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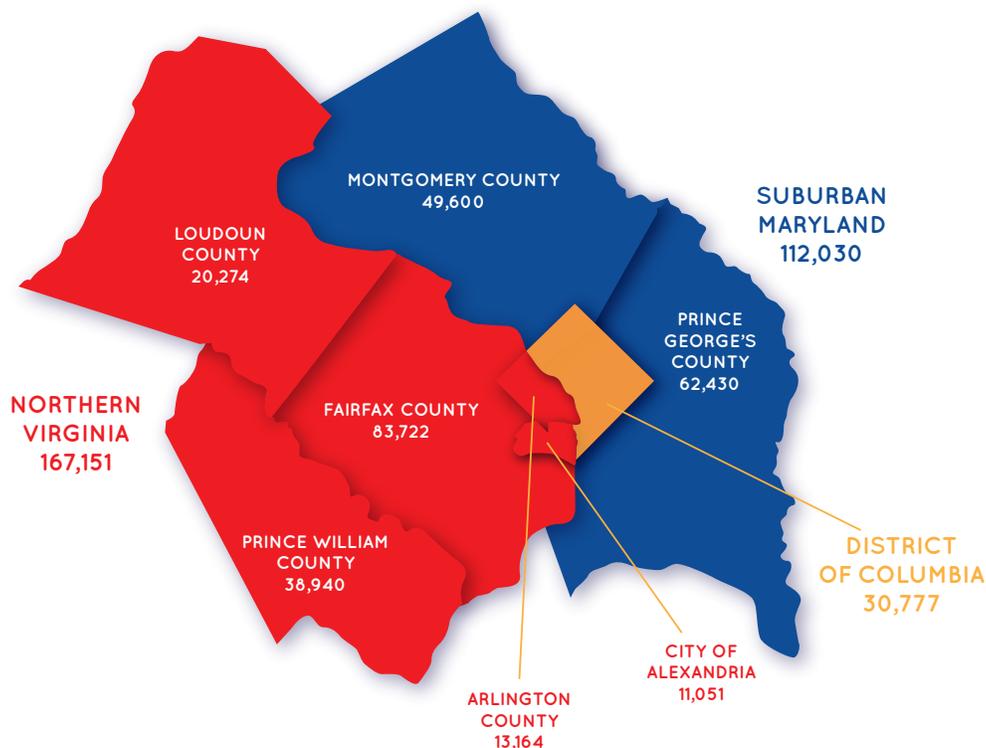
VETERANS

Why Philanthropy for Veterans?

After more than a decade of overseas conflicts, there is a great deal of interest in philanthropy for returning veterans. It is estimated that 2.5 million people have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan; many of those individuals have been deployed more than once. The Greater Washington region is home to 18 military installations, so the presence of military personnel, their families, and veterans is felt particularly strongly here.

There are several reasons why veterans philanthropy can be challenging. First, a complex array of services and benefits are available to veterans through federal and state government programs. This can make determining service gaps and needs difficult. Second, a large number of nonprofits have sprung up to meet perceived demand. It is estimated that as many as 400,000 service organizations across the country are providing some kind of service to veterans. Finally, civilians not connected to the military may not understand how best to serve veterans. Both nonprofit organizations and their funders need to be culturally competent in order to effectively serve the veteran population.

The Post-9/11 Veteran Population Across Our Region



Post-9/11 Veterans

Today's veterans are different from the veterans of prior wars. The length of the conflict has resulted in multiple deployments for many individuals. Today's veterans are older and more likely to be married and have children, so the stress of multiple deployments is felt throughout the family. The Pew Research Center reports that 44% of post-9/11 veterans experience difficulty with the transition to civilian life, as compared to 25% of pre-1990 veterans. Many report difficulties that are emotional or psychological in nature. For example, 48% report strained family relations, 47% report irritability or anger, and 37% believe they suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Importance of Cultural Competency

The civilian population unconnected to the military may not realize that there are significant differences in attitudes and values that characterize a unique military culture.

Through training and tradition, military personnel and families adopt values of self-sufficiency, and self-identification as a protector, provider, and caregiver. In their 2012 Military Cultural Competency Training webinar, the authors describe the following "cardinal rules" that affect military culture: unit cohesion, devotion to duty and mission, stoicism and emotional constraint, and adherence to chain of command. These are the standards of conduct that govern the daily lives of military personnel and their families both on and off duty. These values may be in contrast to the ethos of the general population and the modern workplace, making the transition difficult. These values may also prevent individuals from seeking help.

Key Challenges for Returning Veterans

The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, as well as national organizations serving veterans, have identified eight core areas of concern:

Employment: Service members' retirement typically occurs in their late 30s or early 40s, when they are too young truly to retire and their pension is too small to support a family. These retirees return to (or enter for the first time) the civilian labor force. Veterans may have difficulty adjusting to the culture of the civilian workplace where roles and hierarchies are likely to be less structured than in the military.

Purpose: Veterans may feel a loss of purpose and isolation after leaving the military.

Benefits: The network of services, benefits, and supports can be challenging to navigate. Long waiting times for disability and other benefits can lead to crisis situations.

Education: It has been reported that the retention rate for veterans utilizing the post-9/11 GI Bill is as low as 20% nationwide.

Behavioral health issues: These may include PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI), and depression, combined with the stigma of seeking support.

Reintegration: Returning veterans are less than 1% of the American population. As a result, veterans may feel isolated in their home communities.

Family reintegration: Multiple deployments can cause stress in military families. Issues may continue once the family is reunited.

Housing and financial stability: Veterans struggling with re-entry and the transition to civilian employment may also struggle with the high cost of housing and with financial stability.

What Funders Can Do

- Be aware that cultural competence is the single most important criteria for a military/veteran service provider. Providers should demonstrate an understanding of military culture, and should include military members, veterans, and spouses (of varying ranks and branches) in decision-making positions on boards and staff.
- Look for nonprofits' experience with the populations and deep connections with the military/veterans. Connections with both the Veterans Administration and local transition assistance personnel, emergency crisis personnel on and off military installations, and family assistance personnel are also important to getting the word out about services.
- Look for holistic, high-touch services and consider peer-to-peer models. High-touch approaches are shown to be very effective with the veteran population.
- Consider an organization's ability to distinguish needs of veterans of different time periods. Traditional programs that serve older veterans may not be relevant or appealing to the post-9/11 cohort, who may not even self-identify as "veterans."
- Serve veterans in the context of their families. Multiple deployments and frequent moves can strain military and veteran families.
- Support veterans of all eras. On the whole, most veterans are doing well and are contributing members of society. But some veterans of prior wars may still suffer from service-related issues. While the needs of post-9/11 veterans garner more attention at the moment, older veterans should not be ignored.

Sources

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A repository of much of the recent national research on post-9/11 veterans. (<http://exchange.cof.org/communities>)

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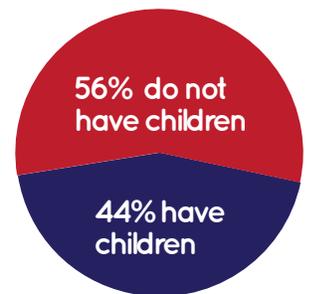
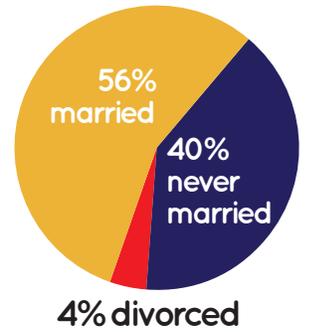
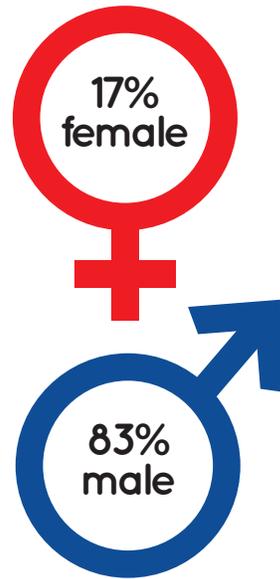
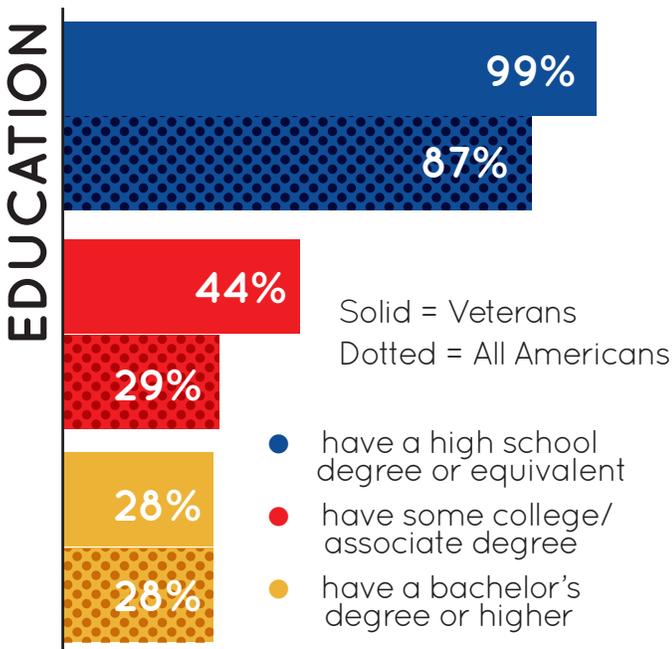
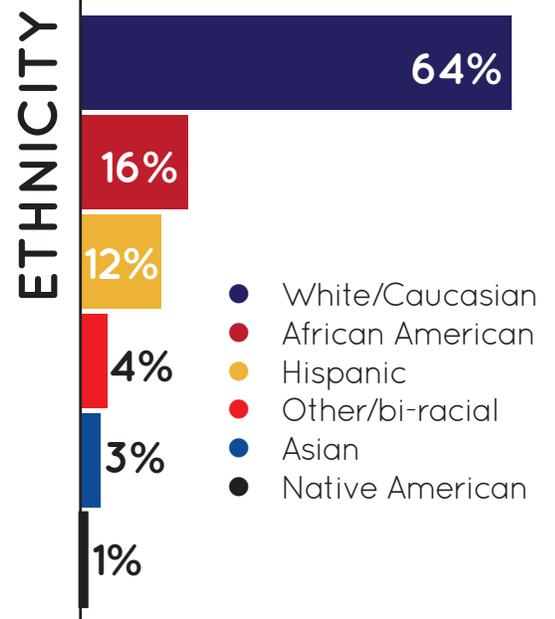
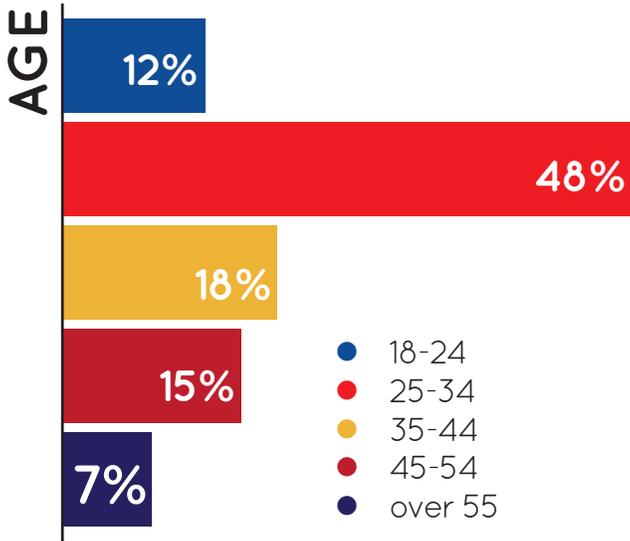
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Veterans Support Initiative: A community based model to meet the needs of service members and their families, Lincoln Community Foundation, 2011

Promising Models

A report on the California Community Foundation's Iraq Afghanistan Deployment Impact Fund (IADIF) recommends that grantmakers consider investing in a sustainable infrastructure that fosters coordination among providers of services to veterans. Many communities are taking this advice, and veteran support initiatives in Augusta, Georgia (augustawarriorproject.org), Charlotte, North Carolina (charlottebridgehome.org), and Rochester, New York (veteransoutreachcenter.org), among others, are creating community support programs that address coordination between providers, peer navigation to link veterans to direct assistance, policy advocacy, and education. The Lincoln Community Foundation's paper, "Veteran Support Initiative: A community based model to meet the needs of service members and their families," outlines the steps a community can take to help realize the goal of successful reintegration for all veterans and their families. Serving Together (servingtogetherproject.org) in Montgomery County is a local example of a collaborative, community-wide approach.

Post-9/11 Veterans by the Numbers



DISABILITY PREVALENCE

13-20%
may be affected by PTSD

27%
suffer from hearing loss

32%
suffer from tinnitus (noise in ears)

253,330
cases of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) diagnosed from 2000-2013