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Survey of Municipal Veteran Services

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ABOUT THE MILITARY, VETERANS, AND SOCIETY PROGRAM

The Military, Veterans, and Society program addresses issues facing America's service members, veterans, and military families, including the future of the All-Volunteer Force, trends within the veteran community, and civil-military relations. The program produces high-impact research that informs and inspires strategic action; convenes stakeholders and hosts top-quality events to shape the national conversation; and engages policymakers, industry leaders, Congress, scholars, the media, and the public about issues veterans and the military community face.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In partnership with Comcast NBCUniversal and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) surveyed its member cities to assess the needs of veterans, as well as successes and challenges in providing services to veterans, at the municipal level. This report provides a descriptive analysis of the perceived challenges cities face in supporting veterans, as well as emerging best practices.

Mayors around the country shared similar concerns about affordable housing, homelessness, and employment opportunities for veterans; were keenly interested in learning how communities can better support those who have served our nation; and identified best practices which could be exported to other cities.

- The top challenges cities identified – affordable housing, employment options, and homelessness – are largely interrelated and not unique to veterans.
- Respondents also highlighted additional challenges for veterans, including navigating the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system, transitioning to civilian life, and accessing health services (i.e., suicide prevention, mental health services, and behavioral health issues).
- Over half (59 percent) of cities had a plan in place to address their top identified challenge over the next 24 months, but expected less than 20 percent of the funding to address this issue to come from the cities themselves.
- The majority of cities reported working with VA offices but overwhelmingly selected increased integration and coordination with additional state and federal agencies as the most promising initiative to better support veterans.
- Cities cited support to nonprofits and affordable housing as two other initiatives to launch or improve upon to better support veterans in their communities.
- Nearly two-thirds of responding cities reported they do not have an office or an individual dedicated to veteran services. Nearly 80 percent of small cities have neither, compared with only 20 percent of large cities.
- Of the cities that responded, over one-third did not know how many veterans resided in their jurisdiction. Smaller cities were more likely not to have this information than medium or large cities.
- Inadequate resourcing was a constant barrier noted in the survey: Program effectiveness or even existence was stifled due to funding shortfalls.

After analyzing cities' self-identified municipal best practices and considering previous research, this report offers these recommendations for cities:

- Designate an individual or establish an office dedicated to veteran issues if they have not already done so.
- Conduct a needs assessment of local veterans to identify challenges and issues within the community and establish which resources veterans require.
- Raise awareness of existing veteran services and foster greater collaboration.
- Offer transportation services for disadvantaged veterans to obtain other services.
- Provide a “one-stop shop” veteran resource center.

This paper begins by providing a brief background of veteran demographic trends in the United States. The second section explains the methodology used to develop, field, and analyze the survey in collaboration with Comcast NBCUniversal and USCM. The third through sixth sections, respectively, detail top-level demographic background on the veteran population of cities that participated in the survey; municipal-level organizational alignment supporting veterans in participating cities; perceived challenges veterans face and challenges cities face providing services to veterans; and city successes supporting veterans and potential initiatives. The final section draws high-level conclusions and offers recommendations for cities to better serve their veteran populations.

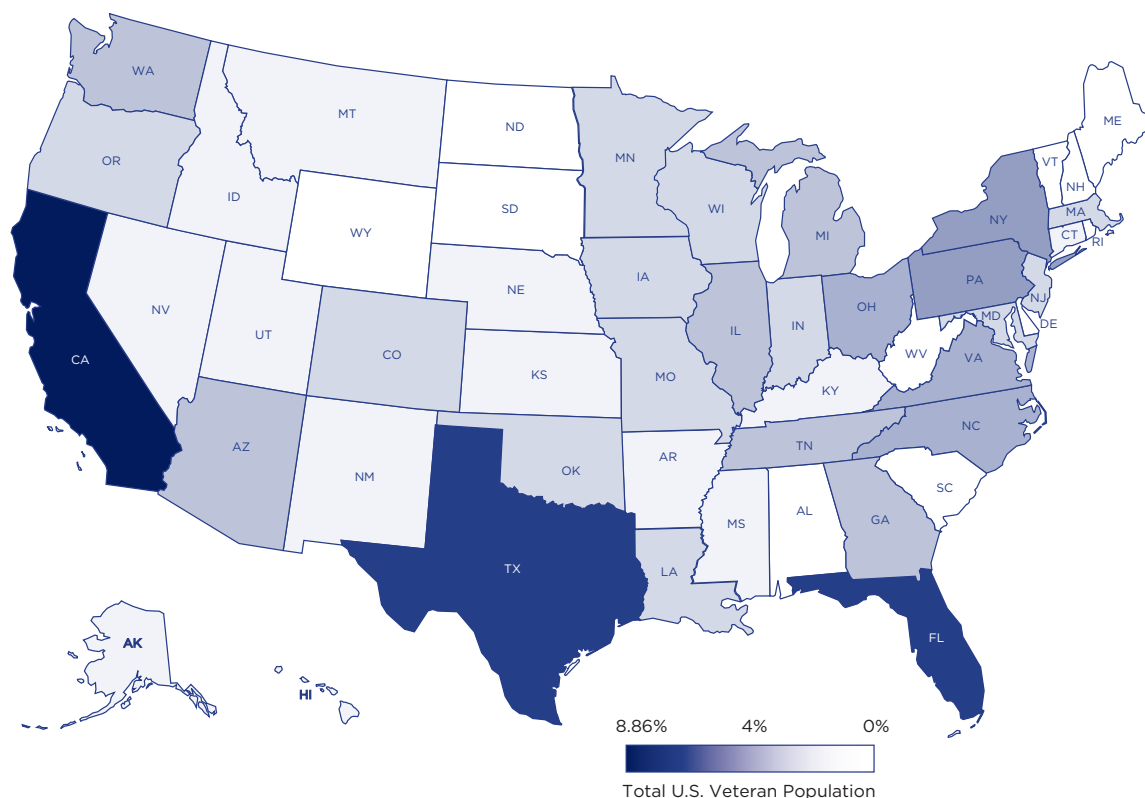
INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense (DoD) employs nearly 2.1 million service members (1.3 million active-duty service members and 800,000 reserve forces).¹ Each year, approximately 200,000 service members separate from the military, joining the roughly 20 million veterans living throughout the United States today.² The U.S. veteran population is steadily shrinking, with half of all veterans now residing in just 10 states and an increasing trend of veterans' moving to Southern and Western states.³ However, communities across the country have residents who are veterans, as shown in Figure 1; in large part they are integrated into communities and often an invisible demographic.

In terms of dollars spent and numbers served, the majority of government programs delivering services to veterans are federal. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) remains the largest provider of health care, disability benefits, educational benefits, home loan guarantees, and other services. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor, the Social Security Administration, and other agencies also provide various types of support to veterans. State and county efforts offer a range of services as well, though support varies widely depending on location, size, and capacity.

An underexplored area of research is the role that cities play in supporting veterans. This report represents an initial effort to bridge that knowledge gap by presenting and analyzing the results of a survey of mayors, a research project made possible by the collaboration of Comcast NBCUniversal, the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM), and the Center for a New American Security (CNAS).

Figure 1: Percentage of the U.S. Veteran Population by State



There has been no national survey of veterans since 2010, either by the VA or Census Bureau, and this survey did not comprehensively assess veterans' needs.⁴ Other research shows somewhat contradictory data on veterans' status. For example, veterans are historically overrepresented in the U.S. homeless population and die by suicide at rates higher than those who have never served.⁵ However, they also have higher education levels, lower rates of poverty, higher rates of civic participation, and higher median earnings than nonveterans.⁶ Understanding what issues municipalities see as most challenging for veterans is valuable for the broader community of those who serve veterans: It provides important perspective on how veterans are viewed and offers insight into the services and benefits cities plan to prioritize.

The survey sought information from mayors or their designated representative on: (1) demographics of responding cities and their veteran populations; (2) organizational alignment on the city, county, state, and federal levels and with nonprofit and private partners; (3) challenges veterans face at the municipal level and obstacles to addressing these challenges; (4) cities' successes and best practices. Appendix A includes the complete survey, Appendix B lists all participating cities, and Appendix C shares additional survey results.

This report provides a descriptive analysis of the respondents' perceptions regarding challenges veterans in their communities face and barriers to supporting veterans that cities encounter. The analysis was not designed to assess the validity of pre-existing theories or whether city-level perceptions of the challenges veterans face align with other data sources. Different-size cities have

different demographic and resource challenges and should likely be analyzed distinctly from one another; due to the small sample sizes, this report is unable to assess every issue in this manner. However, commonalities among responses from an array of cities help illustrate challenges cities face as well as identify successes that foster solutions in supporting the veteran population.

The following section explains the development of the survey instrument in partnership with USCM and the completed survey responses used as the basis for this descriptive analysis.

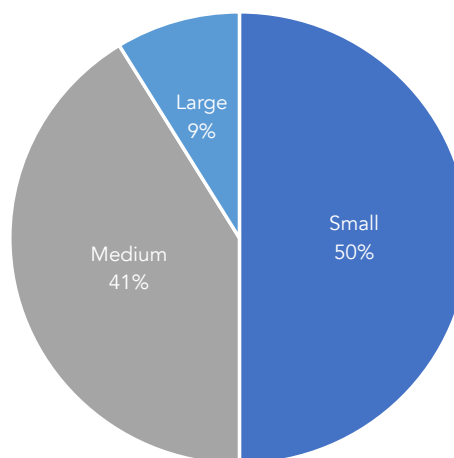
METHODOLOGY

This project was a collaboration by Comcast NBCUniversal, USCM, and CNAS. USCM is nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more (currently 1,408 member cities); this research partnership leverages USCM's reach to cities nationwide, as well as CNAS' expertise in the veteran space.⁷ Comcast NBCUniversal served as project lead, USCM handled outreach and communications directly to cities, and CNAS provided research support in survey development and analysis. The 33-question survey included a combination of response formats including multiple choice, ranking, and write-ins. In addition to quantitative analysis, this assessment extracted key themes, illustrative quotes, and best practices from the write-in responses.

USCM managed all aspects of communication and outreach to cities, including selecting them, raising awareness of the survey, and encouraging participation. The organization sent an invitation to participate via email to mayors of selected member cities; the email contained a link to the survey, which was hosted on SurveyGizmo. From October 16 through December 6, 2018, mayors or their designated representatives in 114 cities (including the District of Columbia) in 40 states submitted at least partial responses to the survey.

In total, the survey was opened 243 times: 77 cities (32 percent) responded with a complete survey; 37 cities (15 percent) submitted partial responses; and 129 cities (53 percent) did not answer the survey or were disqualified as duplicate opens. Furthermore, 11 city responses were disqualified due to duplicate complete submissions.⁸ Completed surveys had all questions answered, while partial surveys had at least completed the entire first section of the survey, providing sufficient information for top-line analysis. Participants provided a cross-sectional look at veterans' issues in diverse communities, and although more than 50 percent of cities that opened the survey did not submit it, those that did were broadly representative of the full group.

Figure 2: Responses by Size of City (N=114)



Small cities, defined as having populations up to 150,000, comprised the largest group of respondents (57 cities, or 50 percent); medium cities, defined as having populations 150,000 to 1

million, comprised the second largest group (47 cities, or 41 percent); and large cities, defined as having populations greater than 1 million (10 cities, or 9 percent), were the smallest group represented. Figure 2 illustrates responses by size of city. Appendix B lists all cities that responded to the survey. Smaller cities were slightly less likely to complete the survey, perhaps because small cities may have fewer resources or data to successfully complete a survey about a minority population such as veterans.⁹

The next section provides demographic information about the cities that responded to survey.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic data is essential for targeted and accurate delivery of services to populations, especially one with critical needs. Of the cities that responded, one-third did not know how many veterans reside in their jurisdiction. Smaller cities were less likely to know this information than medium or large cities, as shown in Figure 3. This could be due to having fewer resources to collect the information or a belief there is no demonstrated need to know it. Two-thirds of cities did not know the number of female veterans residing in their jurisdiction. Of those cities that reported the number of veterans living in their communities, on average small cities reported 10,000; medium cities reported 30,000; and large cities reported 142,000.

Cities without a coordinator or office dedicated to veteran issues were less likely to know baseline information about the veteran population within the community or the issues that segment of the population faces. Most cities (84 percent) without a person or office working on veteran issues did not track veteran population demographics, compared with only 15 percent of cities that did have an office or individual. This indicates that a determining factor in whether a city can identify the needs of its veterans is having a person or office charged with that duty.

The survey asked about other data cities track among veteran populations with regard to employment, homelessness, awareness campaigns, and minority status, shown in Figure 4. Because veterans are diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, sexual identity, and gender, each group has distinct challenges that inform veteran outcomes. The majority of cities (55 percent) track homelessness, but only 10 percent of cities track veteran income brackets. Few cities track female or minority veterans in their jurisdictions (19 percent and 14 percent, respectively).

Figure 3: Known Veteran Population by City Size (N=114)

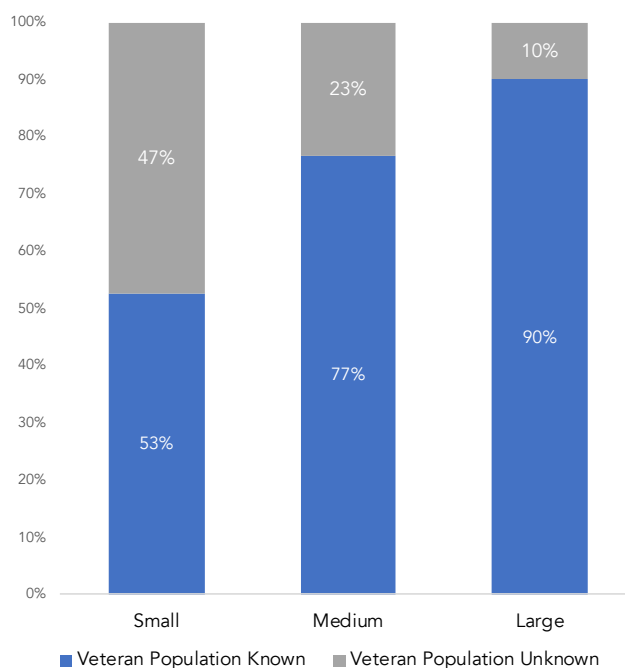
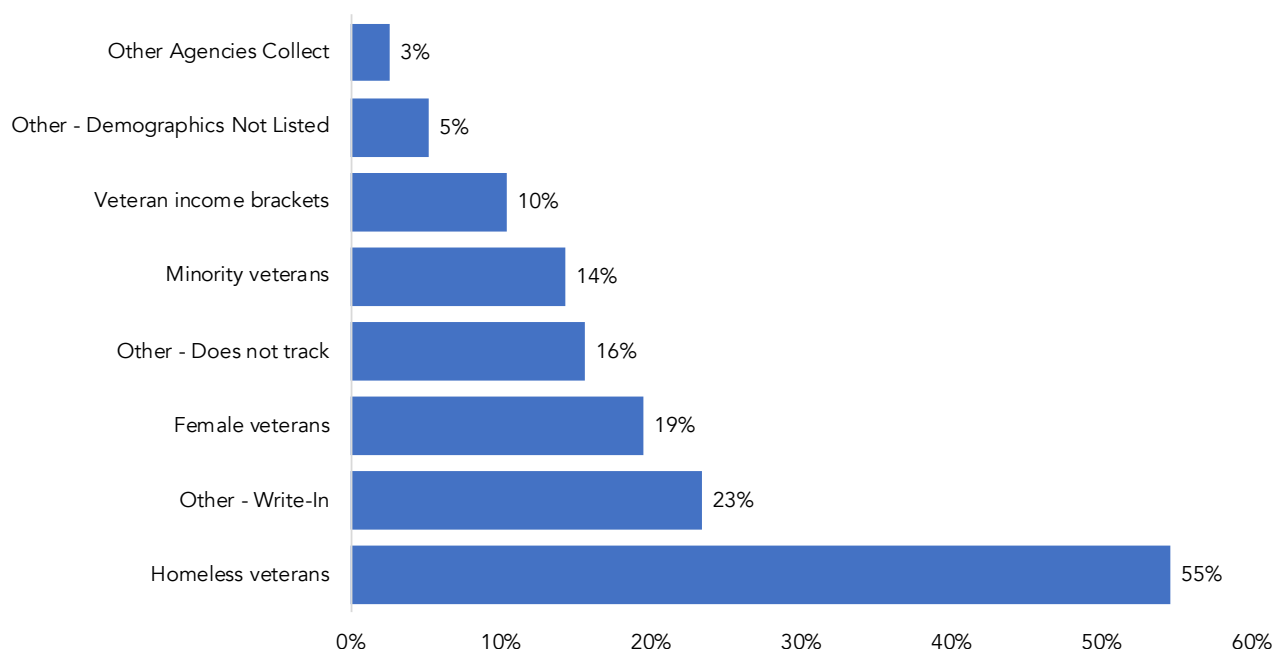


Figure 4: Demographics Tracked by City (N=112)



Greater data collection can serve as a resource for a city as can greater coordination. Therefore, city coordination with other agencies at the municipal or county level is explored in the next section.

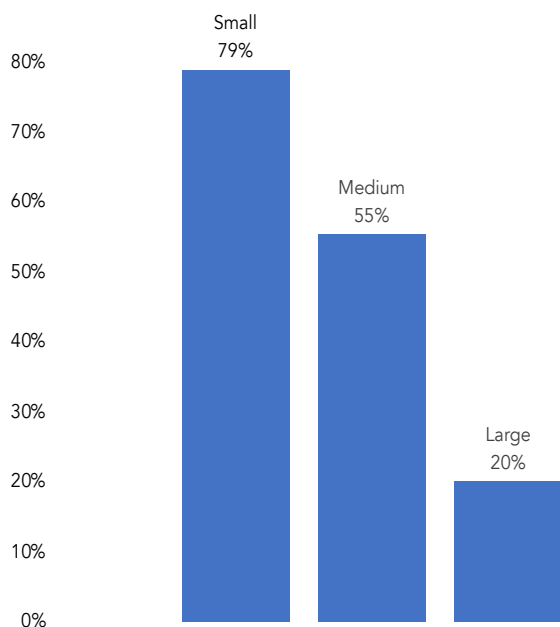
ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT OF RESPONDING CITIES

A thread underlying many responses was the presence of an office or individual dedicated to serving veterans, which serves to align resources, coordinate with other agencies, or advocate for veterans. Two-thirds (73 percent) of participating cities had neither an office nor an individual dedicated to veteran services, while only 17 percent have an office and 18 percent have an individual; this not only impacts a city's likelihood of offering support services for veterans but also its ability to respond to the survey in full. Figure 5 shows this is highly correlated to municipality size, with 79 percent of small cities having neither, compared to only 20 percent of large cities. There was additional correlation between military base proximity and city services to veterans, which could speak to the number of veterans in a community or the community's awareness of the veteran population.

There was significant variation in organizational alignment, with the individual or office dedicated to veteran services falling under a variety of departments, shown in Figure 6. Most fall under some variation of a health and human services department, followed closely by those that report directly to the mayor's office. Some cities indicated the county rather than the city staffs this type of position, and the remainder were scattered through an array of departments. Only five cities had stand-alone departments for veterans. For those cities reporting an office or individual, the average number of staffers was four, though 12 cities reported one individual dedicated to veteran issues. New York City, an outlier, reports 40 people in its stand-alone department. Organizational alignment may affect – or reflect – the amount of funding and attention the office is allocated, and

competing priorities or a lack of resources could diminish effectiveness and coordination between and within agencies.

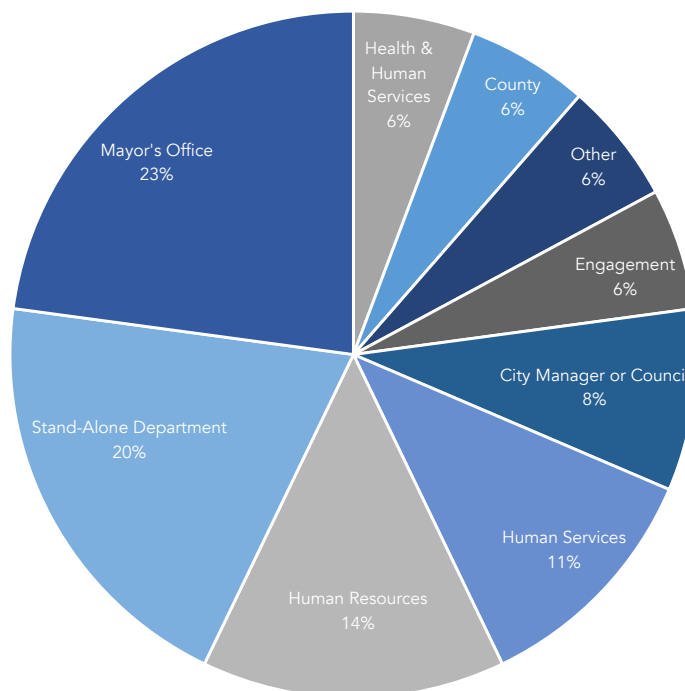
Figure 5: Percentage of Cities without a Veteran Service Office or an Individual, by City Size (N=114)



Cities overall report regular engagement with a variety of state, federal, and county organizations. The majority of cities work with the local VA medical center (70 percent) and VA Central Office (61 percent), while only one-fifth of cities reported coordinating with the National Cemetery Administration. In terms of other partners, nearly half report engaging with the county veteran service officer (48 percent) or the state women veterans coordinator (20 percent), and only a small number (14 percent) work with faith-based or tribal organizations. However, few consider their cities well-integrated with these other entities: Just more than half indicated they are integrated with their county, and fewer than a third consider themselves well-integrated with state, federal, private, or philanthropic entities. Cities consistently reported the

need for greater coordination among agencies and organizations, and lack of such coordination was an obstacle for cities in deploying solutions to support veterans.

Figure 6: Veteran Service Office or Individual Organization Alignment (N=35)



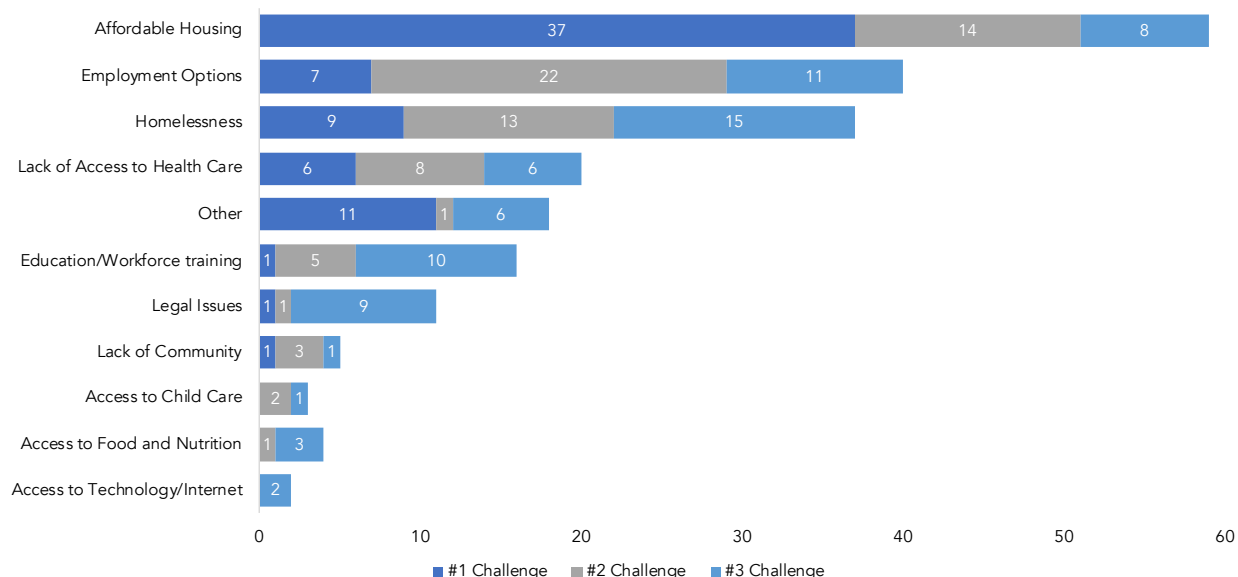
Difficulty communicating or coordinating with other agencies and actors played a role in cities' ability to support veterans. The next section explores in greater depth both the challenges that cities perceive veterans face and the barriers to providing services to veterans that cities face.

CHALLENGES VETERANS FACE AND CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING SERVICES

Cities cited a variety of challenges veterans face but generally agreed on the primary ones. The top issues veterans face according to survey respondents are interconnected and not ones that affect only veterans: affordable housing, employment options, and homelessness, as shown in Figure 7. These three were far and above the most reported issues, with lack of access to health care, access to education, and other issues listed as less pressing concerns. A common hurdle cities routinely cited was lack of funding or difficulty coordinating with other government agencies.

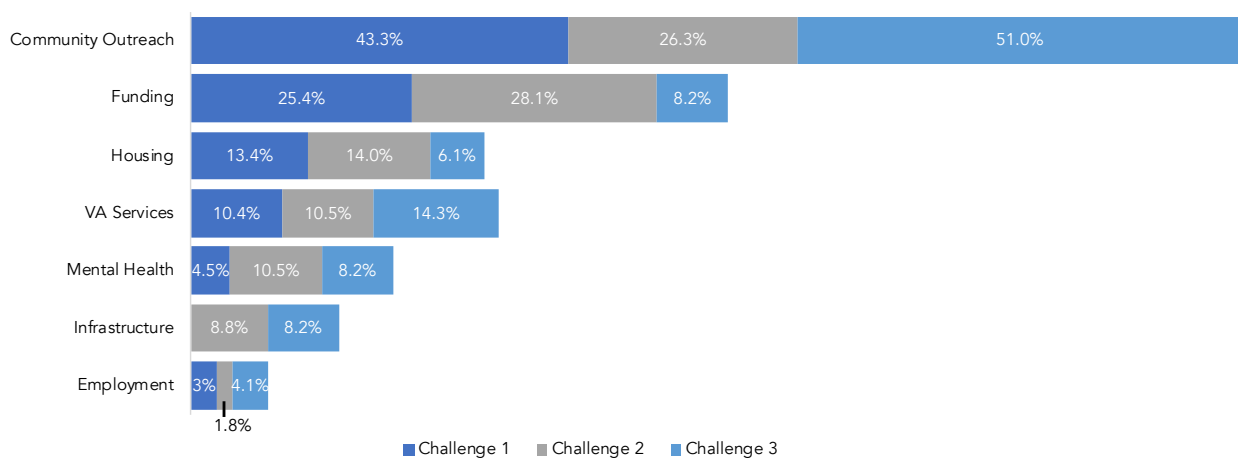
Challenges veterans were perceived as facing varied slightly by city size, though cities generally agreed on the primary challenges. Unfortunately, the small sample size for large cities made it difficult to draw conclusions. Overall, affordable housing and homelessness remained top issues across city size. When cities had the chance to write in additional challenges, they highlighted mental health challenges, lack of access to health care, transition and socialization into civilian life, transportation, and VA benefits navigation.

Figure 7: Top Three Challenges (N=73)



Cities are invested in supporting veterans but cite a range of hurdles to successfully providing services. In addition to asking about the top three challenges veterans face in their jurisdiction, the survey asked cities what hurdles they faced successfully deploying solutions to them. Given that two top identified challenges were the interrelated issues of affordable housing and homelessness, the biggest hurdles to addressing them were lack of affordable housing units, lack of units dedicated to veterans, or lack of government-subsidized units; the unwillingness of landlords to accept housing vouchers; or costs associated with building and maintaining affordable housing. Cities regularly cited additional funding as the solution that would be most helpful in addressing these challenges.

Figure 8: Hurdles to Supporting Veterans (N=67)

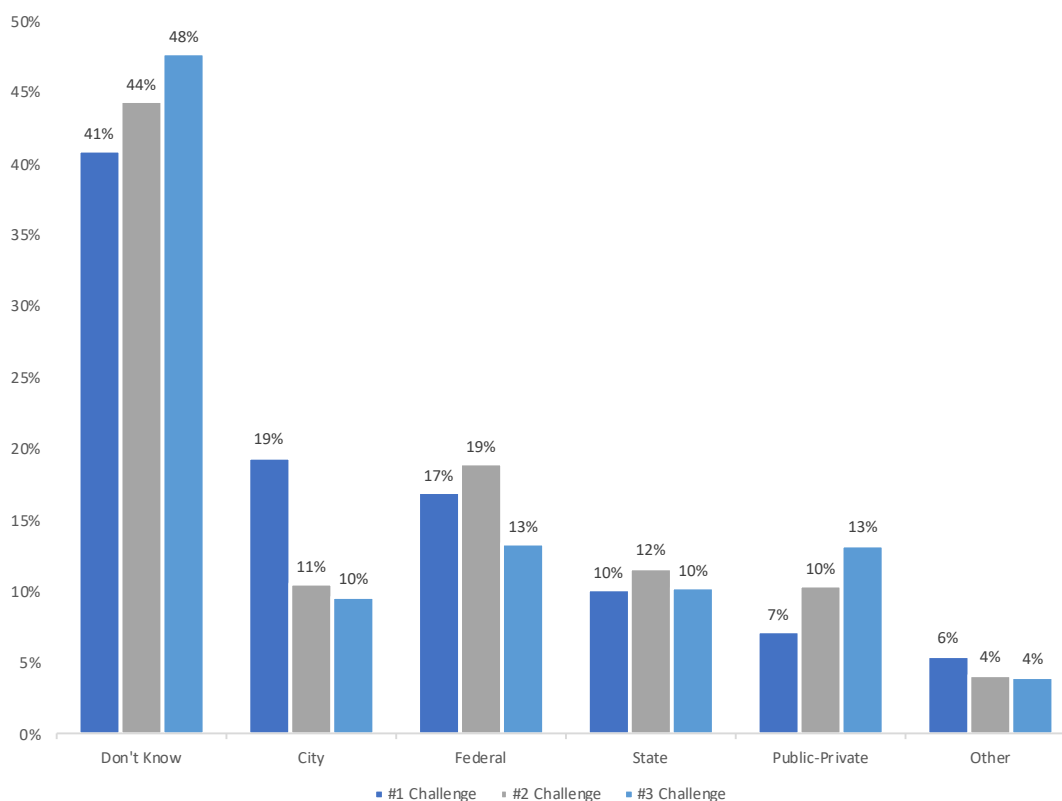


Asked to identify key challenges in providing services to constituents, city responses were analyzed against seven categories: housing; mental health/drug and alcohol; employment/job training;

funding; VA issues; community outreach/coordination; and infrastructure/transportation. As shown in Figure 8, cities ranked community outreach and coordination (43 percent), funding (25 percent), and housing (13 percent) as the top hurdles to supporting veterans. When lack of funding is combined with cities citing lack of other resources as the primary hurdle, the ratio increases to one-quarter of cities.

While hurdles to addressing specific challenges touched upon citywide trends that permeate the housing and employment markets, rather than trends affecting veterans specifically, cities did identify potential solutions to veteran homelessness. Top among them was additional affordable housing units, although a number of efforts on the state and federal levels were also identified. These included Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grants, wraparound services to address mental health and transition challenges, and additional resources. A number of cities recognized the interconnected nature of homelessness, physical and mental health, and employment, suggesting a greater need for wraparound services or transition assistance that would support veterans holistically.

Figure 9: Expected Funding Source by Challenge (N=77)



Although cities identified employment as a top issue veterans face, few municipalities cited lack of employment within the city as the primary hurdle to addressing employment gaps. Instead, cities cited difficulty coordinating with other government or veteran-serving agencies, challenges communicating opportunities to veterans, and the need for skill development among the veteran

community. Some cities indicated that underemployment – ensuring veterans maintained full-time permanent employment – was more of a problem than unemployment. Corporations and nonprofits often fund employment training programs; while this is very beneficial to employment opportunities for veterans, there may need to be a pivot in funding toward meeting other challenges. The focus on educating veterans about opportunities and retraining/reskilling programs may be an outgrowth of the lower veteran unemployment rate or may demonstrate an oversaturation of services providing job placement or employment training.

Cities reported that stigma related to mental health was a challenge to successfully reaching veterans and providing needed services; and repeatedly reported veteran suicide and lack of access to health care as issues in their jurisdictions. The 2018 VA Mission Act, which aims to make community care programs easier to navigate, expand eligibility, and improve access to care, may improve services to eligible veterans throughout the country when implemented fully.¹⁰ Suggestions for addressing mental health care included educating veterans on services available, including families in providing care and identifying symptoms, and making health centers more accessible for veterans living at further distances through telehealth or transportation assistance.

Of the 77 complete responses, there was surprising variation in funding allocated to veteran programs and services. However, inconsistency in city responses and low sample sizes for large cities inhibits comprehensive comparison. As expected, large cities had larger budgets dedicated to veteran services (averaging greater than \$1 million) while medium-size and small-sized cities reported less funding (averaging less than \$1 million).¹¹

However, cities were widely dissatisfied with their budgets. Difficulty finding and aligning resources was repeatedly noted, with respondents reporting that service effectiveness is stifled because of funding shortfalls or an overall lack of programs. Cities routinely indicated they relied on federal and state funding to offset municipal funding shortfalls. Introducing an office or individual dedicated to veteran issues could serve not only to identify resource needs but communicate with donors and connect them with appropriate projects.

In addition to the base budget for veteran programs and services, cities expected additional resources to come from a variety of sources in order to address their top three identified challenges, shown in Figure 9. The source of funding varied based on the challenge identified. For example, housing and homelessness programs were primarily funded by city and federal agencies. Because homelessness and housing are citywide issues, rather than solely affecting veterans, it follows that funding would come from sources beyond those dedicated to veterans. However, nearly half of cities did not identify a source of funding to address the top challenges veterans in their cities face. From what cities did report, government funding on the municipal, federal, and state levels was the primary resource for the identified challenges; public-private partnerships were expected to make up just 10 percent of funding.

While cities expressed numerous hurdles to adequately supporting veterans, they also noted a number of solutions and successes. The following section delves further into services cities would like to provide to address challenges veterans face and successes of implemented policies.

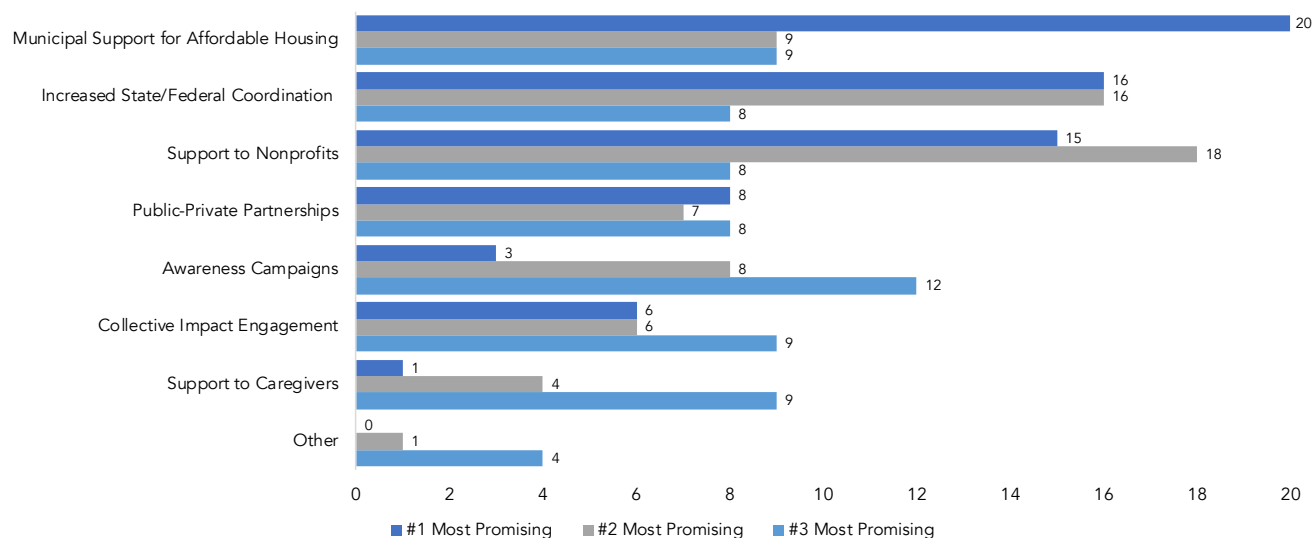
CITY SUCCESSES AND IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES

As previously noted, cities identified a number of challenges veterans face that were not specific to the veteran population, complicating the ability of a veteran-specific office to address those challenges independently if present. However, cities cited a wide variety of workable collaborative solutions to the challenges they identified and demonstrated successes to supporting veterans.

When ranking the most promising initiatives to address the challenges veterans face, cities indicated the most important were support to nonprofits, increased integration and coordination with state and federal agencies, and municipal support to state and federal agencies (Figure 10). Regular city reliance on, and collaboration with, public-private partnerships indicates there is room for review on how such partnerships could be tailored to support specific veteran needs in each community.

When asked how important county, state, federal, private sector, and philanthropic agencies and groups were to city efforts, cities overwhelmingly indicated county coordination was essential to addressing veteran needs (52 percent) and also valued state, federal, and philanthropic actors. Twenty-two percent of cities listed support to nonprofits as the most promising initiative, while 26 percent said it was the second most promising initiative. Past work examining the “sea of goodwill” of veteran-serving nonprofits confirms the finding that the philanthropic space can be a significant asset on the local and national levels.¹² Public-private partnerships and awareness campaigns were two other overarching solutions to better supporting veterans. While private-sector initiatives and philanthropy can be sizable, cities did not indicate that these resources were as critical in supporting veterans at the local level.

Figure 10: Most Promising Initiatives (N=77)



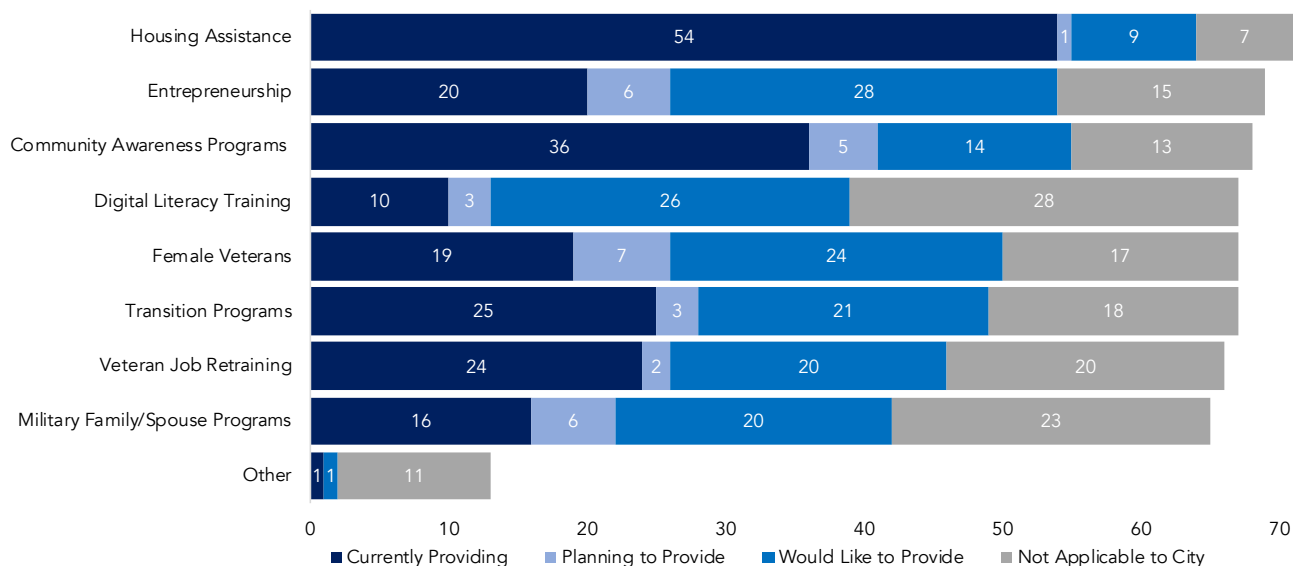
To support veterans, cities regularly coordinate with a variety of other government actors, particularly the VA. Relationships with the federal VA headquarters were illustrated by 30 percent of cities’ saying VA funding was important to funding veteran initiatives. Another 29 percent of cities said VA funding was fairly important.

Cities were asked if they were currently providing, planned to provide, or would like to provide a spectrum of services, ranging from housing assistance to digital literacy programs (shown in Figure 11). A majority (76 percent) currently provide housing assistance programs, while 13 percent would like to provide such programs. Cities listed affordable housing as the No. 1 identified challenge and homelessness as the third. When asked what the obstacles were to addressing veteran homelessness, one-third of cities indicated funding was a hurdle, with one-fifth of cities reporting lack of available housing was an obstacle. A number of cities also referenced difficulty navigating bureaucracies such as public housing authorities (PHA), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the VA.

Ending veteran homelessness has been a top priority at VA for several years. Each year HUD conducts a point-in-time count of homeless individuals nationwide that includes a count of homeless veterans. The January 2018 point-in-time count found 37,800 homeless veterans nationwide, a dramatic decline from six years ago.¹³ Coordination between public, private, and nonprofit actors has had immense impact on reducing veteran homelessness. This nationwide effort has encouraged cities to commit to addressing veteran homelessness in their jurisdiction; 79 percent of cities that completed this survey have committed to reducing or ending veteran homelessness and the majority of cities (42 cities, or 55 percent) indicated they track homeless veteran demographics.

Cities identified increasing the availability of affordable housing as the top solution to homelessness. Additional HUD-VASH vouchers and SSVF grants were suggested as assistance to veterans and their families in addition to wraparound services to address complicating health and employment factors. Cities routinely identified a shortage of low-income housing units and recommended an increase in housing units that rent to “low-qualified” individuals (such as those with a criminal history, low credit score, unemployment, or past drug use). However, as noted previously, a majority of cities currently provide housing assistance.

Figure 11: Services Cities Currently, Plan, or Would Like to Provide (N=77)



Community awareness programs were the next most provided service (52 percent) after housing assistance, while 20 percent of cities indicated they would like to provide more such programs. Cities noted that using social media to raise awareness was one way to help veterans find resources. Fewer than one-third of cities (29 percent) indicated they have structures to assist veterans in accessing portals to sign up for federal or state veteran-specific programs. Desire for greater community awareness aligns with city write-in responses that cited greater knowledge of services and understanding of opportunities as one way to better serve veterans. Cities tended to think awareness campaigns were important but not the most important initiative, with 18 percent saying it was the third most promising initiative and 19 percent saying such programs were not applicable.

Cities noted that technology could better support veteran engagement and outreach to veterans, which could be an opportunity for public-private partnerships given that only 19 percent of cities indicated they have Web-based or distributed learning technology accessible for veteran use. For instance, 13 percent of cities indicated a desire for connected health and telemedicine and the fourth top challenge cities indicated veterans face was lack of access to health care. Desire for greater coordination demonstrates a potential inroad for veterans advisory commissions; hubs or clearinghouses of veteran-specific resources; more information and better communication about offerings, training, and available technology; and assistance with local actors to build veteran-serving apps and portals.

Another service cities indicated they would like to provide is support for veteran employment, perhaps because of a perception that finding work is a big challenge for veterans. While employment was identified as a top issue at the municipal level, existing services varied. One-third of cities have no established program to address veteran unemployment; nevertheless, veteran unemployment was 3.5 percent in 2018, the lowest since 2000, and has been on the decline over the past few years.¹⁴

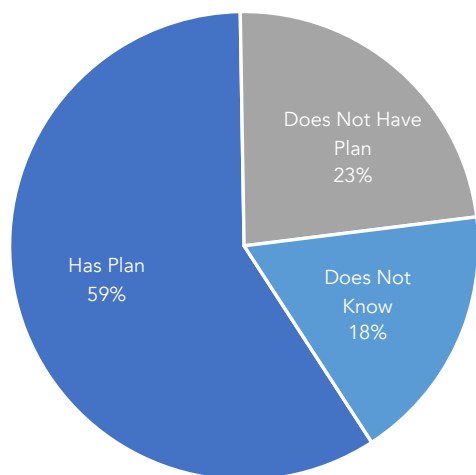
Veterans may experience difficulty translating their military experience into the civilian sector, which can be addressed through job retraining and transition assistance support. The military provides transition programs for service members in an attempt to bridge military service with civilian life; however, this assistance tends to be broad-brush, and there may be a disconnect between the skills gained in these programs and what is required for success. Workforce training was cited as a top solution to addressing veteran employment; however, only 35 percent of cities provide veteran job retraining programs, while 31 percent would like to. Many cities would like to provide entrepreneurship assistance (42 percent), but only 29 percent of cities offer such programs. In write-in responses, numerous cities indicated that veteran awareness of job retraining and reskilling programs was a hurdle to addressing veteran unemployment.

Many cities indicated a desire for greater public and private collaboration, and nearly one-third reported established partnerships with employers or post-secondary institutions. In write-in responses, cities reported a number of successful nonprofit and academic retraining programs that benefited veterans, leaving the door open for greater coordination. Transition programs often support employment; 37 percent of cities report currently providing such programs, and 32 percent of cities would like to. One solution could be for cities to assess which kind of program (reskilling training, retraining programs, or transition assistance) would best assist veterans and to align services accordingly.

Cities also expressed interest in providing support such as digital literacy training, with 41 percent indicating they would like to do so. Due to the importance of digital literacy for employment and access to information about veteran services, the opportunity for such training could positively impact a veteran's ability to navigate employment options.¹⁵

A large portion of cities (44 percent) do not provide specific services for minority veterans. Female veterans and military spouses are two under-supported groups, with only a quarter of cities offering programs for both female veterans and military family and spouse programs.¹⁶ However, cities indicated they would like to provide programs supporting female veterans (37 percent) and military families (29 percent).

Figure 12: City Plan to Address Top 3 Challenges (N=73)



Cities were also asked whether they have a plan in place to address at least one of the challenges they identified. Nearly two-thirds (59 percent) had a plan to address the top identified challenge, while fewer cities indicated plans to address their identified second challenge (52 percent) and third challenge (39 percent), as shown in Figure 12. One-fifth of cities did not know if they had a plan in place to address the identified challenges. The cascading decrease in plans to address second and third identified challenges may be indicative of a resource shortfall or competing priorities; cities may only have enough capacity or funding to address one major challenge.

The majority of cities (58 percent) reported having an established collective impact group. Established collective impact groups or structures can coordinate delivery of services by multiple entities such as community councils, community collectives, collaborative networks, military caregiver network, regional or national networks and the majority of cities. Twenty-eight percent said they did not have a collective impact group and 14 percent said they did not know.

Given that the top identified challenges veterans face were not unique to veterans, overcoming them requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates government, businesses, and nonprofits. The following section offers top-line conclusions on city responses and specific recommendations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey's primary takeaway suggests cities lack coordination among departments as well as with higher-level governments and their agencies. Cities consistently claim a lack of collaboration and awareness of different services offered in their community. Prior research has demonstrated an immense amount of support for and desire to help veterans throughout the nation's communities. A bridge that connects the "sea of goodwill" to the challenges faced within cities may be needed. Cities also face many challenges receiving or raising enough funding to successfully meet veterans' needs in their communities, and a collaborative relationship with government, private, and nonprofit actors

may help to fill gaps in service. Cities still cite homelessness and employment as top challenges veterans face, issues that have been focus areas of government, nonprofit, and private actors over the past few years with significant success. Further research is required to determine whether improvements seen at the national level have not been reflected across localities, or whether some cities are repeating outdated narratives due to the lack of comprehensive data assessed by a person or office dedicated to veterans' issues.

Cities desire to do more to support veterans and cited a number of suggestions but indicated a lack of resources or coordination to successfully implement solutions. Few cities host specific programs to support minority veterans, nor do many cities have programs to support caregivers; however, these have both been regularly cited as vital for providing timely and adequate care to veterans. Many cities' best practices suggested collaborative multiresource approaches. Despite a lack of funding, there was a demonstrated opportunity for cities to have greater collaboration with government, private, and nonprofit actors rather than operating all veteran-serving programs in-house. Stovepiping knowledge or access to resources only exacerbates the challenges cities face; a more team-based approach was reported as being the most successful.

Mayors and city councils need to be invested in the veteran population in order to develop plans and support services that directly and indirectly assist veterans in need. Many cities listed financial burdens and resource shortfalls as challenges to serving veterans. Cities that do not already have one could benefit from a designated office or individual working on veteran issues to assist with identifying community partners, setting agendas, and enhancing collaborative efforts. Partnerships that increase collaboration with nonprofits or corporations to coordinate additional services the municipality is unable to offer itself can help foster solutions.

Based on municipal responses about best practices and challenges in providing services, this report recommends that cities:

Designate an individual or establish an office dedicated to veteran issues. This addition to the city staff should oversee coordination of veteran services at the municipal or county level and ensure synchronization across city and county agencies for veteran issues. An individual or office with decisionmaking ability can also serve to increase integration and coordination with state and federal agencies. Appointing someone to coordinate the resources toward veterans' issues would help alleviate many of the identified issues cited by cities and serve to connect services to veterans. In lieu of hiring a full-time staff or office position, cities should at a minimum identify an individual or office responsible for veterans' issues as part of that person's or that office's broader portfolio. The individual or office dedicated to veteran issues in the city should perform the role of connector to organizations, not just collector of information.

Conduct a needs assessment. If one has not already been completed, cities should conduct a needs assessment by identifying how many veterans are in their community and what resources they require. An assessment could empower a city to identify and address issues specific to veterans in their communities. Findings should be public to raise awareness of the issues, encourage nonprofit- and private-sector actors to assist, and alert veterans to services available and forthcoming. Publicly available information could foster local buy-in and connect local nonprofits and businesses to

partner with to address veteran issues. The needs assessment will also provide a valuable benchmark to assess future programs progress and effort.

Raise awareness of veteran services and foster greater citywide collaboration. Communities should establish a website that is easy to navigate and updated routinely. They could also leverage social media platforms to better communicate services available and to help connect nonprofit organizations with veterans. Cities could launch a joint campaign between organizations and the city for better reach. Websites and social media platforms can host announcements on public outreach events for veterans, information about hotlines and services, and community events. These sites can also educate the public about challenges veterans face, available services, location of services, and announcements of public outreach events for veterans, as well as to connect nonprofit organization with veterans.

Several cities have found benefit in hosting a mayor's advisory board related to veteran issues and to connecting the different elements of the city together. Regular meetings (quarterly or monthly) could help keep the city government abreast of changing factors. A city office or individual for veteran issues could both manage social media platforms and organize meetings to bring in local businesses, nonprofits, and other government agencies. Cities with reserve units or military bases could leverage those units' relationship with the local community for greater outreach to veterans and integration back into society after service.

Provide subsidized or free transportation to veterans. Cities could institute a subsidized public transit, ride-sharing, or volunteer-based transportation program to transport veterans to medical appointments and job interviews. Both large and small cities identified this as an effective approach. In lieu of city-sponsored transportation, the city could act as the connector between volunteers, veterans, and organizations that provide transportation services. The city could validate the volunteers' capability and capacity to perform this function through the Department of Motor Vehicles or the local police department.

Create a one-stop shop for veteran resources. Providing a facility for a veteran resource center such as in a community college space has been beneficial for some cities. The location serves as a one-stop shop for veterans to receive information about services provided by the city as well as for local veterans' organizations to meet. Providing a space in addition to an office or individual would allow cities to serve as conveners with existing influencers in their local veterans space to develop a "collective impact" group structure to coordinate delivery of services by multiple entities.

APPENDIX A SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The purpose of this survey is to assess the needs of veterans, as well as successes and challenges in providing services to veterans at a municipal level. The goal is to provide further information to cities with existing programs that have identified gaps in services, as well as to better understand key issues facing cities with emerging veterans support programs.

We want to hear from you and your city regardless of whether your city has established veteran services. If you are unable to take the survey yourself, recommended respondents could include the City Manager, Chief of Staff, etc.

The deadline to submit this survey is October 22.

A. Contact Information and Follow-Up

1. Name of city you are responding for:
 - a. CITY - Fill in the blank
 - b. STATE - Choose from a drop-down
2. Contact information:
 - a. Name:
 - b. Email:
 - c. Phone Number:
3. What is the size of your city or metropolitan statistical area (MSA)?
 - a. Large (population greater than 1 million)
 - b. Medium (population between 150,000 and 1 million)
 - c. Small (population fewer than 150,000)
4. How many veterans live in your city?
 - a. Fill in the blank (make not required)
5. If known, how many female veterans live in your city?
 - a. Fill in the blank (make not required)
6. Does your city have an office or individual dedicated to veteran services or issues? Check all that apply.
 - a. Yes, the city has an office dedicated to veteran services or issues.
 - b. Yes, the city has an individual or coordinator dedicated to veteran services or issues.
 - c. No, the city has neither of these.
7. (Display if Q6=a or Q6=b) You mentioned having an office or coordinator dedicated to veteran services. Under what department does the office or person fall? (open response)
8. [Display if Q6=a] How many people work in the veterans office?
 - a. (option to insert number, restrict field to numerical only)
9. [Display if Q6=a] What is the budget of the veterans office?

B. Background

10. Please identify the **top three challenges** facing veterans in your city in order of significance: (Assign number 1 to the selection with the highest significance, number 2 to the selection with next highest significance, and number 3 to the final selection)
 - a. Affordable housing

- b. Employment options
 - c. Lack of access to health care
 - d. Lack of community
 - e. Legal issues
 - f. Homelessness
 - g. Access to child care
 - h. Access to food and nutrition
 - i. Access to education/workforce training
 - j. Access to technology, broadband
 - k. Other: fill in the blank
11. Looking forward over the next 24 months for each of the three priorities identified above, does your city have a plan to address that specific challenge?
- a. Challenge 1 <replacement string, carry forward from Q10>
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - iii. I don't know
 - b. Challenge 2: <replacement string, carry forward from Q10>
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - iii. I don't know
 - c. Challenge 3: <replacement string, carry forward from Q10>
 - i. Yes
 - ii. No
 - iii. I don't know
12. [For each question 11 a-c for which the respondent says "Yes, we have a plan," carry forward the initiative into each of the following questions and display one block per initiative. Place text boxes next to them for percentages, constrain percentages to =100 percent:
- a. How do you expect to finance the deployment of your top/second/third priority, <insert top/second/third priority name>?
 - i. City capital
 - ii. State funding
 - iii. Federal funding
 - iv. Public-private partnerships
 - v. Don't know
 - vi. Other: fill in the blank
 - b. Please indicate what you expect to be the biggest obstacle in deploying this priority (open response)
 - c. Please indicate what single action would be most helpful in advancing this priority more quickly (open response)
13. What are **THREE** key challenges in providing services to constituents in the veteran community?
- a. Fill in the blank
 - b. Fill in the blank
 - c. Fill in the blank

14. For each of the following areas, could you please indicate whether your city is [**choose one:** currently providing, planning to provide, would like to provide, or not applicable] the following veteran services?
- Community awareness programs (e.g., supporting nuanced depictions of veterans, community events or town halls)
 - Housing assistance (e.g. homelessness assistance or services, loan assistance, affordable housing)
 - Entrepreneurship (e.g. funding veteran businesses, supporting local incubators that assist veterans)
 - Digital Literacy Trainings
 - Female veterans (e.g. services specific to female veterans)
 - Military family and spouse programs (e.g. child care services, spouse employment assistance, military caregiver assistance)
 - Transition programs (out of the military and into civilian life)
 - Veteran job retraining (e.g. programs to train veterans in critical skills)
 - Other: fill in the blank

C. Partnership and Development Outlook

15. Does your city have an established “collective impact” group or structure to coordinate delivery of services by multiple entities? (Such as community councils, community collectives, collaborative networks, military caregiver network, regional or national networks, e.g., VA Community Veteran Engagement Board)
- Yes
 - No
 - I don’t know
16. From the following list, please rank the most promising initiatives to address challenges facing veterans. (Assign number 1 to the selection with the highest significance, number 2 to the selection with next highest significance, and number 3 to the final selection)
- Public-private partnerships to facilitate and support veteran entrepreneurship
 - Increased integration and coordination with state and federal agencies to ensure timely and comprehensive health care
 - Support to nonprofits that address veteran homelessness
 - Municipal support for affordable housing
 - Awareness campaigns promoting challenges veterans face
 - Collective impact engagement
 - Support to military caregivers and other veteran-specific health care professionals
 - Other: fill in the blank
17. Which of the following state, federal, and county organizations or individuals does your city engage with on a regular basis? (Please indicate all that apply.)
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Central Office (such as the VHA Homeless Programs Office, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Center for Neighborhood and Faith Based Partnerships, or Office of Tribal Government Relations)
 - Local VA Medical Center
 - Local Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) regional office
 - Local office of National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

- e. State Department of Veteran Services / Affairs
 - f. State Women Veteran Coordinator
 - g. County Veteran Service Officer
 - h. Other (fill in the blank)
18. How coordinated are city efforts with the following? On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how integrated are your city's efforts with the following agencies:
- a. County
 - b. State
 - c. Federal
 - d. Private sector
 - e. Philanthropic sector (foundations or nonprofits)
19. Which private, governmental, or nonprofit actors have been the most critical in addressing veteran needs in your city?
- a. Fill in the blank
20. How important has the federal Department of Veterans Affairs funding been to your city's veteran initiatives?
- a. Scale 1-5 or N/A

D. Specific Veteran Issues

21. Which veteran demographics data does your city track? Check all that apply.
- a. Female veterans
 - b. Minority veterans
 - c. Homeless veterans
 - d. Veteran income brackets
 - e. Other (fill in the blank)

Employment/Entrepreneurship

22. Which of the following transition or employment assistance does your city have dedicated to veterans? Check all that apply.
- a. Municipal transition or employment assistance
 - b. Partnership with post-secondary institutions to offer assistance to student veterans
 - c. Employer partnerships (e.g., funding or programs to offer internship or apprenticeship programs for veterans)
 - d. Access to capital for veteran entrepreneurs
 - e. Partner organization offering courses for veterans to learn about entrepreneurship
 - f. N/A
23. What sorts of employment assistance would be helpful for addressing the needs of your city's veteran population?
- a. Fill in the blank

Serving Veterans through Technology, Information Services and Innovation

24. Which of the following services or partnerships does your city have dedicated to serving veterans through technology? Check all that apply.

- a. Access to discounted services (e.g., smartphones, laptops, desktops, or computer software)
 - b. Web-based or distributed learning technology accessible to veterans for use in job training
 - c. Connected health or telemedicine initiatives aimed at improving patient outcomes
 - d. Support to access online signup portals for federal or state veteran-specific benefits (e.g., Post-9/11 GI Bill; Department of VA Health Benefits; etc.)
 - e. N/A
25. What sorts of technological engagement would be helpful for addressing the needs of your city's veteran population?
- a. Fill in the blank

Homelessness

26. Has your city committed to reducing veteran homelessness numbers?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't know
27. What sorts of veteran homelessness support would be helpful for addressing the needs of your city's veteran population? (open response)

Minority Veteran Populations

28. Which of the following does your city have for minority veteran populations? Check all that apply.
- a. Specific programs tailored to minority veteran populations
 - b. Specific programs tailored to female veterans
 - c. Specific programs tailored to military families and/or military caregivers
 - d. Awareness campaigns about services and support specific to female veterans
 - e. Other minority veteran population programs (fill in the blank)
 - f. None of these
29. What other issue(s) specific to minority veterans is your city addressing? [display if Q28=a-d] (open response)

Veteran Misconceptions and Engagement

30. Does the city have any initiatives to combat misconceptions about veterans (PTSD, suicidal, homeless, underemployed)?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
31. Does the city monitor public awareness campaigns that promote veterans issues?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
32. Describe successes you see as "best practices" that could be exported to other cities.
- a. Open-ended text
33. Are there any other issues, initiatives, or work not addressed here that you would like to share?
- a. (Open response)

APPENDIX B CITIES AND STATES REPRESENTED IN THE SURVEY

Cities highlighted indicate those that submitted partial responses to the survey.

Key
Complete Survey
Partial Survey - Demographics
Partial Survey - Base Line

City	State
Alabaster	Alabama
Anchorage	Alaska
Andover	Minnesota
Auburn	Washington
Augusta	Georgia
Austin	Texas
Beverly Hills	California
Bismarck	North Dakota
Bloomington	Indiana
Boston	Massachusetts
Boulder	Colorado
Bridgeport	Connecticut
Cape Coral	Florida
Cape Girardeau	Missouri
Charlotte	North Carolina
Chattanooga	Tennessee
Clarksville	Tennessee
College Station	Texas
Columbia	Missouri
Columbia	South Carolina
Columbus	Ohio
Corpus Christi	Texas
Dallas	Texas
Dayton	Ohio
Denver	Colorado
Des Moines	Iowa
Dubuque	Iowa
Durham	North Carolina
East Hartford	Connecticut
El Paso	Texas
Erie	Pennsylvania
Everett	Massachusetts
Everett	Washington
Fairfield	Connecticut
Fayetteville	Arkansas
Fort Wayne	Indiana
Framingham	Massachusetts
Franklin	Tennessee

City	State
Livermore	California
Long Beach	California
Los Angeles	California
Louisville	Kentucky
Medford	Massachusetts
Mesa	Arizona
Miami	Florida
Mobile	Alabama
Mooreville	North Carolina
New Bedford	Massachusetts
New Haven	Connecticut
New Orleans	Louisiana
New York	New York
Newport News	Virginia
Norfolk	Virginia
North Little Rock	Arkansas
North Ridgeville	Ohio
Ocala	Florida
Oregon City	Oregon
Orlando	Florida
Pembroke Pines	Florida
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania
Phoenix	Arizona
Pinellas Park	Florida
Pittsburgh	Pennsylvania
Plano	Texas
Richmond	Virginia
Richmond	California
Riverside	California
Rochester Hills	Michigan
Rowlett	Texas
Sacramento	California
Salisbury	Maryland
San Antonio	Texas
Santa Ana	California
Santa Fe	New Mexico
Santa Monica	California
South Bend	Indiana

City	State
Gary	Indiana
Goodyear	Arizona
Gresham	Oregon
Henderson	Nevada
Honolulu	Hawaii
Houston	Texas
Huntington	West Virginia
Independence	Missouri
Indianapolis	Indiana
Irvine	California
Joliet	Illinois
Juneau	Alaska
Knoxville	Tennessee
Lakewood	Colorado
Lansing	Michigan
Las Cruces	New Mexico
Lauderdale Lakes	Florida
Little Rock	Arkansas
Livermore	California
Long Beach	California

City	State
St. Petersburg	Florida
Sumter	South Carolina
Tacoma	Washington
Tallahassee	Florida
Tempe	Arizona
Trenton	New Jersey
Tucson	Arizona
Tukwila	Washington
Tulsa	Oklahoma
Tuscaloosa	Alabama
Vacaville	California
Vancouver	Washington
Walnut Creek	California
Washington	District of Columbia
Waukesha	Wisconsin
West Haven	Connecticut
West Jordan	Utah
Westland	Michigan
Wichita	Kansas
Yakima	Washington

APPENDIX C ADDITIONAL RESULTS

In this appendix we provide additional descriptive results from the survey that supplement the findings in the rest of the document.

How coordinated are city efforts with the following? N=69

	1	2	3	4	5
County	12	5	15	18	17
State	13	18	16	9	13
Federal	17	10	19	10	12
Private sector	13	14	23	10	7
Philanthropic sector	14	6	25	9	13

How important is the VA for funding your city's veteran initiative? [1 as most important] N=66

1	20	30%
2	8	12%
3	11	17%
4	5	8%
5	22	33%

Which of the following transition or employment assistance does your city have dedicated to veterans? N=77

Municipal transition or employment assistance	23	30%
Partnership with post-secondary institutions to offer assistance to student veterans	22	29%
Employer partnerships	22	29%
Access to capital for veteran entrepreneurs	8	10%
Partner Organization offering courses for veterans to learn about entrepreneurship	19	25%
N/A	24	31%

What sorts of employment assistance would be helpful for addressing the needs of your city's veteran population? N=42

Workforce transition training	13	17%
Resource center	1	1%
Entrepreneurship training	1	1%
Apprenticeship/programs	2	3%
Transition assistance	5	6%
Jobs	4	5%
Public-private partnerships	6	8%
Transportation	1	1%
City-specific resources	5	6%
I don't know	4	5%

Which of the following services or partnerships does your city have dedicated to serving veterans through technology? N=77

Access to discounted services	6	8%
Web-based or distributed learning	14	18%
Connected health or telemedicine	10	13%
Support to access online signup portals	22	29%
N/A	39	51%

Which of the following does your city have for minority veteran populations? N=77

*Cities able to select more than one answer.

Specific programs tailored to minority veteran populations	11	11%
Specific programs tailored to female veterans	15	16%
Specific programs tailored to military families and/or military caregivers	13	14%
Awareness campaigns about services and support specific to female veterans	12	13%
Other minority veteran population programs	3	3%
None of these	42	44%

Does the city have any initiatives to combat misconceptions about veterans (PTSD, suicidal, homeless, underemployed)? N=77

Yes	23	30%
No	45	58%
Omitted	9	12%

Does the city monitor public awareness campaigns that promote veterans issues? N=77

Yes	25	32%
No	41	53%
Omitted	11	14%

¹ “Military Active-Duty Personnel, Civilians by State,” *Governing* (September 30, 2017), <http://www.governing.com/gov-data/public-workforce-salaries/military-civilian-active-duty-employee-workforce-numbers-by-state.html>.

² Kristy N. Kamarck, “Military Transition Assistance Program (TAP): An Overview,” CRS 7-5700 (Congressional Research Service, July 12, 2018), 2, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10347.pdf>; and United States Census Bureau, “U.S. and World Population Clock,” <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>.

³ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Veteran Population Projections 2017-2037 (VetPop2016),” 2016.

⁴ Westat, “National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, Demobilized National Guard and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses,” Final Report Deliverable 27 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2010), <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/surveysandstudies/nvssurveyfinalweightedreport.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress* (December 2018), 1, <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2018-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>; and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA National Suicide Data Report 2005-2016* (September 2018), https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP_National_Suicide_Data_Report_2005-2016_508.pdf.

⁶ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Profile of Veterans: 2015* (March 2017), 9, https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/specialreports/profile_of_veterans_2015.pdf.

⁷ United States Conference of Mayors, “About the Conference,” 2019, <https://www.usmayors.org/the-conference/about/>.

⁸ Cities sometimes submitted multiple surveys with varying answers; in this case, demographic data was spot-checked for accuracy and the correct response was chosen. This variance may indicate that cities themselves are unaware of all of the services provided to constituents.

⁹ The city size breakdown of the 77 complete responses was: Small cities (35 of the 77) accounted for 45 percent of responses; medium cities (34) accounted for 44 percent; and large cities (eight) accounted for 10 percent. The breakdown of the 37 partial survey responses was: 59 percent small cities (22 of 37); 35 percent medium cities (13); and 5 percent large cities (two).

¹⁰ The Mission Act aims to reduce the burden cities experience trying to resolve medical- and access-related issues at the local level. See U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Enterprise Integration, “VA MISSION Act,” March 21, 2019, <https://www.va.gov/oei/missionAct/>.

¹¹ Only seven of 35 small cities reported their annual budget dedicated to veterans; the remaining left it blank. Nine of 34 medium cities reported their budget; and three of eight large cities reported their budget. Small cities’ budget average was \$716,000 and the median was \$350,000. The range was from \$68,000 to \$3.1 million. The outlier was New Bedford, Massachusetts, which reported a \$3.1 million annual budget. Medium cities’ budget average was \$502,000 while the median was \$60,000. The range was from zero to \$4.7 million. Large cities’ budget average was \$1.5 million while the median was \$585,000. The range was from zero to \$4.8 million, with New York City reporting the highest budget.

¹² Phillip Carter and Katherine Kidder, “A Continuum of Collaboration: The Landscape of Community Efforts to Serve Veterans” (Center for a New American Security, April 2017), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/a-continuum-of-collaboration>.

¹³ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*, 54.

¹⁴ Arguments that lower unemployment could be due to the artificial deflation in unemployment if veterans have ceased looking for jobs are doubtful. See U.S. Department of Labor, *April Jobs Report* (April 2019), <https://www.dol.gov/vets/latest-numbers/>; and U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Situation of Veterans – 2018*, USDL-19-0451 (March 21, 2019), 1, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>.

¹⁵ Veterans living in rural areas could especially benefit from internet services and thus greater digital literacy. Veterans could access telehealth, online education, or information about services.

¹⁶ Katherine Kidder, Amy Schafer, Phillip Carter, Moira Fagan, Jeesue Lee, and Andrew Swick, “Needs Assessment: Veterans in Washington, DC, Maryland, and Northeastern Pennsylvania” (Center for a New American Security, February 2018), <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/needs-assessment-1>.