

# WHITE OAK VI: Summary Report

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## PURPOSE, BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

*“Service members may be employed by their respective services, but they work for all Americans—and so do their families.”<sup>1</sup>*

“White Oak” is the informal name used to denote a series of conferences originally titled “America Joins Forces for Military Families” and initially held at the White Oak plantation in Jacksonville, FL in 2010 and 2012. White Oak retreats encourage creative thinking, collaboration and relationship-building across sectors in support of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors among the major non-profit military service organizations, related government offices, and other key philanthropic partners and contributors to this cause.

Participants at White Oak do not constitute a concrete organizational membership, but rather emphasize “White Oak” as a *process* by which positive transformation is made possible through dialogue, collaborative sharing of information and perspective, inspiration of ideas and future commitment to action amongst cooperative but uniquely focused individual participants. The result is a rare blend of national, regional and grassroots efforts working toward the ultimate goal of creating conditions through which various sectors can better serve the interests and needs of military members, transitioning veterans and their families.

This year’s convening is the sixth White Oak retreat. The White Oak VI main goals were:

- ❖ Taking stock of recent collaborations amongst public, private and philanthropic organizations working in support of military members/military families/veterans to identify intra-sector top priorities, areas of potential inter-sector collaboration and gapped areas of concern,
- ❖ Assessing community engagement to determine how to engage more effectively at local level and how to intensify military-community connections with the purpose of strengthening families, smoothing veteran reintegration and improving overall civil-military relations through increased familiarity and cooperation.
- ❖ Honing a workable definition and understanding of “public-private partnership” to elicit better collaboration among groups/sectors, generate innovative approaches to critical issue areas such as spouse employment, military family life and veteran

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<sup>1</sup> Blue Star Families, “2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Executive Summary,” 2, <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ExecutiveSummary-Survey16-Finalpages.pdf>.

transition, and identify duplicity and/or lack of coverage in addressing military community needs.

Conducted with a retreat-type atmosphere, this convening is designed as a strictly non-attribution/non-solicitation event, promoting candid, open discussion with the aim of identifying critical gaps, short-comings, or excessive overlaps in veteran and military community support networks and fostering a non-competitive willingness to present new ideas and engage hard topics. A short historical review of previous White Oak convenings provides further background and context.

### **White Oak I**

The Howard Gilman Foundation in partnership with Blue Star Families, the American Red Cross, United Service Organizations (USO), Service-Nation, Veterans Innovation Center and the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, hosted the inaugural White Oak in January, 2010. Including participants from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Council, the Senate Armed Services Committee and representation from other senior government and military entities, the first 55 attendees focused on the themes of *community, empowerment, and road mapping existing military and veteran community services*.

On the basis of this work, a sub-grouping of participants generated the “Military Community Blueprint” in the wake of the conference. This concept was adopted by the Points of Light organization and supported by 40 non-profits, providing resource tools and networking frameworks to help local communities take action on behalf of veterans, military members and their families. The conference contributed to a Presidential Study Directive, which mandated agencies support military families consistent with their mission.

### **White Oak II**

Blue Star Families, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes Initiative, Points of Light, The Red Cross, the USO, and Armed Forces Services Corporation, and White House and Department of Defense senior advisors were among those convening the second White Oak in February of 2012. Objectives of this gathering included addressing gaps, highlighting opportunities for private sector engagement and developing methods for better cooperation toward realizing common goals. Considerable attention was given to the establishment of an exploratory committee to

investigate the feasibility of a voluntary association of nonprofits working in the military family and transitioning veteran space. Potential benefits the committee was tasked to explore included identifying “practices of promise,” data sharing, mentoring for younger organizations, avenues for the improve public-private collaboration, greater cooperation with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and post-White Oak steering committee engagement with the philanthropy sector.

### **White Oak III**

The third White Oak convening held February 2014, witnessed a significant expansion of participants, ranging across government, military, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. Blue Star Families, Hiring our Heroes/U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Points of Light partnered with representatives from the, Military Officers Association of America, American Red Cross, Center for National Security and the USO to host White Oak III. The main foci of this convening centered on 1) *resource multipliers* to counteract declining resources, 2) *resource mapping* in an effort to improve knowledge of and delivery of services, 3) *decentralized services* to foster local community integration, and 4) *positive messaging* drawing attention to the significant contributions military and veteran members bring to the communities in which they live. Philanthropy participants discussed the need and usefulness of bringing more members of the philanthropic sector into this space. The Philanthropy Joining Forces Impact pledge resulted, garnering over \$300 million in pledges from corporate and private funders in support of veteran and military family causes.

### **White Oak IV**

White Oak IV continued under the guiding principle of past convenings, seeking collective impact areas offering scalable solutions in the spring of 2015. The three key issues of this March weekend were 1) collaboration, 2) communication and strategy, and 3) gaps and solutions. Main areas of idea convergence included a need to capture the lessons learned during the most recent wars to improve anticipation of future conflict needs in this regard, a need to align positive messaging stories about veterans using strong visuals and personal stories, and a need for metrics to reflect more accurately where engagement and collaboration can be most effective at offering support and assistance. The gathering also expressed agreement on the idea that veteran, military retired, and military spouse political participation serves as a valuable representative voice on behalf of the veteran and military communities.

Future action items included the compilation of best practices for funders and their communities, asset mapping to identify partner capabilities, and exploration of the idea to formalize White Oak in an effort to strengthen development of initiatives with “between retreat” intermediary meetings.

### **White Oak V**

The fifth retreat sought 1) to improve local civil-military bridges to strengthen military family resilience, 2) to work towards the modernization of personnel management and (re)define the “value proposition” of service for the purpose of recruiting and retaining future forces and their families, and finally, 3) to consolidate priorities/develop collective strategies to gain commitment from the next presidential administration for the sake of preserving public awareness and “voice” enjoyed by military/veteran communities.

An outcome of White Oak V was the generation of the “White Oak Scorecard,” summarizing the goals of White Oak convenings and highlighting the major accomplishments that have stemmed from these gatherings. White Oak V also successfully outlined a non-partisan platform of positions on behalf of military members, veterans and their families including expectations of presidential candidates and hope for continued support, establishing a firm foundation for bridging this critical advocacy work into the current administration.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WHITE OAK VI

In the tradition of bringing together leading advocates working on behalf of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors, White Oak VI sought 1) to take stock of recent public, private and philanthropic collaborations to identify top priorities, gaps and potential for growth; to assess local community engagement with the purpose of strengthening families, smoothing veteran reintegration and improving overall civil-military relations through increased familiarity and cooperation; and finally, to improve understandings of “public private partnership” to elicit better collaboration and innovative approaches to critical issues such as spouse employment, military family life and veteran transition.

Attendees of White Oak participate as thinkers, not as institutional representatives, engaged in a non-attribution, retreat-style atmosphere in which shared knowledge, open dialogue and brainstorming culminate in transformative collaboration. “Membership” is not attached to a concrete organization, but rather to an idea rooted in individual commitment to action united by shared goals and aligned messaging to achieve maximum impact in the lives of military members, veterans, their families, survivors and caregivers.

The following reflects sites of convergence, giving rise to actionable issue-areas and directing attention toward our “next steps.”

### *Reflecting on Recent Collaborations: Intra-Sector Communications*

- Across all sectors—government, philanthropy, community organization, and military family/veteran organizations—the top priorities identified involved reducing barriers between military/veteran populations and non-military populations. These roadblocks are recognized as physical, policy-based and/or ideational, to include: unnecessarily aggressive or outdated security restrictions and administrative “red tape” impeding partner access to bases as well as sources of data, information and know-how; social misperceptions of military members, veterans and their families; a lack of common metrics and language amongst collaborating public and private entities; and educational, financial and quality of life limitations that disadvantage and distance military and veteran populations from wider society.
- A common desire expressed was that fellow sectors converge on the idea that many problems faced by military and veteran families are in fact the same as those faced by the non-military population. As a result, tackling these issues with scalable approaches is to the benefit of the country, as a whole. Government and military

family/veteran organizations therefore seek outside assistance in promoting this message of similarity, “*we serve you; we are you,*” to the American people. Conversely, philanthropic and community organizations call for military members, veterans and their families to “self identify” as military, evidencing this positive messaging with their own examples of community participation and contribution.

- Additionally, sectors emphasize the primacy of the national security mission, the speed and efficiency of private organizations over public, the budgetary and experiential benefit of inviting partners to the decision-making table, and the slow-changing, uneasily quantified nature of communities.
- Inter-Sector reflections also unite on calls for increased emphasis on data and leveraging technology. All sectors seek improved data sharing and collection, specifically performance data, demographic comparisons and disaggregated data. Technology platforms by which to exchange data and the development of common metrics allow for helpful cross-sector analysis, while geography-based data and support mapping reveal physical and functional gaps and/or duplicity.

### **Community Engagement**

- Significant agreement congeals around the idea that community engagement between military and civilian populations at the local level requires a “red line” approach to define common objectives and unite the diverse populations and levels of governance involved. A campaign of data and explanatory findings, visuals to communicate meanings and powerful narrative that energizes players to action is required to secure the value proposition of embracing military members and veterans within cities and states.
- A critical node of influence is identified as the garrison/base level commander. This individual uniquely impacts military and veteran family strength, connecting families to local community resources, facilitating cross community social networks beneficial to spouse and veteran employment opportunities, and communicating a positive image of these active contributors in the wider community. Through such connections, military service is revealed as an attractive lifestyle, enhancing recruitment efforts, while military family strength is boosted by positive “at home” experience that fosters readiness and retention. Thus, overall national security is bolstered while civil-military social distances are reduced.

- In geographies distant from military installations, collaborative partnerships with national level organizations are particularly important. Connecting grassroots efforts to a countrywide common narrative empowers the diffusion of the idea that military and veteran families are integral members of their local communities, that military service is an attractive lifestyle, and transition from active duty to veteran status is a normal and natural process with significant benefits for the local communities to which veterans return.
- Formally instituted, community level veteran representatives with connectivity to state and federal echelons are highly recommended. Informal National Guard members, active duty, veteran or military-affiliated individuals, such as adult “military brats” also offer valuable pathways to engagement in regions without military presence.

#### ***Public Private Partnerships/Collaboration***

- Despite noteworthy legal, cultural and policy-oriented challenges, general agreement favors public private partnerships as major opportunities for continued and expanded support to military and veteran families amidst austere budgetary environments and conditions of stretched resources. Strong partnerships are characterized by proof of need and a workable concept, a well-researched and user-friendly plan, an advocate within the partnering organization(s), solid policy support and persistence. The value of a well-established partnership—or “collaboration,” as the military prefers for legal reasons—is the capacity for growth and scalability, multiplying the forces at hand by facilitating greater access to information, offering multidimensional/inter-subjective analysis and amplifying impact.
- Better collaboration among sectors is best achieved through tailored, local level initiatives that can be scaled up, as fitting. Public outreach to educate and increase awareness of needs enables community members who want to engage but often do not know how to help. Finally, creating mechanisms to ensure accountability is vital to success.

- Key collaborative solutions brainstormed:
  - Development of federally supported initiatives to facilitate military spouse employment continuity and/or establishment of business incentives, specific to military spouses hiring.
  - Improve military family strength through positive messaging of military lifestyle by increasing visibility of successful military-affiliated individuals; reduce civil-military social distance through celebrations of community partners who enhance the lives of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.
  - Map organizations/potential partners across the country and intensify linkages between DoD, the Veterans' Administration and state government offices to facilitate knowledge of transition assistance coverage and gaps.

Moving forward from White Oak VI, significant opportunities exist to brief the outcomes from this year's convening on the Hill, to philanthropies, and to the corporate sector. Attendees importantly conclude that by reducing barriers to partnership, community interaction can travel in both directions, not only allowing partners to enter into military/veteran spaces, but also encouraging the military-veteran population to engage locally, reducing feelings of social distance/divide. One participant summed up this sentiment saying, "Ask not what your community can do for you; ask what you can do for your community!"

## Report Overview

This document is organized to provide greater insight on the White Oak VI experience presenting:

- (1) summary descriptions of the overarching themes for the plenary sessions,
- (2) an accounting of the breakout conversations,
- (3) a summary of major themes, and
- (4) recommendations for future actions.

## OPENING PLENARY SESSION AND WELCOME TO WHITE OAK VI

*“Stay idealistic... stay needy for the input of others.”*

Bringing together over fifty participants from the public, private and philanthropic sectors, the White Oak VI opening plenary session began, setting the scene for the weekend with a warm welcome, calling for earnest collaboration in a positive spirit of openness and trust, and offering an introductory overview of the current military/military family/veteran support community “space.” The evening’s gathering allowed for introductions and the re-establishment of the White Oak ground rules, encouraging broad “individual thinking” and emphasizing a non-attribution/non-solicitation policy for the sake of fostering hearty dialog, honesty and cooperation.

***Common themes emerging from participants’ introductory remarks included optimism for continuing the mission of White Oak in support of the new presidential administration; calls for continued efforts to understand and improve civil-military community distance/divide; heavy emphasis on leveraging technology and the need for “big data” analysis and empirically driven solutions; concern that budgetary constraints could put families on a “collision course” with greater Department of Defense (DoD) needs; and finally, a strong desire for actionable collaboration.***

A “state of the space” capture followed introductions, highlighting most recently analyzed data points and societal impact assessments as well as introducing the convening topic of public-private partnerships presented in the context of philanthropic practice and lessons learned to date. Most salient statistical findings indicate military families continue to endure wartime levels of separation while many feel socially isolated from the wider American (non-military) public and cannot easily engage in a professional sector. Amidst these challenges, fewer than half (~40%) of military family

surveyed respondents would currently recommend military service to their own children.

Considerable opportunity exists, however, for public-private partnerships to improve this situation, acting to voice and/or amplify calls for reform or accountability, serving to bridge military and non-military communities to foster interaction/familiarity, and disciplining the broader message to reflect accurately special assistance needed by the military-veteran community without overlooking the significant positive impacts made and outcomes experienced by military service members, their families and veterans.

The discussants acknowledge that while philanthropy is limited in its capacity to address “*fundamentally broken*” structures, partnerships—embracing a human-centered design—can bring the knowledge and capacity of all sectors to bear, leveraging a greater array of tools and approaches to issues that *can be* helped. Knowing whom we serve, as military/veteran community advocates, and defining a shared view of our clientele is critical. In preparation for the work of White Oak VI, participants are challenged to re-envision the “journey of veterans” as a continuum extending from service entry, to departure from service, to life as a veteran, identifying military members, veterans, families, caregivers and survivors as part of the broader definition of whom they serve.

### Plenary Session I: RECENT COLLABORATIONS

*“Organizational cooperation can be ‘clunky,’ but can occur.”*

Saturday morning’s plenary session began with a meaningful charge proffered to the community by a highly valued partner and senior military member spouse calling for strong cross-sector teamwork and multidimensional approaches to working within the military-veteran community realm. Discussants emphasized a need for actionable collaboration with specific, measurable results meeting real needs (not perceived). Importantly, collaboration must be sensitive to the narrative generated by the portrayal of military members, veterans and their families. Characteristics of good collaboration include efforts to vet those with whom work is being done, prior surveillance and knowledge of the field to guard against duplicity and to fill gaps, and responsible, efficient expenditure practices.

### Breakout Session I: Intra-Sector Communications

Attendees were asked to break into four groups based on their organizational affiliations as “Government,” “Philanthropy,” “Community Organization” or “Military Family/Veteran Organization.” All groups were tasked with answering the following:

- *What are your top priorities? Among those in the room, where can we add value to each other?*
- *Regarding the other sectors -- what would we like other sectors to know about us? What do we need from them? What is our message to them?*
- *How do we exploit the data and technology we have? What data is missing?*

The group narratives—at times departing from the prescribed questions per collective preference—are summarized below:

#### Government

- **The top priority identified by this sector is to strengthen intergovernmental as well as public-private partnerships, seeking opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships amidst austere budgetary environments.** Significant discussion revolves around **the need to reassess policies and tendencies that grew out of more immediate post-9/11 security postures but today unintentionally create roadblocks to collaboration with “too much red tape.”** The example of the Army Corps of Engineers typical collaborative work is offered as a viable model from which a template for successful local partnership might be developed. Participants agreed that transformative goals must be realistic, but argued room for improvement exists.
- **The garrison/base commander level of leadership is identified as a critical node in breaking down barriers.** In addition to the challenge of a heavy OPTEMPO/ deployment schedule which has reduced the experience of “leading at home,” commanders have also become constrained by a well-intentioned, force protection-driven attitude that finds it is easier to say “no” than to seek out a viable, secure path to “yes,” particularly in the case of **easing non-federal entity access to bases.** Assisting them in this capacity is a recommended action item. Creating and implementing a guide to local partnership would facilitate commanders’ capacity to enable financial relief for the military, increased benefit to military families, stronger connection to local community, and overall economic boost.
- **In looking to other sectors, this group first acknowledges that service members are often “quiet professionals” that have difficulty in expressing both their needs as**

**well as their strengths.** This backdrop implicitly explains some of the difficulty to overcome in establishing partnership; however, they argue:

- **Strong messaging that emphasizes the competency of the military community/veterans and highlights valuable contributions to the local area is key.** Again, the garrison/base commander is identified as the ideal military member to promote this narrative in partnership with local public and private partners.
- Non-military/non-federal sectors must also take into consideration the non-negotiable first priority of our national security mission as well as significant budgetary and legal constraints faced by government personnel. In addition to complicating collaboration efforts, **these realities increasingly degrade capacity to fund and staff services with DoD resources, and a need for help in the realm of social programs and philanthropic support exists.**
- **This support is not charity, but rather civic duty** in response to outstanding service already given and with typically strong return on investment. The state of Kentucky is offered as an excellent example, where two centers of excellence are being built to **empower and leverage veterans as local assets who will continue to serve in their neighborhoods and towns.**
- Finally, **exploiting data and technology** is best achieved through:
  - **Making what we have—in terms of shareable data—available** to those organizations that seek to partner with us, helping them target needs and efficiently provide the right support to our community.
  - **Engaging with outside institutions**, such as university and non-profit research facilities, to gain further insight informed by their evidence-based analysis.

### Philanthropy

- This group’s dynamic discussion focused on “messaging veterans” as valuable assets in their communities, ensuring philanthropy has a seat at the table during program development to keep initiatives grounded in reality and sharing best practices across the philanthropic space through data/metrics.
- **The top priority for the philanthropic sector is to empower and utilize veterans in such a way that “flips the paradigm” of benefits strongly focused upon dependency and rather emphasizes a view of increased benefit attached to greater**

**well-being.** Veterans possess **global experiences in crisis regions all over the world, giving them unique skills, for example, to address similarly troubled domestic zones within the United States.** Moreover, veterans' issues are largely representative of the struggles faced by the wider population; therefore, **philanthropic work with veterans serves to inform programs in other sectors of philanthropy,** especially in efforts to develop a strong future workforce. In this way, **philanthropy can function more fully as a partner with government and private entities, not simply as a "funder," but as a significant social problem solver.**

- **Philanthropy would like other sectors to know:**
  - Their sector typically has the capacity to do things **faster than government** due to less bureaucracy. Although philanthropy was previously viewed as "out of touch with veteran needs," foundations have worked—and continue to work—to **know veterans and their needs better.** Subsequently, in many areas philanthropy is performing demonstrably better than government while measuring outcomes and prompting government to improve or take action on its own end.
  - **Philanthropy should have a "seat at the table"** to guide program development due to its valuable experience. Philanthropy can not only fill gaps that government cannot cover, but has the capacity to steer an agenda within the realm of reality/possibility—connecting organizations capable of achieving tangible outcomes, guaranteeing solid strategic investment of resources by scrutinizing funding/staffing plans, and working within partnerships to scale proven models.
- The philanthropy conversation on data proved very fruitful. First of all, **"performance data" is emphasized as key** to providing a common way of showing impact and allows for quantification of philanthropic efforts at a broad level of analysis. **Common metrics for identifying success within the philanthropic community is an important objective and identified as an "action item."** A common **workforce development measure relative to grant implementation** is suggested as a much-needed common metric. Although broad measures can be helpful, generalizations can miss important nuances and are discussed as potentially problematic. As a result, **the value of disaggregating data is also raised** observing critical differences exist within our massive, diverse military-veteran community.

### Community Organization

- Before tackling the prescribed questions, this group chose to begin by **establishing a common definition of “community,” breaking the concept down into *who* is involved, *what* requires attention and *how* or what mechanisms will be implemented to address those needs.** Reflexively, the group identifies itself as “those who serve those who serve,” or those who “help existing organizations do their work better on behalf of military and veteran families.”
- The **top priorities for the “community organization” breakout session center largely on being able to form connections between local groups, which requires community education, cross-sector familiarization and relationship building.** A major challenge to this work is the civil-military social distance/divide and increasing likelihood that neighbors do not know one another. The group identifies the following as critical to achieving their objective:
  - **Coordinating along a continuum with a model that evolves,** inviting the input and coordination of others and providing the collective with a common goal. Importantly, partners must remain focused on the customer and not the development of the organization.
  - **Meta collaboration to create a shared national narrative** on military and veteran families, strengthen public awareness and help unify civilian and military communities. In communities where connections seem particularly challenged, change the perspective of the military/veteran member as your “customer,” and observe the community *writ large* as the “customer.”
  - **Develop common metrics** that all can use so that all service providers are using the same quantitative data to facilitate cooperation.
  - Focus on **solving the causal roots of needs** instead of focusing on/reacting to needs at surface level.
- What would community organizations like other sectors to know about them?
  - **Change in a community is not rapid.** Two-three years are required to change behaviors and attitudes, form new narratives and/or win “hearts and minds.” **These results are also not easily quantifiable.**
  - Most military families and veterans are not outside the norm. **Many issues plaguing them are the same as those challenging the wider population; therefore, improving veteran quality of life serves as a template and potential spillover benefit for improving an entire community.**

- Community organizations are interested in data determining **where overlap exists amongst efforts on behalf of military members and veterans and similar work aimed at community improvement more broadly**. Using and exploiting data requires using **technology platforms to share what is being done**. We need to make data and information comparable in order to communicate with others as well as benchmark ourselves.

### Military Family/Veteran Organization

- This group also begins discussion by first clarifying **who they understand themselves to be, agreeing, “we are service members, veterans, military families, caregivers, survivors...”** and they leave the door open to the possibility of others who may hold a stake in the wider military family/veteran organization community.
- The top priority for the military family and veteran organization group is **building better services that target pertinent issues, are held accountable for performance and are prioritized according to the needs of a very large and inclusive community**
  - Services must be 1) readily available, 2) apparent, 3) easy to access, with emphasis on access to behavioral health.
  - **Barriers must be removed that disadvantage those who choose to serve** such as education, financial, medical and quality of life limitations.
  - Significant need for legislative advocacy is identified to tackle top problems such as the “Widow’s Tax” and **spouse employment—an issue that must be separated out from the issue of veteran employment to ensure proper visibility** and attention.
- **Military family and veteran organizations would like other sectors to know:**
  - To community: **“We serve you; we are you.”** The military is a cross section of the country. We have the same problems and concerns, plus a “hyper mobile” lifestyle.
  - To government/DoD, **“You can’t do your job without us.”** Bringing together federal, state, local, public and private players is required.
  - More broadly, **“We are not entitled; we deserve.”**

Additionally, this group highlights the fact that **many concerns in the military space are reflective of those in the broader community**—many issues are, in fact, nationwide (e.g., affordable, quality child care, education, alcohol/substance abuse treatment, mental health and health care). They argue, therefore, solutions must be viewed and addressed in a context

beyond military families. **The military family and veteran organizations seek collaboration with outside partners focusing on similar issue areas to identify where efforts overlap and to determine how best use all available resources efficiently.**

- **Data on gaps in needs coverage is required** to guide military family and veteran organizations to action where external organizations are not addressing the specific kinds of needs that military families and veterans uniquely possess.

## Plenary Session II: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

*“If you’re too busy to do a lot, you can still offer yourself to do something.”*

The second plenary session brought forward honest and heartfelt conversation framing the topic of community engagement with both a challenge to military members, families and veterans to participate more fully in their local communities as well as a critique of misperceptions and lack of knowledge of the military/veteran community in wider American society. Panelists emphasize the need for military community members and veterans to “identify as military” when engaged locally, allowing others to become more familiar with the military/veteran community and correcting false attitudes about this population and the opportunity to serve one’s country.

### Breakout Session II: Community Engagement

For this session, attendees were given the choice to participate in one of four teams, each responding to a unique question. The key group findings are outlined below:

#### ***Group 1: How is the strength of military families a national security issue? (Retention? Recruitment? Readiness?)***

- **Breakout conversation on this subject begins, centering on the importance of the military family home and the quality of military children’s lives vis-à-vis the demands of national security in terms of the preservation of a quality all volunteer force through recruitment and retention, readiness to fight and how this wellness relates to positive transitions from active to veteran status.**
  - **Recruiting and retention are challenged by the fact that benefits have to compete with the needs of families.** A military lifestyle particularly

challenges families financially as **hyper mobility reduces opportunities for spouse employment** amidst increased cost-of-living expectations of dual parent incomes. Added complexity in **repeatedly establishing quality childcare solutions and inconsistencies in education** for school aged children also impact recruitment and retention.

- Family readiness has long been associated with the readiness of the military member. **Challenges at home translate to poor service member performance, thereby degrading overall unit effectiveness and contribution to mission accomplishment.**
- Connecting these concerns and driving discussion further is the fact that **increasingly military recruits come from military families, linking quality of military children’s lives to the quality of our volunteer force.** As a result, the question posed is taken into consideration and several key connections are suggested, all of which understand “strength of the military family” as a national security issue, particularly as this topic relates to the question of recruitment:
  - **Military family strength signals a positive life style that is attractive to young people considering military service**—potential recruits. The better this value proposition, the higher the number of interested young people with increased likelihood of higher quality recruits.
  - Statistically, **the large majority of young people entering military service are coming from military families; therefore, a good military family environment relates to the quality of a high proportion of likely recruits.**
  - **The likelihood to recommend service to a family member also presumably relates positively to military family experience,** suggesting negative experiences can reduce recruitment numbers.
- **Garrison/Base Commanders have an important role to play in these dynamics as they serve in a capacity that significantly impacts military families and function as the critical node between the military and local communities.** This position enables them to connect families to local community resources, facilitate cross community social networks beneficial to spouse and veteran employment opportunities, and project a positive image of military families and veterans as active contributors in the wider community. Through such connections, military service is revealed as an attractive lifestyle while military family strength is boosted by positive “at home” experience. Some additional considerations:
  - **Families are on post an average of two years before they are forced to start over.** It is important to consider what can be done to facilitate

integration into a community within this 24-month margin and whether this length or time could be extended.

- How do we help families that are living where they do not want to be located?
- The budgetary cost of recruitment is significant and a lack of resources has led to geographical trends in enlistment alongside the increasingly lop-sided participation of military children (offspring) and relatives. Optimal recruitment is inclusive of all classes, backgrounds and geographies. **Military Reservists and National Guard across the country, especially in vicinities where large bases are not located, familiarize the wider American public to the personal value of military service and demonstrate positive family outcomes.** When these representatives identify as “military” in their home communities, they successfully convey this positive messaging, revealing that the military community really is just a part of the overall American community.

*Group 2: How can we more effectively engage at the local level, both with returning veterans and their families, and with citizens and community leaders, to facilitate successful reintegration efforts?*

- **This group begins with the premise that veterans should be seen as a community members first**, and from there, they agree that **a mutually supportive relationship should exist between veterans and their communities with strong norms reinforcing the responsibilities each has to the other.** The group then poses and addresses several questions outlining the path to more effective engagement at the local level easing veteran integration/transition.
- **What do we want communities to be doing differently?** Importantly, recognizing municipal governments are already stretched and come from varying positions of awareness and capacity, **care must be taken to treat these partners as stakeholders, extend ownership of the process to them by giving them tools to enhance what they are already doing within their communities and not levy upon them additional work or cost.**
  - **One recommendation is to institute a community veterans’ representative** that connects the local to the national, keeping veterans abreast of issues that affect them, taking the former central role of the Veterans Administration and creating a center of gravity for grassroots veteran and veteran family activity organic to the locality. The **Massachusetts Veteran Service Officer program is offered as an**

**example** approaching this idea. Collective opinion adds that **veterans have a responsibility to add to this process** by engaging and bringing their own resources to the table.

- **Better market research is required of local communities** to better inform their efforts when trying to engage with military/veteran activities.
- **What do we, as national level organizations need to do?**
  - **Efforts must be inclusive.** National level players should not enter the scene with a dictatorial approach. Programs initiated ought to be mutually beneficial to both veterans and the community at large, creating interdependence that crosses civil-military social distance and forms strong local relationships. **Empowering leaders in local communities is key.**
  - **Expectations must be realistic.** Overly ambitious events and programs cannot be assumed to be sustainable for local communities. Helping localities get to know the military/veteran population through information and data sharing will fortify local government understanding, help develop improved structures and enhance overall municipal level efforts to smooth veteran integration.
  - **Encourage partnership.** Responsibilities must be shared between national, state, local, civilian and military players. Everyone must be contributing. Everyone must be given voice and empowered.
  - **Change the narrative nationwide to abandon the idea of veteran “reintegration” into the civilian life, and embrace the idea of “transition,” as transitions are a normal part of life for everyone.** This description is more relatable to those outside of the military community and avoids contributing to the notion that the military community exists outside of the rest of American society.
- **How to “connect the dots?”**
  - Communities and families must be “met where they are” in such a way that **respects the uniqueness of each community and the authenticity of local culture.** Solutions must fit within this dynamic.
  - **Service members must take responsibility for their transition to post-military service life, pro-actively engaging with the local community** to establish a veteran-friendly environment together.
  - **Honor strong communities and elevate mutual efforts.**
  - Gather data on the results and share the findings.

**Group 3: How do we connect communities without significant military presence to the mission of the military?**

- This group reports the problem of poor connectedness to the mission of the military and familiarity with the military lifestyle in communities lacking significant military presence is reflected both in surveyed perceptions gathered across the country as well as in the lack of recruitment numbers coming from non-military affiliated youth. **They argue this yawning gap in awareness and familiarity should be understood as a serious “national security need” as the sustainability of a high quality, all volunteer force affects the entire country.**
- **A key resource in places without significant military presence is the veteran population, veteran spouses or those formerly affiliated with the military, such as “military brats,”** i.e. people who have a parent or parents that have served. These individuals can be leveraged as major assets to influence those around them positively.
  - **Many in the military community do not self-identify as “military connected,”** and their affiliation goes unknown in wider social circles where they serve as elected officials, volunteers, community leaders and business people. We need to highlight those doing good work.
  - **In higher education arenas, veterans, military spouses and “brats” also have significant opportunity to interact with young people** who might be interested in joining the military upon graduation.
  - Encouraging **adult “military brats” or “Navy juniors” with high visibility such as CEO’s, celebrities and political leaders to advertise their military affiliation** adds to an affirmative portrayal of the military lifestyle and the positive potential of military families.
- Tapping into **a significant majority of civilians’ professed desire to “know” military people better,**<sup>2</sup> this group recommends a coalition of corporate and municipal leaders, chambers of commerce, faith-based and education organizations embrace a local effort to **familiarize the community with veterans as an issue of local importance.** The need for improved awareness and knowledge cannot simply be a concern for federal government.
  - **Saying “thank you for your service” is not really enough. Individual level investment in national defense across the entire country is vital to American security.**

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<sup>2</sup> Discussant cites an Edelman study.

**Group 4: Look beyond federal - what should we ask of city and state leadership?**

- Seeking community engagement assistance from city and state leadership requires a well-structured plan based on a “red line drawn” approach. The group introduces their recommended framework, **critically asserting the military-veteran advocacy community needs to define this “red line” to bring together these multiple levels of governance effectively.** Through the use of **data to explain phenomena and visuals to communicate the meanings and findings, a narrative emerges at each of these levels of governance that energizes players to action.** Follow-on questions building upon the areas of agreement across the city and state sectors are added to direct advocates toward the next appropriate steps.
- **Data** – At both city and state levels, leaders are called upon to gather data from a range of public and private contributors capturing the best data and, when possible, from consistent sources. **This data should include but is not limited to:**
  - Population data in terms of military/civilian comparisons
  - Demographics on gender, income, education, employment levels
  - Geographical breakdowns on where veterans live and work
  - Available military leadership or visible influencers
  - Economic impact of military community
  - Programs and/or gaps in services needed
- **Visuals** – These intermediary mechanisms help to simplify data into digestible, meaningful communication that can be applied at all levels of governance and across sectors to unite overall efforts. **Visuals include engaging material, media or activities drawing attention to consistent data-driven themes such as:**
  - Political leadership engagement on the topic
  - Infographics and white papers tailoring descriptions of the military/veteran impact (social, political, economic, etc.) at city and state levels
  - Media messaging through videos, vignettes or organizational materials familiarizing city and state with the general landscape of military/veterans presence within their geographies.
  - Participation in community events
- **Narrative** – In the words of this group, **narrative, the third step in this process, is meant to “emote,”** drawing upon data-informed visual efforts at city and state levels in an effort to look beyond federal support of community engagement. By evoking emotion or feeling about the empirical findings on military members and veterans

within a community, the likelihood of action at city and state levels of leadership is increased. The group argues:

- The **value proposition of embracing military members and veterans within the city and state localities is revealed**, energizing leaders.
- **Municipal and state leadership will better understand how to partner with federal and private institutions** to the boost their local military and veteran affiliated citizenry and, by extension, benefit their overall constituencies.
- **Veteran entrepreneurship stands to benefit** from improved city and state engagement, in particular, as local legislators recognize their valuable contribution.
- **City and state leadership support translates to greater local familiarity with the military and veteran community**, improving private, non-profit and philanthropic partnership opportunities, as well.
- **Some important additional question to take into consideration:**
  - What is the capacity to give support? How can expectations be tuned to the capacity available?
  - In cases of local base proximity, how connected is the community to the installation, and what levels of awareness already exist?
  - What is the nature of the “ask” for community engagement assistance relative to what the federal government is already doing? Is it proportional? Is it nested within pre-existing federal engagement?
  - What natural allies exist at the municipal and state levels to tackle similar problems and serve as good partners?
  - Who are the local and state level stakeholders with vested interest in the success of this community engagement?

### Plenary Session III: PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

*“Patient and polite persistence pays. It is just going to take time.”*

The final plenary session features speakers with considerable real world experience in developing and executing public private partnerships, bringing forward key lessons learned to stimulate thinking and challenge breakout group conversation. Significant challenges are highlighted despite general agreement that public private partnerships

often sound like perfect solutions. Legal constraints and logistics can severely complicate collaboration. Sound research is required to ensure that players can realistically meet the expectations of the partnership fiscally, responsibly, capably and with shared commitment. However, in a strained budgetary environment an investment in public private partnership cannot be overlooked. With persistence and passion, success is possible.

Helpfully, the “**Five P’s**” of public private partnerships are offered as a fundamental framework for establishment:

1. **Proof** – proof of need, workable concept and scalability
2. **Plan** – must be familiar and user-friendly (research must endorse)
3. **“Pom-Poms”** – an internal advocate (cheerleader) is required within your partnering organization
4. **Policy** – doctrinal and legal coherence are “must haves”
5. **Persistence** – “Patient and polite persistence pays” and may take time

#### Breakout Session III: Public Private Partnerships

Afternoon breakout session participants were given the option of attending breakout sessions based on the following issue areas:

- “Spouse Employment”
- “Military Family Strength as a National Security Issue”
- “Transition for Veterans and Veteran Families”

All groups were then tasked with answering the following:

- *What does private-public partnership really mean?*
- *How do we elicit better collaboration among groups /sectors?*
- *Brainstorm at least one creative solution to the specific topic.*
- *Where are you focusing/ where is there overlap, where are you not focusing?*
- *Among those in the room, where can add value to each other?*

#### **Group 1: “Spouse Employment”**

- In response to the initial question, what is a public-private partnership in relation to the issue area of “spouse employment,” **the group emphasizes a need for strong, predominantly non-governmental collaboration that tackles the significant roadblocks to military families that have long-hindered opportunity for spouse employment. Funding/monetary support is not what is needed** to make the

necessary changes. Rather, **networks engaged at tactical as well as strategic levels of partnership are needed to improve flow of information to spouses, elevate awareness of the issue, advocate for policy change at local, state and national levels and bring an end to a history of inattention and inaction.** Connecting with younger spouses is identified as a critical aim.

- Although national attention is acknowledged as needed to foster attention, much discussion revolves around the **need for very tailored, small scale, local level collaboration.** Many contend that supportive policies are in place, but the problems of **awareness and lack of accountability limit effectiveness.** For example, legally required military spouse hiring preferences suggest government service work should be a major source of spouse employment opportunity, yet data indicates a large portion of spouses who have applied for these jobs are not being hired for the positions. **Partnerships that educate and inform spouses as well as employers/hiring agents facilitate spouse access to opportunity. Garrison/base commanders are identified as ideal partners to affect this process.**
- **The aspect of licensure is a critical area for improvement and should serve as a key example of an area where public private partnership can engage collaboratively.** Again, a narrow focus is valuable, as a unique approach is required for each particular licensing authority; however, the nature of military family mobility requires broad scale efforts to smooth transfer of professional certifications, authorizations and licensure across governmental administrative geographies.
  - Brainstormed solutions:
    - Improve **federal employment opportunities.**
    - Increase **intergovernmental collaborations to support military spouse job continuity.**
    - Create **tax incentives that apply to military spouses similarly to veteran applications.**
  - **Military community organizations, professional associations and other philanthropic advocates are needed to amplify the messaging of this need, build community, state and national support for spouse employment and pressure political actors for policy change.**
- Department of Defense has little at stake on this issue and even fewer resources to impart to the problem. Non-profit/corporate partnership help is needed:
  - We must focus on **convincing employers to see the value in a military spouse** as a highly resilient person who has worked in multiple cultures, states and localities often under stressful conditions.

- **Think tanks and research institutions are needed to conduct cost analysis of spouse unemployment and underemployment** to bring home the bottom line on this issue for those outside of the military community.

**Group 2: Military Family Strength as a National Security Issue**

- **Beginning with the premise that strong military families foster a strong defense**, this group defines public private partnerships in support of “military family strength as a national security issue” by first distinguishing them from more typical government contractual “*quid pro quo*” relationships that involve action in exchange for money. **Public private partnerships in this capacity, rather, are characterized by action that does not involve monetary compensation.**
  - These partnerships are focused on military and veteran family well-being during, throughout and after service.
  - Messaging the narrative of “*military family strength as a national security issue*” to the public requires partnership with all sectors to increase national awareness and invite action.
- Military family related organizations are **traditionally good at collaborating with inside organizations, but not with outside organizations. They have also historically chosen to “swim in their own lane,” striving for uniqueness for the sake of earning issue-oriented monetary support but are increasingly seeking collaboration and merging efforts with other organizations.** Some additional considerations on the path to improvement:
  - In general, the private sector has “passion” to act while the public sector owns the problem or issue requiring attention; therefore, **military service organizations, as non-profits, can facilitate the transfer of pertinent data or knowledge held by the public sector to private sector players that can act on the data.**
  - Partners include but are not limited to local government, community organizations, DoD, educational institutions, corporate entities and non-profits.
  - **Acknowledge communities want to help but often do not know how to engage.** Reach out to the public and start discourse to develop and strengthen partnerships.
- This group brainstormed **numerous solutions. Most focused on ways to improve perceptions of the military/veteran lifestyle, the positive impact made by service and the valuable local community contributions of military members and veterans.**

Different partnerships and possibilities were blended to achieve this overall goal. Some ideas included:

- **Corporations identify veterans visibly at work**, such as placing military logos on nametags akin to “home state” markers.
- Using **“Military Family Month” in November to draw attention to key community members who impact military family lives** such as educators.
- **Identify and applaud military children** for strong academic performance and community service.
- Observe **Veterans Day by celebrating with a campaign that highlights service members and veterans who are serving as successful role models.**

### **Group 3: Transition for Veterans and Veteran Families**

- Addressing the first question, “what does public private partnership really mean?” **this group contends better defining the aspects of “private” and “partnership” in a framework of “public-private partnership” is required:**
  - **“Private” organizations**, for example, range in nature and can include foundations, philanthropic groups or corporations.
  - Importantly, the **DoD does not like to use the word “partnership” because it has a legal connotation that confuses the concept with a contractual relationship.** An action item is to **replace “partnership” with “collaboration.”**
  - **Non-profits bring particular value**, as public actors are greatly restricted in their capacity to partner directly with private entities. This relationship development aids in information sharing to leverage private capacity to address many of the challenges faced by veterans.
- **Virtual conferencing with stakeholders to improve connectivity and understanding** would be helpful to collaboration. Partners and communities **should feel empowered to ask “What’s in it for me?”** Honest communication allows collaboratives to define their shared objectives to enhance veteran transition. This contingent argues, **better collaboration among groups on the topic of “transition for veterans and veteran families” would be elicited by:**
  - **Increasing government awareness of private organization accomplishments to evidence the value in non-profits** assisting with transition,

- Conceptually **mapping related organizations/potential partners and their efforts across the country** to improve knowledge of resources available,
- **More research and access to data, in particular that held by DoD, the Veterans Administration and state governments**, to facilitate understanding of where transition assistance is needed and what kind of needs exist.
  - The group recommends **matching transition offices in DoD with the VA and improving hand-off from government to community providers**.
- **Encouraging and incentivizing veterans to self-identify** to enhance knowledge by which collaborations can improve their efforts.
  - **Geographically and demographically targeted outreach** is needed.
  - **Teaching stakeholders and individual veteran users how to access and utilize data** also speeds and tailors the process.
  - We need to gather **better empirics on what veterans are interested in doing** professionally.
- The group identifies/summarizes **several critical gaps that complicate public private collaboration** in support of veteran transitioning:
  - Gaps in **research**
  - Gaps created by **institutional differences** driven, for example, by problematic legal structures and/or policy.
    - **A significant gap is the result of private provider inability to access state-held DD-214 data.**
  - Gaps in perception, specifically in **failure to understand the military/veteran community as part of and reflective of wider society** and to understand their challenges as integral to the success of the American future workforce.
- **Two major ideas** were brainstormed during this breakout session.
  - The first is to **create a “Yelp” or “Consumer Reports” type of resource for veterans and families to inform their transition decision-making** with facts about community resources and local attributes that make places attractive. Communities stand to gain significantly as increased veteran populations typically increase local revenue.

- The second is to relax TAP (Transition Assistance Program) structures to allow for job marketing at this critical employment opportunity time.

## BREAKOUT GROUP BRIEFS: SUMMARY OF MAJOR THEMES

### *“Do our neighbors know we are doing this?”*

#### **“We Are You.”**

Repeatedly, throughout the course of White Oak VI, attendees emphasized the fact that military members, their families, veterans, those who care for them and those who survive them **are an integral part of American society as well as valuable participants and leaders in their local communities.** *“We serve you; we are you,”* was reiterated from panel to panel whether discussing the challenges faced by military members, veterans and their families similar to those faced by most Americans, or arguing for the need to overcome generalizations of veterans as “broken” with positive images of typical military/veteran families—normal, and often outstanding members of their home communities. Statistics show, however, that most Americans are not familiar with military members and their families, despite the fact that they may be neighbors.

This sentiment is found at the heart of community engagement efforts striving to bring forth this realization, correct misperceptions and bridge civil-military social distance/divide. Understanding our shared identity also informs the work of public private collaborations aimed at the issues of “spouse employment,” “military family strength” and “transition for veterans and families.” Fundamentally, the combined goal of these issues is to support military members, veterans and their families to ensure their capacity to live “normal” American lives and experience smooth transition from successful active military service to successful veteran status. In return, communities have much to gain from the presence of these globally experienced and highly adaptable citizens, many of whom are already quietly contributing in their midst.

#### **Desperately Seeking Data**

Another theme that dominated conversation at this year’s White Oak VI convening was the ardent **call for data** framed by numerous demands and specifications. Leveraging technology to exploit “big” data and collaborating with research institutions to “mine” data in search of empirically driven solutions were broad goals voiced by many attendees. Others argued for the disaggregation of data for the purpose of fine-grained

analysis, seeking quantitative assessments on population comparisons, demographics, geographical data, economic impact and program effectiveness. Perhaps more importantly, discussions of data also pertained to the use of data and how data sharing, improved access to data and joint efforts to assess data facilitates collaboration, enhancing unity of purpose and creating greater impact.

### **Tell Good Stories**

If the first major theme of White Oak VI is a message and the second quantitatively characterizes the message and seeks to measure its diffusion and reception, the third major theme of White Oak VI is a call to substantive action on this message. Throughout the retreat, participants emphasize the importance of unified messaging to “flip the paradigms” or negative stereotypes fostered by civil-military social distance and lack of familiarity with each other. Shifting attention to local levels of engagement, garrison/base commanders, military service non-profit organizations, veterans, reservists, National Guardsmen and even adult military offspring are identified as critical nodes with capacity to straddle this divide and promote positive images of military members, veterans and their families. These “good stories” reveal the day-to-day reality of the military/veteran population as simply fellow Americans and great neighbors who often excel in their local communities.

Public private collaboration can draw major players into this effort to elevate and amplify this narrative. Amidst conditions of limited resources, these partnerships serve as a “force multiplier,” capable of extending this messaging to a national level. By fostering greater overall familiarity with military lifestyle, the presence of military members, veterans and families is normalized within local communities, strengthening families through local ties, increasing spouse employment opportunities and smoothing military-to-veteran transition processes.

### **CONSOLIDATING THEMES AND CONSIDERING NEXT STEPS**

As White Oak VI draws to a close, attendees reflect on the work they have done and discuss how the group can take action upon departure. Commitments to message promotion, new partner “evangelization,” best practices template development and “data potluck”/sharing efforts are shared among other warm offerings. Mentors

applaud willingness to work hard in the midst of frequent disagreement, emphasize the hope energized through the weekend's collaboration and assure attendees that while new problems will continue to arise, White Oak's continued presence ensures there will be people tackling them.

### Next Steps

The final breakout session of White Oak VI divides participants into two groups. The first is charged with consolidating and prioritizing legislative action items for presentation to political leadership while the second group is tasked with assembling a philanthropy-corporate sector outbrief based on the weekend's outcomes. Rough summaries of their discussions follow:

#### Legislative Action Group

- Understanding a need to prioritize action items according to need and feasibility, this group narrows its efforts to seeking federally supported initiatives to enhance military spouse employment opportunities and continuity. The group identifies several key areas of complexity that challenge this effort and suggests possible solutions.

The first challenge is to win state governments over to this idea as states have little interest in military members and veteran issues, perceiving these concerns as federal responsibilities. In addition, the state incurs the risk of poor performing professionals and significant revenue is garnered through state licensure programs and processes. As a result, the state has little incentive to get involved and much to lose.

The group argues that White Oak would be well served to connect with the National Governor's Association where the benefits of military and veteran presence in local communities can be highlighted. On an individual level, governors might benefit politically from the popular image of assisting veterans and military families. By focusing on one or two particularly amenable professions, White Oak increases the chances of getting a "foot in the door" with potential for future expansion.

At the federal level, the second prong of the White Oak attack is to create positive presence, focusing on particularly friendly congressmen and women to work toward

this legislative change and building relationships with the new White House administration.

### Philanthropy – Corporate Sector Group

Two separate outbrief outlines were generated by this group, one specific to corporations and one specific to philanthropic organization.

- **Corporations:** Corporations both stand to benefit from the military/veteran community and offer significant potential for collaboration on behalf of military members, veterans and their families. Corporations depend on global stability for strong economies and solid commercial activity, and corporate responsibility narratives suggest a “Tom Brokaw” moral obligation to support the military/veteran community in return.

A key strategy is to compel corporations to hire military spouses and veterans and then advertise these efforts, thereby raising attention to their connection with the military and challenging other corporations to follow suit.

The group suggests establishing a sub-group to generate a white paper capturing these arguments. One participant offered that they had produced a corporate “playbook” of opportunities for corporations looking to engage with military communities. Several action items were assigned to participants in the group willing to work on bringing the necessary materials together.

Replacing the term “corporate” with “business sector” is recommended as this opens possibilities to interaction with the larger scope of the broad business community.

- **Philanthropy Outbrief:** Philanthropic groups are growing significantly in terms of capacity as evidenced by the critical work these foundations are doing amidst current natural disaster events.

To connect with foundations and encourage expansion into the realm of military-veteran advocacy, White Oak must link current philanthropic focus areas to related or similar military/veteran-specific issues where help is needed. For example, a foundation working in the realm of education might be influenced to take action on

military child after school care, addressing a concern related to their passion while fundamentally enhancing the strength of military families.

Message delivery can occur through the speaker's bureau, through the deputization of funders (extending ownership), via programs to educate community foundations across the country and possibly through regional community foundation convenings.

## CONCLUSIONS

***“Ask not what your community can do for you, but what you can do together!”***

The sixth White Oak convening witnessed the successful gathering of creative, individual thinkers dedicated to transformative dialogue, collaboration and the development of innovative approaches to producing tangible outcomes for military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. This year's gathering focused primarily on the topic of “public private partnership/collaboration,” beginning with **intra-sector reflection to identify top priorities and needs, then considering critical aspects of community engagement for targeted efforts and finally concluding with an intense examination of public private partnership** as this form of collaboration relates to specific objectives in support of the military-veteran population.

Specifically, conclusions drawn through discussion of **“Intra-Sector Considerations”** largely fall into “wants” and “needs” categories. **All groups express the strong desire to remove governmental roadblocks and administrative “red tape” that prevent cross-community interaction/support and hinder collaboration. Improved access to bases, “seats” at decision-making tables for philanthropy and corporate partners, and data sharing are identified as needed to facilitate and empower the work of partnerships.** By working to bring down barriers, community interaction can travel in both directions, not only allowing partners to enter into military and veteran spaces, but also encouraging the military-veteran population to engage in local community reducing perceptions and feelings of social distance/divide.

**“Community Engagement”** conversations strongly reinforced **arguments recognizing the inseparable nature of the military-veteran population from American society, as a whole, and vice versa. Significant interdependency characterizes our shared national**

**security through aspects of recruitment, readiness and retention. While military members and their families serve the nation, they also need the support of their fellow citizens and local communities.** Improving civil-military interaction at local, municipal, state and federal levels serves to strengthen military families and, by extension, overall national security but **requires common language, metrics and understanding to be most effective. Impact can be made through a unified positive messaging** of military members, veterans and their families executed at all levels of human interaction from grassroots individual efforts to nationally-promoted strategic levels of communication.

Simply defining **public private partnership/collaboration** is revealed to be quite complicated, and while technical parameters serve to parse out the nature of service and monetary exchanges involved, legal, cultural and policy frameworks significantly challenge these efforts. **Having strong proof of a need and a workable concept, a well-researched and user-friendly plan, an advocate within the partnering organization(s), solid policy support and persistence is required.** The value of a well established public private partnership is the **capacity for growth and scalability, multiplying the forces at hand by facilitating greater access to information, offering multidimensional/inter-subjective analysis and amplifying impact.** White Oak VI observes significant potential for public private collaboration on the topics of military spouse employment, military family strength, and veteran transitions.

The broad themes of discussion—“We Are You,” “Desperately Seeking Data,” and “Tell Good Stories”—connect to top priorities expressed in White Oak VI discussion, centering on desire for reduced barriers to enable improved support, greater connections and familiarization amongst military/veteran and non-military populations through the use of common language and metrics, and finally, tailored public private partnerships leveraging the power of non-governmental entities to achieve specific goals by telling the good stories of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors.

The “Next Steps” for the White Oak community will heavily draw upon public private collaboration to move forward on the topic of spouse employment, seeking initiatives at Congressional and state levels of governance. This partnership will require the grassroots involvement of military members, veterans and their families engaged alongside governmental, philanthropic and corporate partners to affect community

indifference and drive support for legal changes that make military family life look a little more normal.

*Note: This compilation does not necessarily reflect the opinion of all participants and is only a summary of the basic thoughts and attitudes of the group.*



**APPENDIX A: FACILITATORS, SPEAKERS, AND PANELISTS FOR WHITE OAK V**

**MARIE BALOCKI**

*Deputy Director, Marine and Family Division, U.S. Marine Corps*

**RENÉ BARDORF**

*Senior Vice President for Government and Community Relations, Wounded Warrior Project*

**PATTY BARRON**

*Director, Family Readiness, Association of the United States Army*

**JULIE BLANKS**

*Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military and Community Family Policy*

**IVAN BOLDEN**

*Chief, Army Partnerships, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installations Management*

**MATT BORRON**

*CEO, Association for Defense Communities*

**DAN BRILLMAN**

*Founder and CEO, Unite US*

**ASHLEY BUNCE**

*Director of Government and Community Relations, Wounded Warrior Project*

**BONNIE CARROLL**

*Founder and President, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors*

**PHIL CARTER**

*Senior Fellow, Center for New American Security*

**SHEILA CASEY**

*Chairman of the Board of Directors, Blue Star Families*

**DAVE COKER**

*President and CEO, Fisher House Foundation*

**LYNDA DAVIS, PHD**

*Sr. Advisor to the Secretary, Chief Veterans Experience Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs*

**JASON DEMPSEY, PHD**

*Senior Fellow, Center for New American Security*

**MARIANNE DOWNS**

*Manager, Military and Veteran Programs, Lockheed Martin Foundation*

**ELLYN DUNFORD**

*Senior Spouse*

**LEISA EASOM, PHD**

*Executive Director, Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving*

**SARA EGELAND** - Sara.L.Egeland@ovp.eop.gov

*Policy Director, Office of Second Lady Karen Pence, The White House*

**ERIC EVERSOLE**

*Executive Director, Hiring Our Heroes and Vice President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation*

**VADM WILLIAM FRENCH, USN, Ret.**

*President and CEO, Armed Services YMCA*

**BROOKE GOLDBERG**

*Director of Government Relations, Military Family Issues, Military Officers Association of America*

**ROB GORDON**

*President, Be The Change, Inc.*

**MARGARET HARRELL**

*Director of Programs and Partnerships, Bob Woodruff Foundation*

**DR. INGRID HERRERA-YEE**

*Founder and President, Military Spouse Behavioral Health Clinicians*

**STEPHANIE HOEHNE**

*Director, Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, Army Installations Command*

**COL MIGUEL HOWE, USA, Ret.**

*April and Jay Graham Fellow of the Military Service Initiative, George W. Bush Institute*

**KELLY HRUSKA**

*Government Relations Director, National Military Family Association*

**EMANUEL JOHNSON**

*Program Officer, Robert R. McCormick Foundation*

**VIRGINIA JOHNSON**

*Senior Vice President, Government and External Affairs, United Services Organization*

**DR. MARY KELLER**

*President and Chief Executive Officer, Military Child Education Coalition*

**KOBY LANGLEY**

*Senior Vice President, Service to the Armed Forces, American Red Cross*

**JIM LORRAINE**

*President and CEO, Americas Warrior Partnership*

**JARED LYON**

*President and CEO, Student Veterans of America*

**SHELLEY MACDERMID WADSWORTH**

*Director, Purdue Military Research Center*

**TRACY MALONE**

*Senior Advisor, Military and Veterans Initiatives, United Health Foundation*

**COL JIM McDONOUGH, USA, Ret.**

*Managing Director, Community Engagement and Innovation, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University*

**KARI McDONOUGH**

*Co-Founder, Vets' Community Connections*

**THOMAS MEYER**

*Director of Veterans Services, The Philanthropy Roundtable*

**BLAISE MISZTAL**

*Director, National Security Program, Bipartisan Policy Center*

**KATHLEEN MOAKLER**

*Director, Survivor Advocacy, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors*

**DAVID NOKES**

*Senior Public Affairs Specialist, Office of the Assistant to the Secretary Defense for Public Affairs*

**RHONDA POWELL**

*National Security Director, American Legion*

**STEPHANIE POWERS**

*Senior Director for Policy and Partnerships, Council on Foundations*

**BILL RAUSCH**

*Executive Director, Got Your 6*

**KATHY ROTH-DOUQUET**

*CEO, Blue Star Families*

**JUSTIN SCHMITT**

*AVP, Corporate Responsibility, USAA Foundation*

**STEVE SCHWAB**

*Executive Director, Elizabeth Dole Foundation*

**AMBER SMITH**

*Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Outreach in Public Affairs*

**SHAUNA SPRINGER**

*Senior Director, Red Team, Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors*

**TERRI TANELIAN**

*Senior Social Research Analyst, RAND Corporation*

**ANTHONY WICKHAM**

*J1 Programs Chief, National Guard Bureau*

**HON. DOUGLAS B. WILSON**

*Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs  
Co-Founder, Vets Community Connections*