2015 VETERANS CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

AMERICA'S GREATEST ASSETS:

How Military Veterans Are Strengthening Our Communities

GOT YOUR SIX

AMERICAN EXPRESS

POINTS OF LIGHT

NCoC

National Conference on Citizenship

Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

GOT YOUR 6

Got Your 6 is a campaign that unites nonprofit, entertainment industry, and government partners in collective action to empower veterans and strengthen communities. Got Your 6 reinforces the fact that veterans are trained leaders, team builders, and problem solvers. As a coalition, Got Your 6 works to integrate these perspectives into popular culture, engage veterans and non-veterans together to foster understanding, and empower veterans to lead here at home. Got Your 6 knows that most veterans leave the military seeking new challenges, and the campaign ensures that there are opportunities for them to continue their service.

AMERICAN EXPRESS

Through its Community Service funding theme, the company invests in projects that provide meaningful volunteer and civic engagement opportunities so that community members can play an active role in strengthening their neighborhoods from within. American Express recognizes that veterans continue to lead the way in serving our communities and we are proud to support the efforts to highlight their role as leaders and civic champions.

American Express is a global services company, providing customers with access to products, insights and experiences that enrich lives and build business success. Learn more at americanexpress.com.

POINTS OF LIGHT

Points of Light is the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service— it mobilizes millions of people to take action that is changing the world. POL's Military Initiatives helps organizations that serve veterans increase capacity and provide volunteer opportunities for the community. Through the Community Blueprint Initiative, organizations collaborate and share resources to better serve veterans and their families, uniting communities nationwide.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP

The National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) is a congressionally chartered organization dedicated to strengthening civic life in America. We pursue our mission through a nationwide network of partners involved in a cutting-edge civic health initiative, an innovative national service project, and our cross-sector conferences. At the core of our joint efforts is the belief that every person has the ability to help their community and country thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

Unless otherwise cited, all findings presented in this report are based on the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE)'s analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data from 2012 and 2013.

Goals of this Report

- Foster shared understanding between the military and civilian communities about the civic strengths and opportunities of the veteran population
- Provide a data-informed platform through which to eliminate misconceptions about veterans
- Provide specific recommendations related to the report findings

What is Civic Health?

Civic health is a community's capacity to work together to resolve collective problems. It is defined by the degree to which people trust each other, help their neighbors, and interact with their government.

On an individual level, civic health is shown to improve people's overall health—physical, emotional, social, and mental.[1] On a community level, civic health forms the foundation for growth and improvement. Strong civic health positively affects local GDP[2], economic resilience[3], upward income mobility[4], public health[5], and student achievement.[6] Simply put, when people are civically engaged, they are healthier and their communities are stronger.

For the purpose of this report, civic health is determined by examining Census data related to volunteering, voting, political participation, group membership, and social connectedness.

250,000

Every year, about a quarter-million veterans return to communities across the country.

A Focus on Veterans

Each year, about a quarter-million veterans return to communities across the country. Like the community itself, veterans reach their full potential when given meaningful opportunities to engage. The majority of veterans return home seeking new challenges and opportunities—ways to continue serving their community and country.[7]

Almost half of today's veterans are members of the all-volunteer force (AVF). The AVF removed the burden of military service from those who did not explicitly sign up for it. Combined with military downsizing, the result has been a shrinking veteran population made up of Americans with a strong desire to serve their county—both in and out of uniform.

Because of their experience, training, and skillsets, veterans are uniquely suited to provide solutions to some of our nation's toughest challenges. In recent years, we have seen veterans leading movements across the country to: improve disaster relief and community preparedness;[8] promote physical fitness;[9] combat homelessness;[10] increase educational attainment;[11] and more.

But too often, negative stereotypes about veterans dominate the public dialogue. The average American believes that, in general, veterans are significantly more likely than non-veterans to experience unemployment, incarceration, homelessness, and various other issues.[12] These notions are largely misconceptions. They paint a picture of veterans as "broken." As a result, veterans often say they feel more pity than respect from the civilian population.

This report aims to foster understanding about the civic strengths of the veteran population, and provide a data-informed platform through which to eliminate misconceptions about veterans.

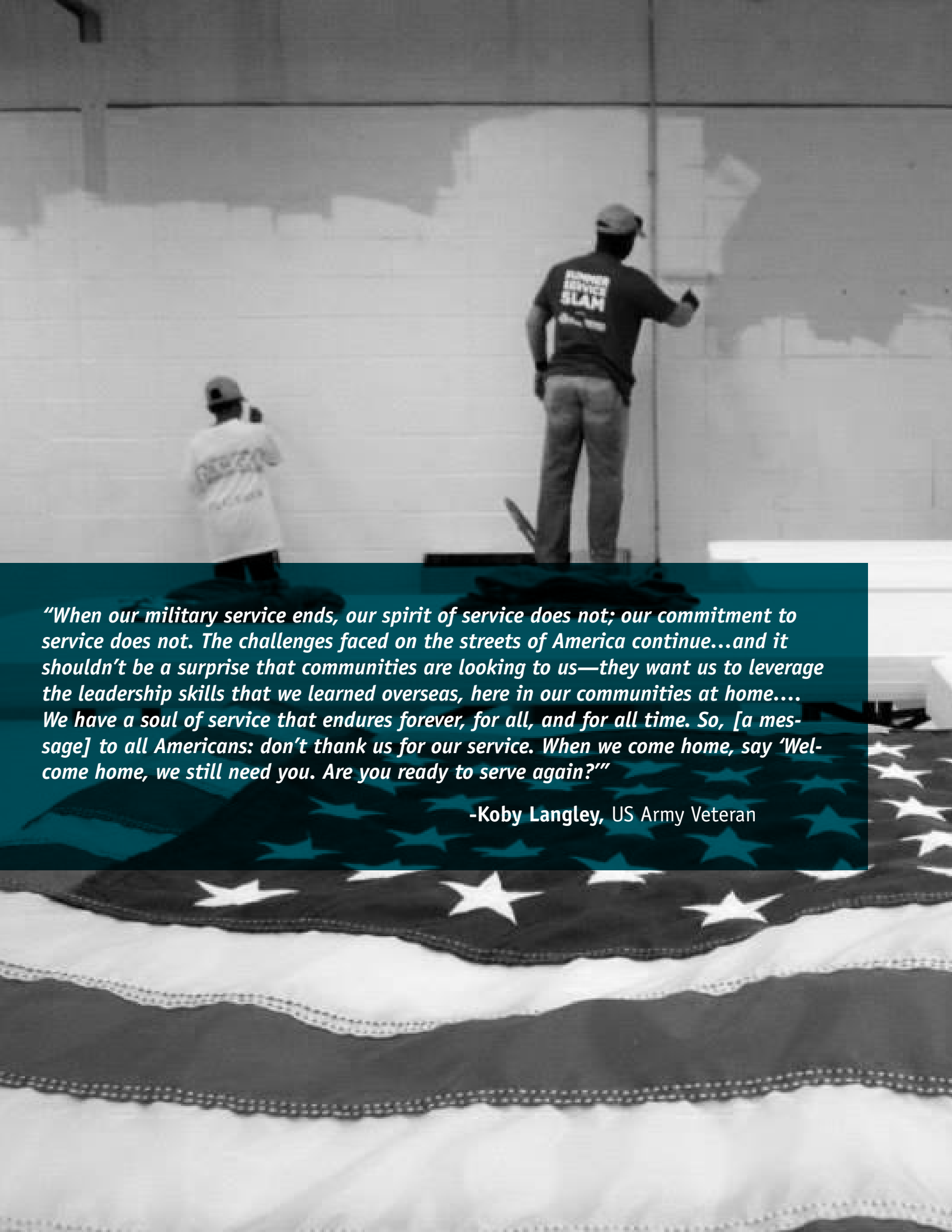
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Findings from this report suggest that **military service positively affects civic health.** When analyzing individuals' civic engagement profiles, we see that military service alters one's civic health trajectory. So by virtue of their military service alone, veterans are likely to demonstrate high levels of civic engagement throughout their lifetime.

Veterans are critical assets to the nation, and they are civic leaders in communities across the country. When they exit the military and return home, our country has an enormous opportunity to leverage their skills to strengthen communities.

Data presented in this report indicate that veterans strengthen communities by volunteering, voting, engaging in local governments, helping neighbors, and participating in community organizations—all at higher rates than their non-veteran counterparts. Key findings include:

- **Veteran volunteers serve an average of 160 hours annually—the equivalent of four full workweeks.** Non-veteran volunteers serve about 25% fewer hours annually.
- **Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to attend community meetings, fix problems in the neighborhood, and fill leadership roles in community organizations.**
- **17.7% of veterans are involved in civic groups,** compared to just 5.8% of non-veterans.
- **Veterans vote, contact public officials, and discuss politics at significantly higher rates** than their non-veteran counterparts.
- **Compared to non-veterans, veterans are more trusting of their neighbors. 62.5% of veterans trust "most or all of [their] neighbors"** compared to 55.1% of non-veterans. Veterans are also more likely to frequently talk with and do favors for their neighbors.



"When our military service ends, our spirit of service does not; our commitment to service does not. The challenges faced on the streets of America continue...and it shouldn't be a surprise that communities are looking to us—they want us to leverage the leadership skills that we learned overseas, here in our communities at home.... We have a soul of service that endures forever, for all, and for all time. So, [a message] to all Americans: don't thank us for our service. When we come home, say 'Welcome home, we still need you. Are you ready to serve again?'"

-Koby Langley, US Army Veteran

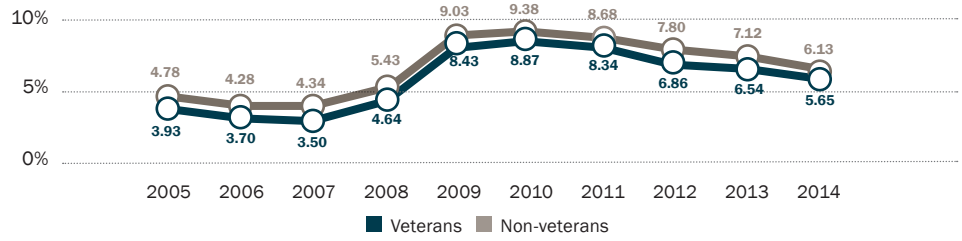
COMBATTING MISCONCEPTIONS: *The Facts*

A 2014 study revealed that the general population views veterans as "broken heroes" who are more likely than non-veterans to be unemployed, undereducated, homeless, and experiencing mental health issues.[13] The reality, however, is much more complex, and challenging these claims is an important step in changing public perceptions of veterans. Here are the facts:

Employment

The veteran unemployment rate has been below the non-veteran rate every year for the last decade. From 2005-2014, the average unadjusted non-veteran unemployment rate (6.73%) is 13% higher than the veteran rate (5.95%).[14]

Chart 1. Unemployment Rates of Veterans vs. Non-veterans

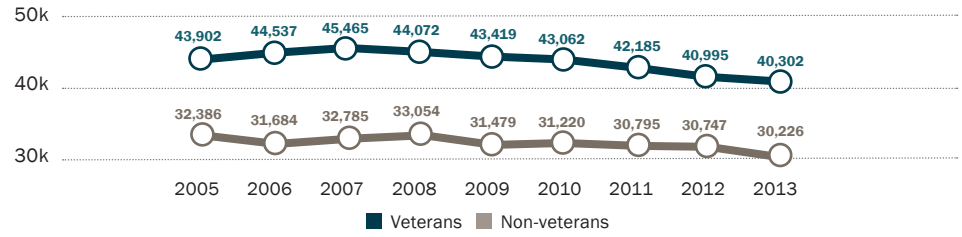


Source: The US Department of Veterans Affairs 2015 Veterans Economic Opportunity Report

Income

From 2005 to 2013, **veterans have consistently earned significantly more than non-veterans.**[15]

Chart 2. Median Income Levels of Veterans vs. Non-veterans



Source: The US Department of Veterans Affairs 2015 Veterans Economic Opportunity Report

Homelessness

Non-veterans comprise 91.4% of the homeless population; veterans comprise 8.6% of the homeless population—there are 578,424 homeless individuals across the US; 49,933 of them are veterans.[16]

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD)

The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that between 11-20% of veterans experience PTSD. Even when considering the highest end of this broad spectrum, it is still true that **the vast majority of veterans do not experience PTSD.**[17]

PTSD is a human condition, not a veteran condition—about 5.2 million adults experience it during a given year, and about 7-8% of the population will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

Education

Four-year college completion rates are higher among non-veterans (33.2%) than veterans (28.1%). However, veterans participating in the GI Bill program are completing degree programs at a rate (48%) similar to traditional beginning postsecondary students in the general population cohort (49%).[18]

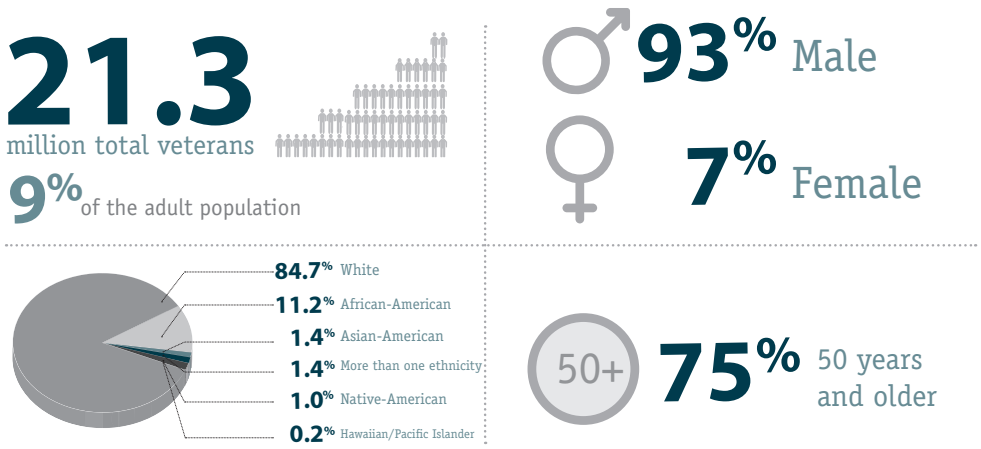
AT-A-GLANCE: *America's Veteran Population*

There are 21.3 million veterans in the United States—that is 9% of the adult population. The median age of all veterans is 62 years old. In general, veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be married, are more likely to have completed high school, and are also more likely to progress to college.

Though veterans are far more likely than non-veterans to have some college experience, they are slightly less likely to have a four-year degree—college completion rates among non-veterans are 33.2%, versus 28.1% for veterans overall. This trend does not exist for female, Hispanic, or African American veterans however. In fact, veterans in these groups display significantly better educational profiles than their non-veteran counterparts. Additionally, veterans participating in the GI Bill program complete degrees at a rate (48%) similar to traditional beginning postsecondary students in the general population (49%).[19]

Overall, veterans are slightly less likely than non-veterans to be unemployed—5.7% of veterans are unemployed, compared to 6.1% of non-veterans. Veterans under 35 years old, however, do have higher unemployment rates than non-veterans of the same age. However, veterans in this group who are employed earn significantly more (with 11% higher median earnings) than their non-veteran counterparts.[20] So, while veterans under 35 years old have the highest unemployment rate, those who do secure employment are faring better than non-veterans of the same age.

Female, Hispanic, and African American veterans display significantly better educational profiles than their non-veteran counterparts.



Young Veterans vs. Older Veterans

In this report, veterans and non-veterans aged 20-49 are referred to as "young veterans" and "young non-veterans," respectively. Veterans aged 50 and over are referred to as "older veterans" and "older non-veterans," respectively. Segmenting by age in this manner allows for clearer analysis of how different generations engage in communities.

All young veterans are members of the AVF—meaning they volunteered to serve in the military. 44.3% of them are post-9/11 veterans—meaning they served after September 11, 2001. On average, young veterans are 38 years old (four years older than their non-veteran counterparts).

The majority (78.7%) of older veterans first served in the Vietnam era or earlier. They are 67.7 years old—almost five years older than their non-veteran counterparts. It is important to note that in 2015, Gulf War-era veterans and Post-9/11 veterans—all veterans who served during the first Gulf War and after—will overtake Vietnam veterans as the largest segment of the veteran population.[21]

The young generation of veterans is more diverse than the older generation. The younger generation is 2.8 times as likely to be female, 2.3 times as likely to have Hispanic origin (regardless of race), and 1.6 times as likely to be African American.

"Our young troops and their families have done everything their country has asked of them. Their lives have been changed forever by war, but their dreams haven't changed at all. They want to raise their children, own a home, go to school, find work and even find new ways to contribute. Most of all, they want to be good citizens. They want to reconnect and renew their relationship to their local communities."

-Admiral Michael Mullen, Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

ARE VETERANS MORE CIVICALLY HEALTHY THAN NON-VETERANS?

When analyzing important civic health indicators (detailed in the following sections), we see that veterans are indeed more civically healthy than non-veterans—they consistently show higher levels of engagement in their communities. In fact, over the last century, veterans from all generations have outpaced the general population in their habits of service and civic engagement.[22]

Veterans show more mature civic engagement profiles than their non-veteran peers, as indicated by their deep and broad involvement in communities. Data presented in this report indicate that veterans today contribute to strong bonds in communities by participating in local government, volunteering, discussing political issues, and helping neighbors.

Civic Indicators

Service

Service—which includes both formal and informal volunteering—is an important indicator of civic health because volunteers greatly impact the health and well-being of communities. Not only do volunteers deliver critical services, but the act of volunteering has been shown to increase other civic health indicators like trust in others, community involvement, and political participation.[23]

Veterans contribute to ***strong bonds in communities*** by participating in local government, volunteering, discussing political issues, and helping neighbors

Young veterans have the highest rate of volunteering among all Americans, and older veterans volunteer the most hours annually. The majority of veterans who volunteer (56.7%) do so regularly. In fact, they are 11% more likely than non-veterans to be regular volunteers. It is estimated that veteran volunteers serve an average of 160 hours per year—the equivalent of four full workweeks per year. Non-veteran volunteers serve about 25% fewer hours per year.

Veteran volunteers offer skills that community organizations and nonprofits need, including: management and supervision skills; ability to lead diverse groups of people; team-building skills; operational skills; and, logistical skills.[24]

"Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia has benefited tremendously through the engagement of veteran volunteers. Arriving early to the work sites — and more often than not, staying well past our usual wrap-up time — Habitat's veteran volunteers bring their experienced and authentic leadership skills, as well as a commitment to the community. With their boots on the ground, Habitat has found veteran volunteers are willing to step up to any challenge, lead other non-veterans in the task, and are determined to get the job done well."

-Frank Monaghan, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity Philadelphia

Social Capital

"Social Capital" is defined as the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular community, enabling that community to function effectively. Important measures of social capital include how much people trust one another and how often they talk with neighbors and exchange favors.

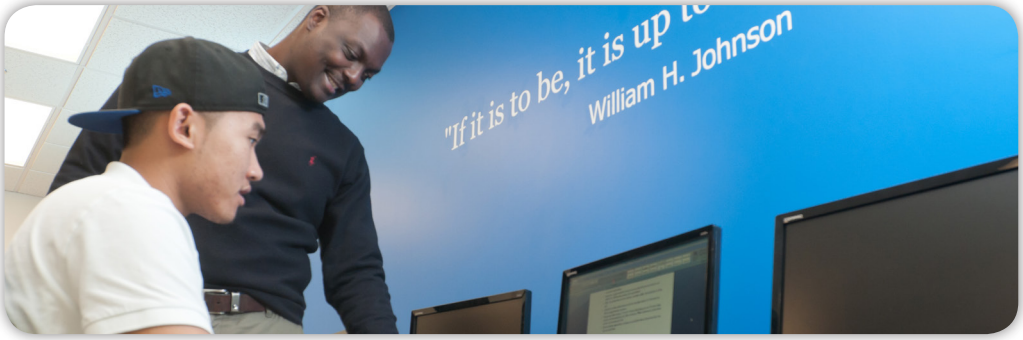
Compared to non-veterans, veterans are more trusting of their neighbors. 62.5% of veterans trust "most or all of [their] neighbors" compared to 55.1% of non-veterans. Generally, trust increases as people age, but this trend was found in young veterans as well as older veterans.

Consistent with their trust of neighbors, veterans are almost 18% more likely than non-veterans to talk frequently with their neighbors. They are also more likely to do some kind of favor for their neighbors.

These findings are important because they show that veterans have strong connections with the people around them. The extent to which a person is strongly rooted within his or her neighborhood is considered an important marker of civic health because these connections, together, make up a strong community.

18%

Veterans are 18% more likely than non-veterans to talk frequently to their neighbors.



Team Red, White, & Blue

Founded in 2010, Team Red, White & Blue (RWB) is among a new wave of veteran organizations that is attracting veterans of the all-volunteer force, who return home seeking new ways to engage in their communities.

Team RWB is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity. In over 115 communities across the country, Team RWB delivers consistent, local opportunities for veterans and non-veterans to connect through weekly fitness activities, monthly social events, participation in local races, and more.

TEAM RWB

"I am the proud Chapter Captain for Team RWB Charlotte. Team RWB's mission is so important, but not just because we aid in the transition from military service to civilian life. Team RWB is an organization that empowers [veterans] to become leaders again; to be productive and contribute to their community. [Team RWB] is not a group of people who want to do things for you; they want to do things with you. They want to give you the tools to take care of yourself and the biggest one is to be in a community, be active and always remember that you have people nearby who care." - Eric Browy

Political Engagement & Voting

Veterans are avid participants in both local and national elections. Young veterans, especially, show a high level of political engagement that out-paces their non-veteran peers. Almost 60% of them "sometimes" or "often" vote in local elections, compared to 48.7% of their non-veteran counterparts. Additionally, young veterans' estimated turnout rate (61.2%) from the 2012 Presidential election is substantially higher than the rate among their non-veteran peers (55.7%).

Veterans as a whole are also more likely than the general public to contact public officials and engage in political discussion with family and friends.

Table 1. Veterans' Political Involvement

	Non-veterans under 50	Veterans under 50	Non-veterans over 50	Veterans over 50
Vote in local elections (sometimes or often)	48.7%	59.5%	71.2%	78.4%
Contacted public officials	7.8%	12.2%	14.3%	18.1%
Voted in 2012 Presidential Election	55.7%	61.2%	69.7%	74.0%
Registered to vote in 2012	67.1%	72.1%	77.0%	80.5%
Discussed politics with family and friends frequently	23.0%	27.7%	31.1%	39.3%

Veterans in Congress

Veterans and active duty service members comprise 18% of the 114th Congress. This number has drastically decreased since the early 1970s, when nearly three-quarters of Congress members were veterans.[25] Even so, veterans are still technically over-represented in Congress today—the percentage of veterans in Congress is double the percentage of veterans in the US population—demonstrating that voters value veterans in public service.

Public service is a natural progression for those who have served in uniform. Veterans have experience with many of the issues facing the country today, from foreign policy to counter-terrorism to government spending. Elected veterans comprise a cohort poised to serve and work together for the betterment of the nation.

"As far as I'm concerned, service to the country is far more important than service to any political party." - Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA6)

"It's not about earning a paycheck. It's about doing something good that you believe in." - Rep. Adam Kinzinger (R-IL16)

"I have found that my service in the military has been a complement to my public service, and my public service has been a complement to my military service." - Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI2)

"We must rise to the occasion, as we always have; change what must be changed; and make the future better than the past." - Sen. John McCain (R-AZ)

Community Involvement

"Community involvement" includes participation in various community organizations such as school groups, sports and recreation leagues, and civic associations.

Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to attend community meetings—11.2% of veterans attend public meetings, compared to 8.2% of non-veterans. Veterans also fix problems in the neighborhood by working with others at a higher rate than non-veterans—10.6% of veterans reported fixing something in the neighborhood, compared to 7.4% of non-veterans. And, about 20% more veterans than non-veterans make some kind of charitable contribution worth 25 dollars or more annually.

Additionally, veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be involved in some kind of community organization, and a larger percentage of veterans (12.5%) take a leadership role in those organizations, compared to non-veterans (9.4%). Most notably, far more veterans are involved with a civic or service group (17.7%) than the general population (5.8%).

Traditional veteran organizations attract ***20.3% of older veterans***, but engage less than ***10% of younger veterans.***

However, it is clear that young veterans and older veterans differ in the way they associate with groups in their community—nearly half of older veterans belonged to some kind of group, while just over one-third of young veterans reported having a group affiliation.

Traditional veteran organizations—which are considered civic groups—attract a significant portion of older veterans (20.3%), but engage less than 10% of young veterans. A possible explanation for this is that post-9/11 veterans are bypassing traditional veteran groups to engage, instead, with modern organizations that highlight service, fitness, mentorship, and active ways to be involved in communities.[26]

Chart 4. Veteran Status and Charitable Giving

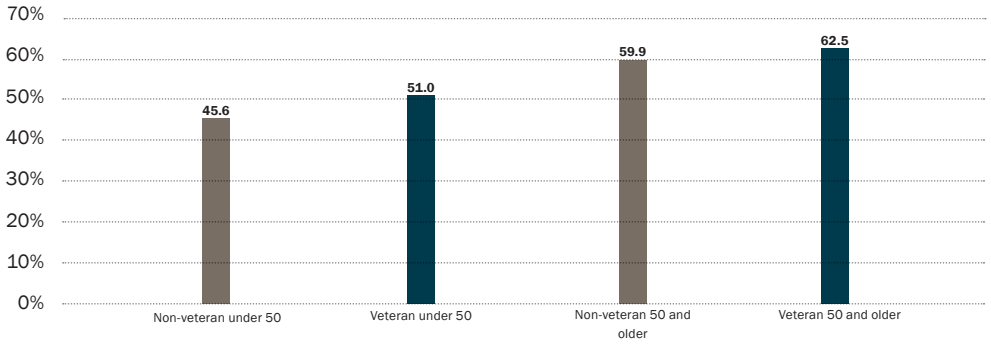


Table 2. Veterans' Group Participation

	Non-veterans under 50	Veterans under 50	Non-veterans over 50	Veterans over 50
Belong to any group	34.4%	34.8%	37.5%	46.1%
Participate in service or civic association	**4.5%**	**9.5%**	**7.7%**	**20.3%**
Participate in any other type of organization	3.8%	6.3%	6.4%	7.9%
Officer or committee member of a group	7.7%	9.1%	12.1%	13.6%

12.5%

of veterans fill leadership roles in community organizations compared to 9.4% of non-veterans.

The Mission Continues

The Mission Continues (TMC) is a nonprofit organization that empowers veterans to serve in new ways by engaging in two innovative and action-oriented programs.

TMC's Fellowship Program harnesses veterans' strengths, skills, and compassion through daily work at nonprofit organizations in their community. In 2014, 260 Fellows at The Mission Continues served over 100,000 hours at nonprofits across the country—the equivalent of 11.5 years of service.

Additionally, TMC's Service Platoon Program brings together teams of veterans and local partners to tackle pressing issues and strengthen the community. Nearly 3,000 veterans have signed up for 30 service platoons in 25 cities since the program's launch in 2013.

Through a unique model that provides reciprocal benefit for the veteran and the local community, veterans volunteer to help others, and through their service, they build new skills and networks that help them successfully transition home.

THE MISSION CONTINUES
Reporting for Duty in Your Community

"A veteran's desire—and need—to serve doesn't end when he or she hangs up the military uniform. Veterans want to help build a brighter future for their communities and nation. Their communities need them, and they need their communities. The Mission Continues reignites veterans' desire to serve and supports them. They reenlist in the tough work of strengthening the country, one community at a time. These men and women are showing current and future generations of Americans that veterans' legacy extends well beyond their military commitment."

- Alex Horton, US Army veteran

DOES MILITARY SERVICE CHANGE ONE'S CIVIC HEALTH TRAJECTORY?

Veteran status is a powerful predictor of civic engagement. Previous studies have shown that the military promotes responsible family relationships and membership in the wider community,[27] partly because military training emphasizes group solidarity, socializes members into norms of service, and provides experiences of diversity.[28]

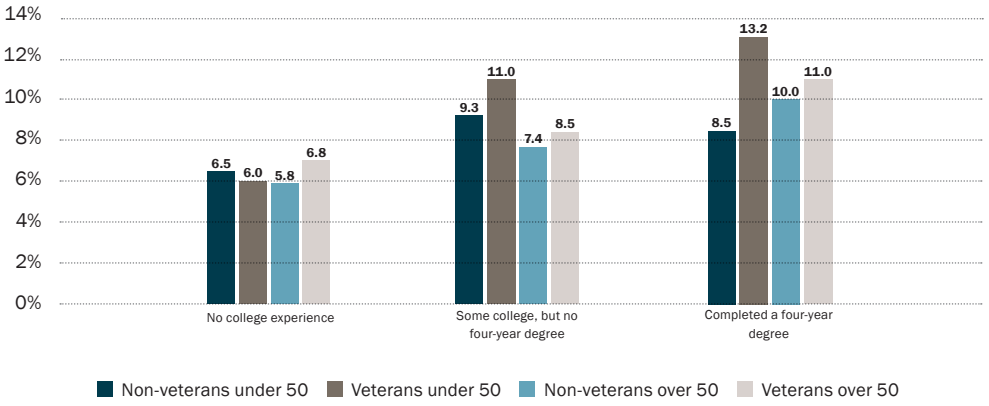
Data analyses for this report show that veterans' civic engagement levels are comparable to non-veterans with a higher level of educational attainment. For example, we see that veterans with a high school education have civic engagement profiles comparable to non-veterans with a college education. Similarly, veterans with some college education are civically engaged like non-veterans with four-year college degrees.

This is significant because educational attainment is often one of the strongest predictors of many forms of civic engagement. When we look at the civic engagement profile of veterans and non-veterans by educational attainment, it is clear that young veterans who have not gone to college are more civically active than otherwise expected in most aspects of engagement—their military service has indeed altered their civic health trajectory.

The graph below shows that young veterans with some college experience express public opinions at higher rates than non-veterans with four-year college degrees.

*Veterans are **critical assets to the nation**, and they are civic leaders in communities across the country. When they exit the military and return home, our country has an enormous opportunity **to leverage their skills to strengthen communities**.*

Chart 5. Frequently Using the Internet to Express Public Opinion by Educational Attainment



Similarly, older veterans with no college experience talk about politics at higher rates than anyone with some college education, and at an equivalent rate to older non-veterans with a four-year degree. Additionally, young veterans with no college experience reported voting in local elections at a rate that is seen among young non-veterans with college experience, and veterans with some college experience vote like their non-veteran peers with four-year degrees.

In theory, college and the military both provide a structured environment that gives young people a chance to develop a strong identity. For veterans, service may help strengthen their civic identity in such a way that is similar to the boost college education can give to civic engagement of young people in general.

"We're using the skills and experiences that we've learned through a decade of war to help people in need.... We are getting teams of highly skilled, highly trained, highly motivated [veterans] into communities, delivering aid where it's needed and helping people in their greatest time of need."

-Jake Wood, Co-Founder & CEO, Team Rubicon

RECOMMENDATIONS

Veterans make communities stronger. As such, it is important to frame veteran reintegration as an opportunity for our country. If Americans perceive veterans as the civic resources they truly are, veterans will more likely transition home successfully, and communities will reap greater benefits from those transitions.

Non-veterans, veterans, and institutions must work together to change the cultural narrative around veterans from one of charity and pity to one of leadership and empowerment.

This includes a shift in veteran-focused "charity." Americans should value organizations and foundations that encourage and enable civic engagement among veterans. Many nonprofit organizations exist to support veterans in times of need—which is extremely valuable and necessary work. But few organizations exist to support and empower the majority of veterans who wish to continue their service at home and engage in communities. In the coming years, since combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have ended, we will begin to see an even greater need to shift our focus from immediate needs to long-term solutions in the veteran community.

Non-veterans, veterans, and institutions must work together ***to change the cultural narrative around veterans*** from one of charity and pity to one of ***leadership and empowerment***.

By working together to change the cultural narrative around veterans, we are taking strides to bridge the civilian-military divide. We can all take additional steps to bridge the divide by:

- **Challenging stereotypes, dispelling myths, and recognizing veterans' civic leadership**
- **Learning about military history and the veteran experience: read books, watch movies, watch videos online, have conversations with veterans**
- **Understanding that intangible skills are gained in the military; military service and college experience should both be highly valued**
- **De-stigmatizing mental illness and understanding that conditions like PTSD are human conditions, not veteran conditions**

Recommendations for Non-veterans

- **Reconsider the way you think about veterans.** The veteran population is changing—it's becoming more diverse in age, gender, race, and sexual orientation. In 2015, Gulf War-era and Post-9/11 veterans will overtake Vietnam veterans as the largest segment of the population, and the majority of veterans will be members of the all-volunteer force.

- **Have a conversation with a veteran.** Veteran-civilian dialogue is key to bridging the civilian-military divide. Veterans have stories to tell and experiences to share. Next time you meet a veteran, go beyond saying "thank you for your service," and have a conversation with him or her. Ask him where he served or ask her what she did in the military. Most importantly ask, "what's next?" after the military.

- **Serve alongside veterans.** Strive to meet veterans' levels of community participation—volunteer in your neighborhood and engage the veterans you know to serve with you.

Recommendations for Veterans

- **Do your part to help bridge the civilian-military divide**. Veterans are in the unique position of having experienced both being a civilian and being in the military. Therefore, you are uniquely suited to help bridge the divide. Share your experiences with non-veterans, start conversations about the military, and explain how civilians can show appreciation for your service in meaningful ways.

- **Engage in your community**. Volunteer, participate in government, help neighbors, and lead civilians by example. Utilize your skills to strengthen your community and lead others.

- **Seek out veteran empowerment organizations near you.** Organizations that empower veterans to continue to grow and serve as leaders—like The Mission Continues, Team Rubicon, Student Veterans of America, the Pat Tillman Foundation—have local affiliates across the country.

Recommendations for Nonprofits

- **Leverage the power of veteran volunteers** through tailored and active recruitment. All people, veterans included, are more likely to participate in their communities if they are asked, or offered the opportunity to do so. Also, recognize veteran volunteers for their exemplary work and dedication.

- **Veteran-focused nonprofit organizations** can leverage their resources to collaborate and reach veterans more effectively—especially young veterans who are less likely to join traditional civic groups without being asked directly.

- **Modernize Veteran Service Organizations to reach young veterans**. As the veteran population changes, so should your approach to engaging veterans. Consider converting underutilized legacy Veteran Service Organization outposts into gyms, libraries, daycares, mentor centers, or other such places that attract young volunteers in your community.

Recommendations for Media

- **Portray veterans reasonably and accurately on film and television**, avoiding the archetypal "heroic" and "broken" veteran characters. Instead, aim for more multi-dimensional, normalized depictions of veterans that represent the majority of veterans in America. Such depictions will positively contribute to the overall cultural narrative around veterans and foster understanding between the veteran and civilian populations.

- **Give voice to veterans by engaging the military and veteran community.** Cast veteran actors, hire veteran writers, portray veteran characters, tell veterans' stories, and use veterans as resources on set or in writers' rooms.

- **Promote responsible news media by instituting best practices for reporting veteran-related stories.** A working example of this type of action is The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (DART) at Columbia University. DART informs innovative and ethical news reporting on violence, conflict, and tragedy by providing resources to journalists from a global, interdisciplinary network of news professionals, mental health experts, educators, and researchers.[29]

Recommendations for Policymakers

- **Incentivize veterans to participate in national service programs like AmeriCorps, Teach for America, and City Year.** One way to do this is to amend the GI Bill to include a veterans civilian service option. This would provide veterans opportunities to use their leadership skills and continue serving their communities while transitioning back to civilian life.

- **Widely publicize the Department of Defense's Call to Continued Service campaign**. In early 2015, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff released a letter urging all transitioning service members to continue serving the nation as civilians in their communities. The letter is part of a *Call to Continued Service* campaign that will include a coordinated outreach effort from across the services that reinforces the call to service in the Chairman's letter.[30] The letter should be a source of inspiration to veterans and civilians alike.

CONCLUSION

Veterans are valuable civic assets. Those who are engaged in their communities are contributing to the strength and growth around them. Those who are not yet engaged have enormous potential to lead and serve in meaningful ways. We can strengthen our communities and our country by expecting and encouraging veterans to continue their service at home.

As a country, we should do all we can to support veterans during reintegration. At the same time, we should not assume that all veterans return home seeking charity. In fact, the majority of veterans report that they want to continue serving their communities and country as civilians.

It is important to be mindful that most veterans return home willing and able to seize new opportunities. Misconceptions and stereotypes can negatively affect veterans' transitions home and future plans. So, hold veterans to high expectations—they will rise to meet them.

A WORD ABOUT RECOMMENDATIONS

NCoC encourages our partners to consider how civic health data can inform dialogue and action in their communities, and to take an evidence-based approach to helping our communities and country thrive. While we encourage our partners to consider and offer specific recommendations and calls to action in our reports, we are not involved in shaping these recommendations. The opinions and recommendations expressed by our partners do not necessarily reflect those of NCoC.

This report should be a conversation-starter. The data and ideas presented here raise as many questions as they answer. We encourage government entities, community groups, business people, leaders of all kinds, and individual citizens to treat this report as a first step toward building more robust civic health for veterans.

TECHNICAL NOTE

Unless otherwise noted, findings presented in this report are based on the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE)'s analysis of the Census Current Population Survey (CPS) data. Any and all errors are our own. Volunteering estimates are from the CPS September Volunteering Supplement, 2013; voting and registration data come from the CPS November Voting/Registration Supplement, 2012; and all data on other civic engagement indicators come from the CPS Civic Engagement Supplement, 2013. Using a probability-selected sample of about 60,000 occupied households drawn from geographically based sampling units, the CPS collects monthly data on employment and demographic characteristics of the nation. Depending on the CPS supplement, the single-year CPS sample sizes for veterans included in this report were 3,538 (Civic Engagement Supplement); 7,750 (Volunteering Supplement); and 9,383 (Voting Supplement).

In order to get the demographic estimates of the veterans' background, the sample data was weighted by the veteran weight, computed by the Census Bureau. The Veteran weight is designed in such a way that estimates will accurately track the official statistics reported by the Veterans Administration. The comparative non-veteran sample demographics are estimated using the final population weight, also computed by the Census Bureau. For all estimates of civic health indicators, we use the specific weights computed for each supplement. These civic engagement weights account for non-response bias.

In this report, we include all veterans for demographic reporting. For age-specific, group-based reporting, we include veterans and non-veterans who are 20 years old and older. We did this because there are very few veterans who are 19 or younger. In this report, we made comparisons between veterans and non-veterans between ages 20 and 49, and comparisons between veterans and non-veterans aged 50 and older.

The Census CPS administers three different surveys from which civic indicators for this report are drawn. The September Volunteering Supplement—which is administered annually—includes questions about volunteering (e.g., frequency and types of volunteer work), community involvement, and charitable contribution. The Civic Engagement Supplement—which was administered annually between 2008 and 2011, and again in 2013—includes questions about political engagement (e.g., political discussion and voting in local elections), and social connection (e.g., favors for neighbors, seeing friends). Statistics about voter participation in national elections come from the Voting and Registration Supplement, which is administered in even years. The estimates are based on US citizens.

All surveys, including federal surveys, are subject to sampling error. Margin of error is influenced by multiple factors including sample size, estimate size, population size, and other parameters. Therefore, we do not report one margin of error across all indicators. With that said—due to the large sample sizes in this report (3,538 for the smallest supplement)—sampling error is quite small, within one to two percentage points. However, any analysis that breaks down the sample into smaller groups (e.g., gender, education) will have smaller samples, and therefore the margin of error will increase.

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NOTES

CIVIC HEALTH INDEX

State and Local Partnerships

NCoC began America's Civic Health Index *in 2006 to measure the level of civic engagement and health of our democracy. In 2009, NCoC was incorporated into the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act and directed to expand this civic health assessment in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service and the US Census Bureau.*

NCoC now works with partners in more than 30 communities nationwide to use civic data to lead and inspire a public dialogue about the future of citizenship in America and to drive sustainable civic strategies.

STATES

Alabama
University of Alabama
David Mathews Center for Civic Life
Auburn University

Arizona
Center for the Future of Arizona

California
California Forward
Center for Civic Education
Center for Individual and Institutional Renewal
Davenport Institute

Colorado
Metropolitan State University of Denver
The Civic Canopy
Denver Metro Chamber Leadership
Campus Compact of Mountain West
History Colorado
Institute on Common Good

Connecticut
Everyday Democracy
Secretary of the State of Connecticut

District of Columbia
ServeDC

Florida
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
Bob Graham Center for Public Service
Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government

Georgia
GeorgiaForward
Carl Vinson Institute of Government, The University of Georgia
Georgia Family Connection Partnership

Illinois
McCormick Foundation

Indiana
Center on Congress at Indiana University
Indiana Bar Foundation
Indiana Supreme Court
Indiana University Northwest
IU Center for Civic Literacy

Kentucky
Commonwealth of Kentucky, Secretary of State's Office
Institute for Citizenship & Social Responsibility, Western Kentucky University
Kentucky Advocates for Civic Education
McConnell Center, University of Louisville

Maryland
Mannakee Circle Group
Center for Civic Education
Common Cause-Maryland
Maryland Civic Literacy Commission

Massachusetts
Harvard Institute of Politics

Michigan
Michigan Nonprofit Association
Michigan Campus Compact
Michigan Community Service Commission
Volunteer Centers of Michigan
Council of Michigan Foundations

Minnesota
Center for Democracy and Citizenship

Missouri
Missouri State University
Park University
Saint Louis University
University of Missouri Kansas City
University of Missouri Saint Louis
Washington University

Nebraska
Nebraskans for Civic Reform

New Hampshire
Carsey Institute
Campus Compact of New Hampshire
University System of New Hampshire
New Hampshire College & University Council

New York
Siena College Research Institute
New York State Commission on National and Community Service

North Carolina
Institute for Emerging Issues

Ohio
Miami University Hamilton Center for Civic Engagement

Oklahoma
University of Central Oklahoma
Oklahoma Campus Compact

Pennsylvania
Center for Democratic Deliberation
National Constitution Center

South Carolina
University of South Carolina Upstate

Texas
The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, University of Texas at Austin

Virginia
Center for the Constitution at James Madison's Montpelier
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

ISSUE SPECIFIC

Latinos Civic Health Index
Carnegie Corporation

Veterans Civic Health Index
Got Your 6
American Express
Points of Light

Millennials Civic Health Index
Mobilize.org
Harvard Institute of Politics
CIRCLE

Economic Health
Knight Foundation
Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS)
CIRCLE

CITIES

Atlanta
Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta

Chicago
McCormick Foundation

Kansas City & Saint Louis
Missouri State University
Park University
Saint Louis Univeristy
University of Missouri Kansas City
University of Missouri Saint Louis
Washington University

Miami
Florida Joint Center for Citizenship
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Miami Foundation

Pittsburgh
University of Pittsburgh
Carnegie Mellon University

Seattle
Seattle City Club
Boeing Company
Seattle Foundation

Twin Cities
Center for Democracy and Citizenship
Citizens League
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

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Executive Director, National Conference on Citizenship

GOT YOUR SIX

National Conference on Citizenship
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POINTS OF LIGHT

Data Made Possible By:
Corporation for National & Community Service