

# 2016 VETERANS CIVIC HEALTH INDEX



## AMERICA'S GREATEST ASSETS:

*How Military Veterans Can Lead a Resurgence of Community Across the Country*



The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation



**GOT YOUR SIX**

**AMERICAN  
EXPRESS**



**National Conference on Citizenship**  
*Connecting People. Strengthening Our Country.*



## ABOUT THE PARTNERS

### **GOT YOUR 6**

Got Your 6 is a national campaign dedicated to empowering veterans and strengthening communities across the nation. The campaign unites cross-sector partners who believe that veterans are uniquely suited to tackle society's most pressing challenges. Got Your 6 believes that veterans are best served when they continue their service here at home. As a coalition, Got Your 6 integrates these perspectives into popular culture, brings together veterans and non-veterans in order to foster understanding, and empowers veterans to lead a resurgence of community here at home.

### **AMERICAN EXPRESS**

Through its Community Service funding theme, American Express 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 is proud to support 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](https://americanexpress.com).

### **THE HARRY AND JEANETTE WEINBERG FOUNDATION**

The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation is one of the largest private charitable foundations in the United States. The Foundation provides approximately \$100 million in annual grants to nonprofits that provide direct services to low-income and vulnerable individuals and families, primarily in the United States and Israel. Grants are focused on meeting basic needs and enabling individuals to live as independently as possible. Within that focus, emphasis is placed on serving older adults and the Jewish community. Among its areas of giving, the Foundation supports organizations committed to ensuring that military members and their families effectively reintegrate into their communities.

### **NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CITIZENSHIP**

The National Conference on Citizenship 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 and 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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Left Cover Photo Credit: The Pat Tillman Foundation  
Center Cover Photo Credit: Student Veterans of America  
Right Cover Photo Credit: Matt Mabe

# INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Veterans Civic Health Index (VCHI) became the first report of its kind to examine the civic health of America's veteran population. The report provided tangible evidence that military service positively affects civic health and that veterans return home to strengthen their communities. The 2015 VCHI found that veterans volunteer, engage with local governments and community organizations, vote, and help neighbors, all at rates higher than their non-veteran counterparts.<sup>1</sup> The VCHI has been an important tool for inserting civic health into discussions about veteran reintegration, informing conversations about the veteran population in general, and demonstrating that investing in our country's veterans is good for our communities.

In 2016, the VCHI reexamines veterans' civic health indicators and how the veteran population affects the overall civic health of our country. It also begins to explore civic engagement in Baltimore, Maryland—a local case study that sets the stage for future examination of veteran civic health trends in various American cities. Finally, this report includes additional recommendations that are specific and relevant to the 2016 election cycle.

Unless otherwise cited, all findings presented in this report are based on data analysis of the 2014 Census Current Population Survey (CPS), Volunteering Supplement, and Voting Supplement.

## Goals of this Report

- **Foster understanding about the civic strengths of the veteran population**
- **Empower veterans to lead a resurgence of civic engagement across the country**
- **Inspire non-veterans to engage in their communities alongside veterans**
- **Begin to explore local trends in veteran civic health in American cities**
- **Provide specific recommendations related to the report findings and the 2016 election cycle**

## Why Civic Health Matters

Civic health is a community's capacity to work together to solve problems. It is determined by how well diverse groups of residents cooperate among themselves and with government to address public issues and strengthen their communities.<sup>2</sup> We measure civic health through engagement indicators like volunteer service, voting, political participation, community involvement, and social capital.

Civic health is proven to be an essential component of individual well-being,<sup>4</sup> strong communities,<sup>5</sup> and healthy democracy.<sup>6</sup> However, for decades, evidence has shown downward trends in engagement and an overall decline in community across America.<sup>7</sup> Political scientist Robert Putnam found that Americans were steadily involved in civic life during the first two-thirds of the 20th century but became increasingly less involved in the final third.<sup>8</sup> He theorized that television and consumerism have played key roles in the decline of social connectedness and subsequently the decline in overall social capital. More recently, author Marc Dunkelman suggested that this same decline in social connectedness is to blame for our "broken" political system and historically high levels of partisanship.<sup>9</sup>

With growing frequency, the topic of civic engagement is surfacing on the front pages of newspapers across the country. Since the last publication of this report, America has witnessed powerful protests, mounting social and political movements, innovative forms of online engagement, and increased public dialogue about democracy and citizenship. In such an environment, informed examinations of civic health are as important as ever. Now is the time for Americans to think deeply, act meaningfully, and talk openly with their fellow citizens about the future and health of our country.<sup>10</sup>

**Social capital** is the networks of relationships among community members. Rich social capital is linked to strong economic development, responsive local governments, lower crime rates, and higher rates of individual happiness<sup>3</sup>

## A FOCUS ON VETERANS

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As one of America's greatest assets, the veteran population plays a crucial role in revitalizing civic engagement and strengthening communities nationwide. Due to their training, skill sets, and proclivity toward service, veterans are unique models for small- and large-scale problem solving as well as widespread cooperation.

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Each year, about a quarter-million service members take off the uniform but retain years of leadership development, team building experience, and a fundamental commitment to the greater good. Veterans in every generation prove to be civic assets. Over the years, their leadership has provided solutions to some of our nation's most pressing challenges. That is no different now. Today's veterans are starting businesses, nonprofit organizations, and community groups; they are improving emergency preparedness, combatting homelessness, and curbing youth violence; they are pursuing higher education, helping their neighbors, and engaging with public officials; they are becoming teachers, doctors, artists, elected officials. You name it—veterans are filling vital roles in all of our communities.

Yet, we still do not see veterans' strengths and opportunities highlighted in most national conversations (though there is evidence of progress). Instead, the dialogue often focuses on the perceived challenges associated with military service and veteran reintegration. While some of these discussions are necessary and helpful, many are formed upon misconceptions or limited analysis of complex data.

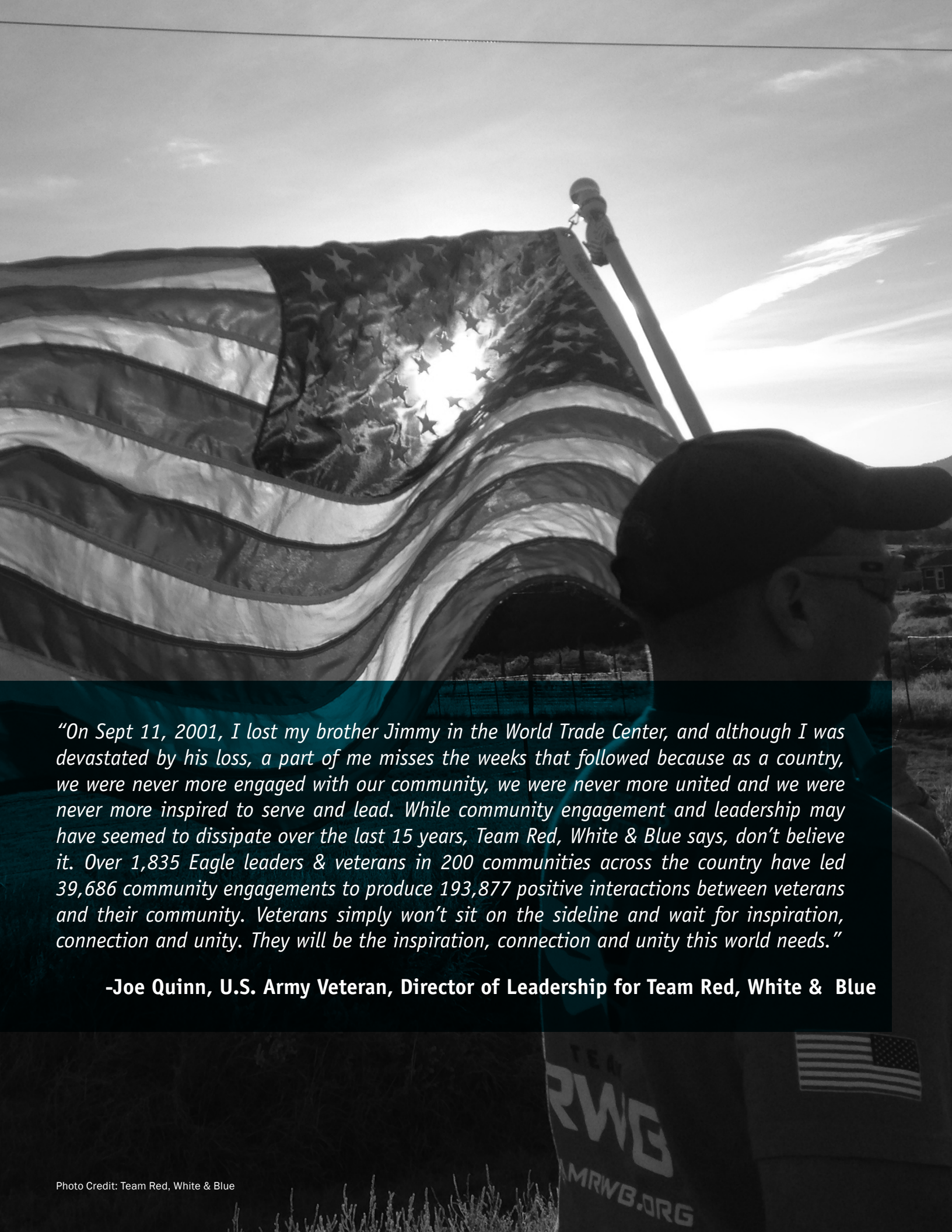
This report aims to emphasize opportunities presented by America's veteran population, provide a data-informed platform through which to encourage thoughtful discussions, and offer innovative solutions that empower veterans to address our nation's most pressing challenges.

By bringing civic health to the forefront of conversations and strategies around veteran reintegration, we can empower veterans and strengthen communities across the nation. The majority of veterans return home seeking new opportunities to continue serving their communities and country.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, our communities are in desperate need of leaders, team builders, and problem solvers willing to tackle local problems. When we recognize this connection between the veteran population and community needs, veteran reintegration becomes an enormous opportunity for America.

Veteran reintegration is an enormous opportunity for America



Photo Credit: Matt Mabe



*"On Sept 11, 2001, I lost my brother Jimmy in the World Trade Center, and although I was devastated by his loss, a part of me misses the weeks that followed because as a country, we were never more engaged with our community, we were never more united and we were never more inspired to serve and lead. While community engagement and leadership may have seemed to dissipate over the last 15 years, Team Red, White & Blue says, don't believe it. Over 1,835 Eagle leaders & veterans in 200 communities across the country have led 39,686 community engagements to produce 193,877 positive interactions between veterans and their community. Veterans simply won't sit on the sideline and wait for inspiration, connection and unity. They will be the inspiration, connection and unity this world needs."*

**-Joe Quinn, U.S. Army Veteran, Director of Leadership for Team Red, White & Blue**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Findings from this report affirm that high levels of civic engagement among veterans are consistent, national trends. At a time when overall civic engagement is on the decline in America, the veteran population is uniquely equipped to disrupt trends of civic disengagement and to lead a resurgence of community across the country.

Veterans demonstrate higher levels of engagement than non-veterans on all civic health indicators available in the latest data. For the second consecutive year, the data reveal that veterans are more likely than non-veterans to vote, contact public officials, volunteer, give to charity, work with neighbors to fix problems in the community, and attend public meetings.

Additionally, female veterans—the fastest growing segment of the veteran population—are outpacing their male veteran and female non-veteran counterparts in areas such as higher education and median household income.

Veterans are continuing to return home to strengthen our communities—they are thinking globally and acting locally as leaders and civic assets.

**Table 1. Veteran and Non-Veteran Civic Health**

	Veterans	Non-Veterans
Average number of hours volunteered	169	126
Vote in local elections (always or sometimes) <sup>12</sup>	73.8%	57.2%
Attended a public meeting	11.0%	8.2%
Worked with neighbors to fix problems in the community	10.7%	7.6%
Gave to charity (\$25 or more)	59.2%	52.1%
Contacted a public official <sup>13</sup>	16.7%	10.3%

The veteran population is uniquely equipped to disrupt trends of civic disengagement and to lead a resurgence of community across the country



Photo Credit: Got Your 6

There are  
**21.8 million**  
veterans in the United  
States

## AMERICA'S VETERAN POPULATION: *At-a-Glance*

There are 21.8 million veterans in the United States—about 9% of the adult population. The average age of all veterans is 62 years (the average age of all non-veterans is 48 years). Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be married, to have completed high school, and to have progressed to college. Veterans are also more likely to be employed and have higher levels of income than non-veterans.<sup>14</sup>

Racially and ethnically, the veteran population closely reflects the American population, with the exception of Asian Americans who are underrepresented by 1.2%. The veteran population also remains heavily male, although females are the fastest growing population of veterans and now total almost 11% of all veterans.

### 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 and non-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 diversity in population and engagement activity between generations. Of all veterans, 26.8% are considered “young” by this description (with an average age of 38 years), and 73.2% are considered “older” (with an average age of 68 years).

All young veterans are members of the all-volunteer force, meaning they volunteered to serve in the military. Of all young veterans, 44.3% are post-9/11 veterans, meaning their term of service included the period after September 11, 2001. One of the biggest differences between young veterans and older veterans is demographics—young veterans are far more likely to be female and are much more racially and ethnically diverse than older veterans.

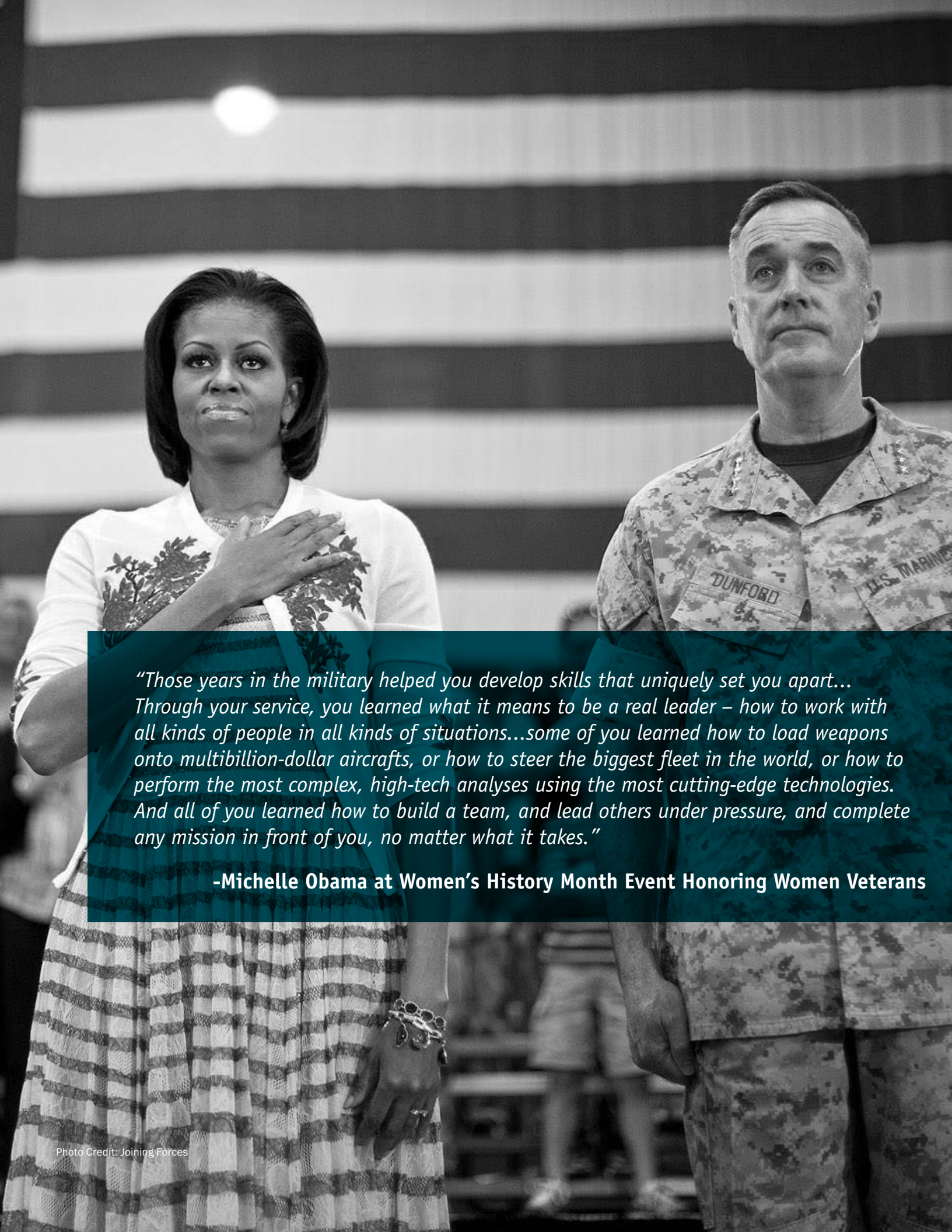
**Table 2. Race and Ethnicity of Young and Older Veterans**

	Young Veterans	Older Veterans
White or Caucasian	78.4%	86.6%
Black or African American	14.6%	10.3%
Hispanic	10%	4.3%
More than one race	3.3%	1.2%
Asian	2.1%	.9%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.2%	.9%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	.4%	.2%

### *Snapshot: Female Veterans<sup>15</sup>*

*Since the establishment of the all-volunteer force in 1973, the number of women serving in the military has risen dramatically. Today, females are the fastest growing population of veterans. Just 7.3% of older veterans are female, but 20.1% of young veterans are female. The majority of female veterans served after September 2001 or in peacetime. Compared to their male counterparts, female veterans are a younger and more diverse population, with higher representations of African Americans and Hispanics in particular.*

*Female veterans significantly outpace their peers—both male veterans and female non-veterans—in higher education enrollment and attainment. For example, 45.3% of female veterans progress to college, compared to 36.4% of male veterans, and 31.9% of female non-veterans. Female veterans also have higher median household incomes than female non-veterans. Additionally, a lower percentage of female veterans are uninsured, have no income, and are in poverty than female non-veterans.*



*"Those years in the military helped you develop skills that uniquely set you apart... Through your service, you learned what it means to be a real leader – how to work with all kinds of people in all kinds of situations...some of you learned how to load weapons onto multibillion-dollar aircrafts, or how to steer the biggest fleet in the world, or how to perform the most complex, high-tech analyses using the most cutting-edge technologies. And all of you learned how to build a team, and lead others under pressure, and complete any mission in front of you, no matter what it takes."*

**-Michelle Obama at Women's History Month Event Honoring Women Veterans**

## VETERANS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: *National Trends*

From the 2015 VCHI, we know that military service positively affects civic health.<sup>16</sup> By virtue of their military experience alone, veterans are likely to demonstrate high levels of civic engagement throughout their lifetimes. Indeed, over the last century, veterans from all generations have outpaced the general population in their habits of service and civic engagement.<sup>17</sup>

Below, we examine the newest civic health data available since the previous publication of this report. **For the second consecutive year, we see that veterans continue to strengthen the civic health of communities at higher rates than their non-veteran peers.**

### *Civic Indicators*

#### Service

Service 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.<sup>18</sup>

From 2013 to 2014, we saw a slight increase in volunteering among all Americans. Still, young veterans exhibit the highest rate of volunteering, at 26.3%. Older veterans also continue to volunteer the most hours annually.

There is an important distinction between rate of volunteering and number of hours volunteered annually. While it is true that young veterans are the most likely to volunteer, the rate of volunteering among all Americans is relatively comparable; on average 25.5% of the population volunteers. However, looking at the number of hours those volunteers serve allows us to better assess the depth of engagement.

As shown below, veterans who volunteer dedicate more time to doing so—and by large margins. Compared to non-veterans, veterans serve an average 40 additional hours per year—the equivalent of a full workweek. Older veterans (although not more likely to volunteer than their non-veteran peers) volunteer a whopping 186 hours annually—the most time of any group. These distinctions show that when veterans volunteer, they tend to be more highly involved in their service, as compared to non-veterans.

**26.3%**

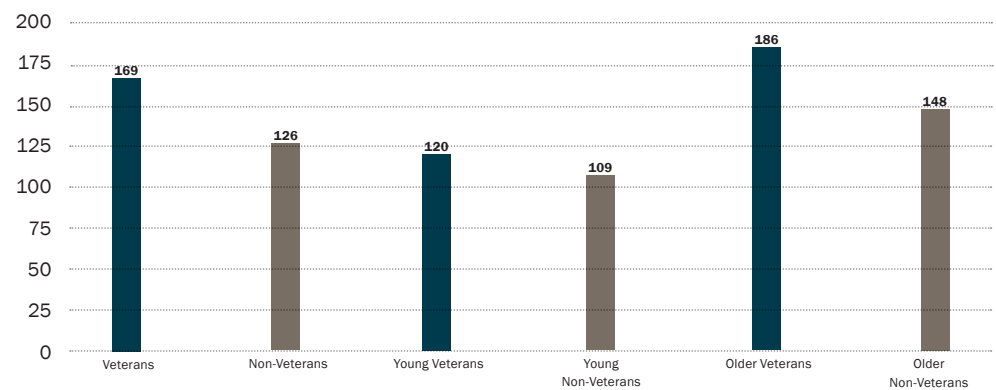
of young veterans  
volunteer in their  
communities—a higher  
rate than all civilians as  
well as older veterans

Older veterans volunteer

**186 hours**

annually—the most time of  
any group

**Chart 1. Veteran and Non-Veteran Average Annual Volunteer Hours**



## Habitat for Humanity

In 2012, Habitat for Humanity International launched the Veterans Build program to provide volunteer engagement, homeownership, and employment opportunities to U.S. veterans, military service members, and their families. Habitat affiliates across the country are building relationships with their veteran and military communities through the organization's work. Habitat has a long history of not just serving veterans but serving alongside veterans and recognizes the unique value of veteran volunteers. "Veterans are individuals who inspire people from all around the world. They have built schools, playgrounds and orphanages for people in the most remote locations. When they return home they are still the world's greatest volunteers. We see our Habitat veterans continuing to serve by helping neighbors build homes, wheelchair ramps, and inspiring hope throughout their own communities," says Michael Hyacinthe, Veteran Relations Associate at Habitat For Humanity, Kent County.



Photo Credit: Habitat for Humanity Veterans Build

## Community Involvement

The extent to which a person is strongly rooted within his or her neighborhood is considered an important marker of civic health because together these connections make up a strong community.

For veterans, community involvement is a critical component of successful reintegration. Transitioning out of the military is a significant life event that can alter veterans' sense of purpose and social connectedness. Community involvement allows for the development of authentic connections and relationships during this time of transition and throughout one's life.<sup>20</sup>

An important measure of community involvement is the rate at which individuals work with neighbors to address community problems. 10.7% of veterans report working with neighbors to address community problems, as compared to just 7.6% of non-veterans. This trend is cross-generational—both young and older veterans (8.8% and 11.3%, respectfully) are more likely, compared to their peers, to cooperate and solve problems with neighbors.

**Table 3. Veterans and Non-Veterans Working with Neighbors**

	Veterans	Non-Veterans	Young Veterans	Young Non-Veterans	Older Veterans	Older Non-Veterans
<b>Worked with neighbors to solve problems in the community</b>	10.7%	7.6%	8.8%	6.2%	11.3%	9.5%

The rate at which individuals attend public meetings is another measure of community involvement. Public meetings are dynamic platforms that have the potential to affect many other civic indicators. On average, 11% of veterans attend public meetings, compared to 8.2% of non-veterans. Older veterans are the most likely to attend public meetings, at a rate of nearly 12%.



*"I learned many valuable life lessons during my service in the United States Air Force from 1994 to 2005. I learned the importance of having a place to call home. I learned that I can still have a positive impact on my community by continuing to serve it. And I learned that there are others just like me who want to continue to make the world a better place, not only for the hardworking people who live here now, but for generations to come. Today, I am able to apply each of these lessons in my work with San Diego Habitat, which offered me an opportunity to find empowerment and purpose after my military service."*

**-Anne Marie Conte, San Diego Habitat for Humanity, Neighborhood Revitalization and Veteran Services Program Manager**

Charitable giving is yet another measure of community involvement and is the most common form of participation of all the measures discussed thus far. On average, just over half of the population donates at least \$25 to charity in a given year. Veterans donate at higher rates than non-veterans.

**Table 4. Veterans and Non-Veterans Donating to Charity**

	Veterans	Non-Veterans	Young Veterans	Young Non-Veterans	Older Veterans	Older Non-Veterans
Gave to charity (\$25 or more)	59.2%	52.1%	50.9%	46.0%	61.8%	60.0%

### Team Red, White & Blue

*Team Red, White & Blue (Team RWB) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2010 whose mission is to enrich the lives of America’s veterans by connecting them to their communities through physical and social activity. With over 111,000 members spread across 200 chapters, Team RWB delivers consistent, local opportunities for veterans and non-veterans to connect through weekly fitness activities, social events, local races, and more. Organizations like Team RWB are directly impacting social connectedness in small towns and big cities throughout the country and positively impacting civic health on an individual and community level. The ultimate aim of Team RWB’s community-building program is to bring veterans together with other veterans and civilian citizens in a way that enables them to establish authentic, lasting relationships.*

### Political Engagement<sup>21</sup>

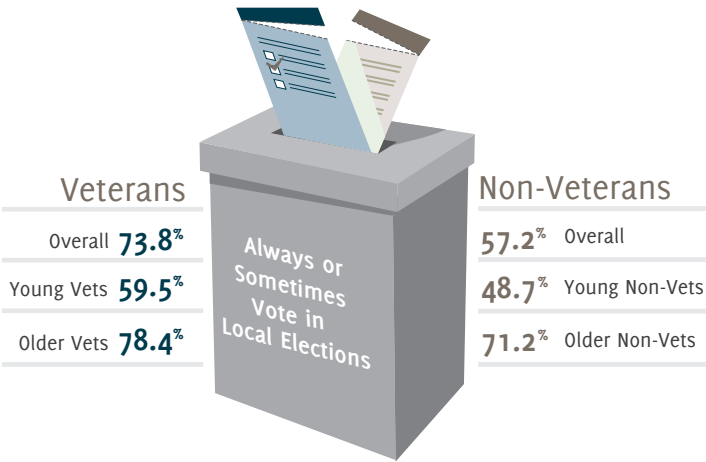
Political engagement represents individuals’ attempts to influence local and national events and broader political outcomes.<sup>22</sup> The most common form of political engagement is voting, but other non-electoral actions like discussing politics and interacting with public officials are also important components of political engagement.

Voting is considered by many to be the most basic form of civic engagement—it is the tool by which most Americans participate in the democratic process.<sup>23</sup> Veterans are highly engaged in this area and are consistently avid participants in both local and national elections. Young veterans, in particular, show a high level of political engagement that outpaces their non-veteran peers.

Overall, veterans are more likely than non-veterans to vote (always or sometimes) in local elections. 73.8% of veterans as compared to 57.2% of non-veterans report voting always or sometimes in local elections. This indicates veterans’ high levels of attentiveness and involvement with what is happening in their local communities.



Veterans Vote More  
**73.8%**  
 of veterans always or sometimes vote in local elections, compared to  
**57.2%**  
 of non-veterans



The frequency with which individuals discuss politics, government, and current events is another indicator of political engagement. Veterans are far more likely than non-veterans to discuss politics with their families and friends—36.4% of veterans frequently talk politics with family or friends, compared to 26.2% of non-veterans. This trend is consistent among young and older veterans alike, all of whom are more likely to discuss politics than their non-veteran peers.

Finally, contacting or visiting a public official is an important non-electoral form of political engagement. This includes contacting or visiting officials at any level of government, to ask for assistance or to express an opinion.<sup>24</sup> Again, veterans are much more engaged in this way than their non-veteran peers.

**Chart 2. Veterans and Non-Veterans Contacting Public Officials**

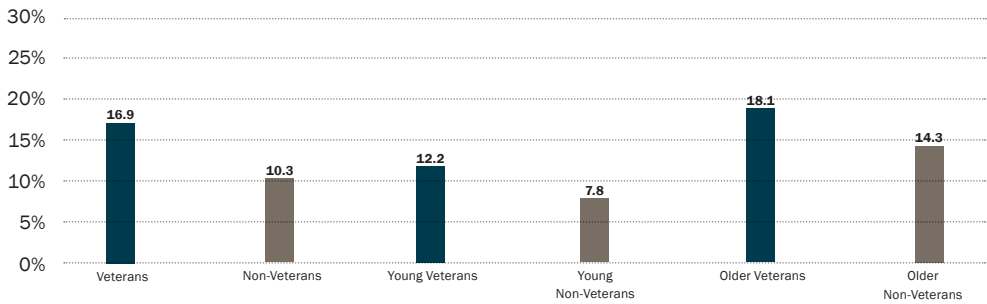


Photo Credit: Got Your 6



*"The pool of talent that has spent time in the military has been through danger and has come out and is ready to continue to contribute."*

**- George W. Bush**

## VETERANS CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: *Local Snapshot*

As we explore national trends, it is critical that we also drill down to local communities to understand how civic health and community engagement vary throughout the country.

Recently, America's attention has turned to the city of Baltimore as protests, uprisings, political activism, and grassroots social movements are making national headlines. Baltimore is a city with a flourishing culture, but a history of unique civic challenges like economic disparity<sup>25</sup> and racial inequality.<sup>26</sup>

Baltimore has also become a touch point for relatively young and innovative veteran-led community initiatives. Veteran empowerment organizations like The 6th Branch, Student Veterans of America, The Mission Continues, Team RWB, and The Pat Tillman Foundation are all active in the Baltimore area. As these and other organizations grow in Baltimore, it is important to track trends in overall community engagement and civic health.

More research is needed to understand the many nuances of civic health in Baltimore. Tracking veteran civic engagement in this community is vital as we explore how veterans can enrich this city and be called upon to tackle the various civic challenges it faces.

### *The 6th Branch*

*The 6th Branch (T6B) is a nonprofit organization founded in Baltimore, Maryland, in 2010 by returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. T6B utilizes the leadership and organizational skills of veterans to execute aggressive community service initiatives in Baltimore City. Since early 2011, T6B has been committed to the revitalization of East Baltimore with emphasis on the Oliver, Johnston Square, and Darley Park communities.*

*T6B's "Neighhorscape" program strategically adopts and transforms abandoned and hazardous plots of land into community assets like parks, playgrounds, and gardens. Through this program, thousands of volunteers have removed more than 100 tons of trash and debris from illegal dumping, transformed a 40,000 square-foot plot of land into a vibrant urban farm that provides food security for some of Maryland's most impoverished residents, transformed a once open-air heroin market into safe space for youth recreation, and much more.*

*T6B believes that veterans' skills are ideal for the initiation and organization of such community projects. The organization is largely led by veterans but builds community by bringing together service-minded veterans and non-veterans to serve and transform Baltimore City.*

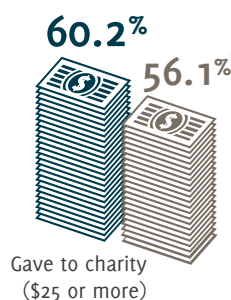
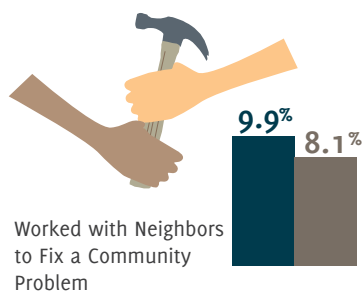


Photo Credit: The 6th Branch

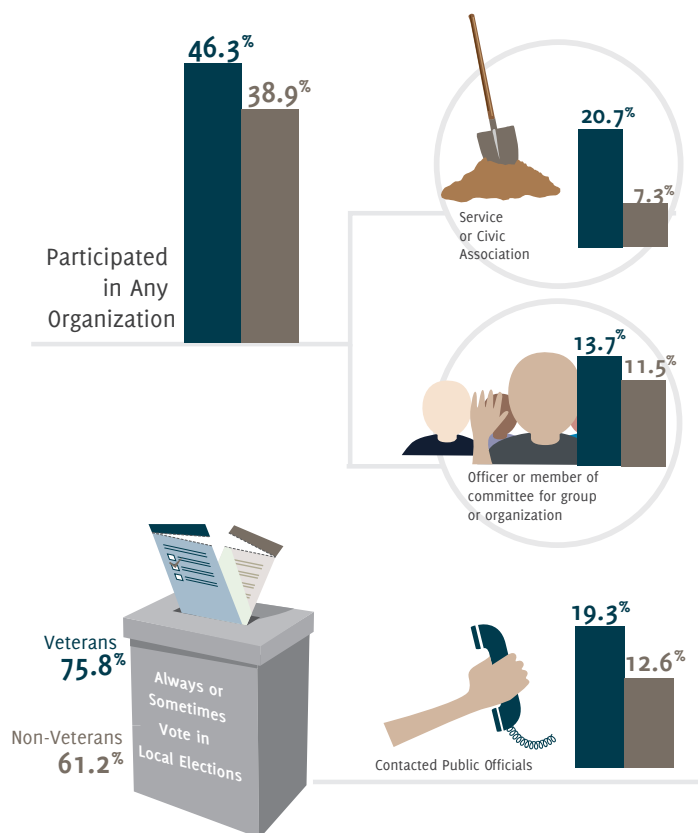
# CIVIC LIFE OF BALTIMORE VETERANS



Key: ● Baltimore Veterans ● Baltimore Non-Veterans



Source: Current Population Survey Volunteering Supplement (pooled 20 and older 2010, 2011, 2013)



Source: Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement 2010, 2011, 2013

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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By bringing civic health to the forefront of conversations and strategies around veteran reintegration, we can empower veterans and strengthen communities across the nation. While it is critical for our country to fulfill its sacred trust to veterans, it is imperative that citizens also ask our veterans how they will continue to serve their communities and country. With that in mind, we offer the following recommendations.

### Recommendations for Veterans

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- **Engage in your community.** Being a leader is not always about starting a business, a nonprofit, or a community program; it is about showing up. Look for ways to participate in your local community, just like you did in your military unit. Connect with both veterans and non-veterans to form genuine relationships.
- **Seek out veteran empowerment organizations.** No matter your phase of transition, there are organizations led by people like you who need volunteers and leaders. Join them in service to your community and yourself. To view a list of such organizations, visit [gotyour6.org/partners/nonprofit](http://gotyour6.org/partners/nonprofit).

### Recommendations for Non-Veterans

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- **Challenge your perception of veterans.** Work to overcome the “broken hero” veteran stereotype<sup>27</sup> by recognizing that veterans are as diverse as the nation they serve.
- **Have a conversation with a veteran.** There is no right or wrong way to speak to a veteran—they are people just like you. Veterans have stories to tell and experiences to share, so have a conversation that goes beyond “thank you for your service.”
- **Serve alongside veterans.** Through shared service, veterans and non-veterans can unite to make their communities stronger. Find volunteer opportunities with veteran empowerment organizations in your area.

### Recommendations for Businesses

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- **Hire veterans.** Don’t hire veterans simply to capitalize on hiring incentives; hire them because they are good for business. Employers seek employees with drive, leadership skills, tactical decision-making experience, and the ability to think on their feet to solve problems and get the job done. Veterans have been trained to do exactly that. Ensure that your job openings are visible to veterans—consider taking part in a veterans hiring fair or even organizing a hiring fair in your community.
- **Establish affinity groups.** Don’t stop at hiring veterans; invest in their long-term success by cultivating an inclusive culture. Affinity groups provide forums for employees to gather socially and share ideas. They not only provide an opportunity for veterans to identify themselves in the workplace (you may be working alongside a veteran and not even know it), but they give both veterans and civilians a chance to talk about the experience of serving our country.

## Recommendations for Nonprofits

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- **Recruit veteran volunteers.** An astounding 92% of veterans strongly agree or agree that serving their community is important to them.<sup>28</sup> Give veterans the opportunities they desire—leverage the veteran population to sustain and strengthen the work your organization is engaged in every day in communities across the nation.
- **Collaborate with veteran-focused organizations.** Veterans return home to small towns and big cities across the country—it is rare that any one organization can reach veterans in every community. By collaborating and leveraging resources, nonprofit organizations can reach veterans more efficiently and effectively.

## Recommendations for Media & Entertainment

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- **Portray veterans reasonably and accurately in film and television, avoiding archetypal “heroic” and “broken” veteran characters.** Multi-dimensional, normalized depictions of veterans better represent the veteran population, positively contribute to the cultural narrative around veterans, and foster understanding among non-veterans.
- **Promote responsible news reporting.** Due in part to sensationalized reporting, Americans are likely to believe that the majority of veterans suffer from PTSD, are likely to be homeless, or are prone to violence.<sup>29</sup> When reporting, it is important to avoid sweeping statements about the veteran population.
- **Include veteran perspectives whenever possible.** Veterans’ voices should not be limited to issues surrounding foreign policy or the Department of Veterans Affairs. As civic assets, veterans are engaged on all issues making headlines today. Veterans can add unique perspectives to any newsworthy discussion.

## Recommendations for Policymakers

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- **Recognize that veterans’ issues are not limited to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).** Less than half of the veteran population is enrolled at VA;<sup>30</sup> therefore, the congressional veterans’ affairs committees should not be the sole place for debate and discussion about veterans. Veterans are leaders in every sector and should be considered across the whole of government.
- **Focus on community-based approaches.** Veterans transition back to communities, not to government agencies. While the VA and other agencies have programs for veterans, policymakers can focus on public-private partnerships to better serve veterans while empowering them to strengthen communities.
- **Leverage proven solutions underway at the state and local levels.** Replicate and build on the innovative and proven solutions already implemented in localities across the nation. A comprehensive collection of state and local policy recommendations can be found at The Veterans Policy Leadership Institute.<sup>31</sup>

## Recommendations Specific to the 2016 Election Cycle

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From the forests of Western Europe to the mountains of Afghanistan and the deserts of Iraq, over the decades U.S. service members have fought to liberate and bring democracy to hundreds of millions of people across the world. All Americans can honor the sacrifice of veterans by actively participating in our democratic process.

### *Challenge To Veterans And The Military Community*

As veterans and civic assets, you have a responsibility to call the country to action this November by:

- **Participating in the electoral process**—whether by registering and committing to vote, volunteering for a campaign, volunteering at your local polling place, or running for state or local office.
- **Engaging candidates on policy issues** that impact the lives and welfare of veterans and military service members. Any candidate running for federal, state, or local office should be challenged to clearly define his or her policy stances on issues of importance to veterans.
- **Educating the country about the value of veterans as civic assets.** Veterans' commitment to service has not faltered. It is time to change the narrative of the “broken” or “damaged” veteran by showcasing and highlighting actual veteran leaders serving their communities.

### *Challenge To The American Public*

As American citizens, you have the right and responsibility to participate in the democratic process by:

- **Registering to vote now and voting in November.** Regardless of background or political leanings, all Americans can unite around a common goal of increasing political engagement across the country. As demonstrated in this report, political engagement is a critical component of overall civic health—without a broad level of involvement, the strength of our democracy is unsustainable. In November 2012, America's voting turnout was a mere 57.5% of the eligible voting public.<sup>32</sup> This year, we can and should do better.
- **Encourage public dialogue.** Challenge candidates to outline their plans for supporting and empowering our veterans. Catalyzing real debate on policy issues that impact the lives and welfare of veterans and military service members is a great way to champion that population.
- **Engaging your neighbors in the electoral process.** American democracy is premised on community-level strength.<sup>33</sup> Talk to your neighbors about registering to vote, meet those running for local office, volunteer for a campaign or candidate, or carpool to your polling place this November.

*To receive election reminders, get registered to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot, visit [gotyour6.org/vote](http://gotyour6.org/vote).*

## CONCLUSION

America's veterans are a unique and often overlooked asset to this nation. The pride we as Americans take in our troops should be extended to the quarter of a million veterans who return to communities across the country each year. Veterans should be greeted not just with our thanks, but with our encouragement to continue their service to our nation in meaningful ways.

Due to their experience, training, and commitment to service, veterans are stepping up by providing solutions to some of our nation's—and our world's—most pressing challenges. Having served and sacrificed for our country, veterans remain strongly invested in communities, understanding that national and international progress begins at the local level.

If America holds high expectations for its veterans as it does its troops, and empowers veterans as they return home, veterans will be uniquely positioned to lead a resurgence of community across the country. So, instead of solely asking what we can do for veterans, let us also ask what veterans can continue to do for our communities.

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communities



Photo Credit: Got Your 6

## ENDNOTES

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## NOTES



## 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, 2014; 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); 7,640 (Volunteering Supplement); and 9,018 (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 Department of Veterans Affairs. 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.

# 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  
DataHaven  
Connecticut Humanities  
Connecticut Campus Compact  
The Fund for Greater Hartford  
William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund  
Wesleyan University

#### 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

Indiana University Center on Representative  
Government  
Indiana Bar Foundation  
Indiana Supreme Court  
Indiana University Northwest  
IU Center for Civic Literacy

#### Kansas

Kansas Health Foundation

#### 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  
Center for Study of Citizenship at Wayne  
State University

#### 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

#### Millennials Civic Health Index

Mobilize.org  
Harvard Institute of Politics  
CIRCLE

#### Economic Health

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

## CITIES

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### Atlanta

Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta

### Chicago

McCormick Foundation

### Kansas City & Saint Louis

Missouri State University

Park University

Saint Louis University

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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