



**THE
MISSION
CONTINUES**

COMMUNITY IMPACT FRAMEWORK

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INTRODUCTION

The Mission Continues (TMC) empowers veterans to continue their service, and empowers communities with veteran talent, skills and preparedness to generate visible impact. We deploy veterans on new missions to be assets to partners in under-resourced communities who are engaged in solving local challenges.

TMC is dedicated to bringing together veterans and innovative community organizations with a vision of creating transformational change in under-resourced communities across the country. TMC partners with community-based organizations, schools, parks and community spaces. It is through these partnerships that we are better able to meet our impact: **to support the building of strong, healthy, sustainable communities.**

We engage in this work through our service platoons which consist of teams of veteran and non-veteran volunteers who together work with community partners to address challenges in their communities. Through this work, our internal research shows that our service platoons positively impact both veterans and the communities in which they serve.

THE COMMUNITY IMPACT FRAMEWORK

The Mission Continues works in neighborhoods across the country and recognizes the necessity of a framework to guide our approach in working alongside community partners. While we acknowledge and celebrate the uniqueness of individual communities, we also understand the importance of providing a framework that focuses our efforts and establishes the outcomes we pursue. Therefore, the framework provides parameters to strengthen our work nationally while also acknowledging that each individual community has its own unique history, strengths, and challenges.

The Mission Continues Community Impact Framework:

- Creates a shared understanding of The Mission Continues' nationwide goals while ensuring a level of autonomy within each unique neighborhood or geographic community
- Identifies how we can utilize assets-based (i.e., strengths-based) best practices in community-based work
- Sets clear expectations to ensure we contribute to measurable, visible and longer-term sustainable positive impact



in communities

THE FRAMEWORK FOCUS AREAS

We believe that veterans and local community members, working side-by-side, can make measurable, visible and immediate impact that ultimately leads to long-term community impact. To help drive this impact, we have identified four focus areas that create the framework around which our service platoons approach their work:

- Relationships
- Neighborhoods
- Activities
- Outcomes

TMC's Relationships



Building and stewarding relationships is central to our approach of Asset Based Community Development.

We build relationships with:

- ★ **People:** community residents (adults and children), community partners, small business owners, etc.
- ★ **Institutions:** community based organizations, schools, food pantries hospitals/clinics, libraries, etc.
- ★ **Associations:** sports teams, community garden clubs, neighborhood associations, outreach groups, sports teams, etc.

Neighborhood Communities



Neighborhood communities are made up of an ecosystem of places and spaces. By focusing on neighborhoods, we effectively and efficiently contribute to solutions across a range of issues. Neighborhoods include:

- ★ Schools and libraries
- ★ Parks and playgrounds and trails
- ★ Community gardens and community markets
- ★ Outdoor and indoor community gathering areas (e.g., theaters and sports facilities)
- ★ Clinics
- ★ Small businesses

Activities



Activities are what we do in neighborhood communities in order to reach our outcomes. Activities include but are not limited to:

- ★ Building community garden beds that will produce nutritious food in areas that are food deserts
- ★ Building bleachers and picnic tables where kids and families socialize
- ★ Painting murals to add vibrancy to recreational and gathering spaces
- ★ Creating walking paths and trail to increase opportunities to engage in healthy outdoor activities

Outcomes



By working alongside community members in their neighborhoods, we contribute to outcomes that strengthen the broader community. Outcomes include but are not limited to:

- ★ More community members engaging in and leading in their neighborhood community
- ★ Increased access to educational and community gathering spaces
- ★ Stronger community partnerships that lead to capacity building
- ★ Improved community health and welfare

Focus Area: Relationships



Developing relationships with key neighborhood stakeholders is imperative to creating sustainable long-term impact. In building these relationships, we come to realize the knowledge, skills and abilities that members of the community are already using to reach their self-identified community goals. This realization is at the heart of our Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach¹ to community work.

Adopted by The Mission Continues in 2018, the Asset-Based Community Development approach is rooted in prioritizing an individual's, group's, or community's already-existing strengths. Local residents are the strongest assets within their community: they understand the community's challenges, priorities, existing resources, and opportunities for solutions. As we build our relationships, we are able to identify how we can be an asset to build upon community strengths and ongoing efforts to help advance initiatives focused on achieving the community's vision.

Additionally, through ABCD, community members come to understand the assets that veterans bring to achieve community goals. When executed properly, this mutual recognition of assets and partnerships ultimately better enables community partners to more quickly reach their self-identified goals.

Focus Area: Neighborhoods



Sustainable community change occurs when individuals, groups, associations, and others work together to collectively strengthen communities.² TMC engages in this collective impact by partnering with multiple partners within a geographic neighborhood, or a small collection of closely-grouped geographic neighborhoods. It also:

- Enables TMC to effectively and efficiently create solutions across a range of social challenges
- Guides us to respectfully engage and connect with community residents to develop an understanding of the neighborhood's history, culture, and opportunities
- Ensures more innovative and diverse projects with multiple community partners within a single neighborhood
- Provides a natural pathway for veterans and community members to work with each other in pursuit of creating community impact
- Deepens partnerships, leading to greater impact through long-term relationships

Focus Area: Activities



We track each activity (each task we do in a community) because each activity contributes to both immediate and long-term positive impact. We connect all activities to larger objectives³ that are focused on achieving longer term outcomes. Tracking each activity helps us to iterate upon our work in and with communities by understanding which types of activities and events lead to creating positive sustainable change.

Focus Area: Outcomes



We track each activity because each one is fundamental to meeting our objectives and our outcomes. We pursue the following short- to midterm outcomes⁴ (see Appendix B for further explanation and examples of outcomes).

- Increased organizational capacity
- Improved educational environment
- Increased access to gardens or green spaces
- Increased access to recreational spaces
- Increased access to essential needs (distribution/collection of food, clothes, etc.)

Any activity completed funnels into one or more of the above outcomes. For example, creating four garden beds helps us meet the objective of creating an community garden. Creating an community garden helps us realize the outcome of increasing access to gardens.



MEASURING OUR IMPACT

In 2019, we launched our first community partner survey to gain an understanding of how our activities contribute to strengthening neighborhoods and achieving our intended outcomes. This annual survey, distributed to all of our community partners, helps us to better understand our effectiveness, iterate upon our programs, and ultimately strengthen our impact.



APPENDIX A: COMMONLY USED TERMS IN OUR WORK

Below are some commonly-referred terms in community-focused endeavors that are central to TMC's work.

Community

While communities may consist of groups of people that share a common identity (e.g., women veterans) or a common interest at The Mission Continues, for the purposes of our work, **we focus on communities as geographic places**. Specifically, these **place-based communities** are the **neighborhoods** where we work alongside community members.

Place-Based Community Work

Community work consists of efforts that individuals, groups, associations, etc. participate in to strengthen **neighborhood communities (places)**. At TMC, those who engage in community work with us are from diverse backgrounds, experiences, ages, and abilities.

Community Partners

We partner with **community-based organizations, schools, parks and community areas** that are embedded within their neighborhoods. We also partner with community members who live and work in these neighborhoods. We intentionally establish partnerships with community-based organizations that are respected by and inclusive of local community residents for two primary reasons:

1. They are often anchor institutions that are part of the community fabric and best understand the existing strengths and available resources within the community.
2. They are best positioned to introduce The Mission Continues to local community residents who are driving positive change within their respective communities. We realize that we must work alongside and behind community members if we want to maximize our contributions to positive long-term community impact.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)

TMC is committed to **taking a strengths-based or assets-based—focus in our work**. The ABCD approach provides a guide for us when engaging with community partners, whether that work is with individuals, local communities, a broader region, or within our nationwide efforts.

Central to the concept of Asset Based Community Development are the questions: 'What strengths (i.e., assets) do I see that already exists in the individual, group, neighborhood?' and 'What is already working well that we can build upon that and make it even stronger?'

Assets

Understanding community assets, and having the mindset to recognize those community assets is fundamental to Asset-Based Community Development. The three primary assets we focus on are individuals, associations, and institutions.

Individuals

Community partners, residents, and allies who are respected by the local community. Examples: youth, older adults, people experiencing homelessness, coaches, council members, etc.



Associations

Groups of individuals that contribute to strengthening the community that are drawn together around a common interest and or share a common goal.

Examples: a group that hosts food drives, a neighborhood association, a choir from a house of worship that volunteers time singing at local retirement homes, or a multi-generational book club that focuses on social justice, etc.



Institutions

Typically formal structures where paid staff work within the community. Examples: government agencies, businesses and nonprofit organizations (that may or may not provide social services). Other common institutions are houses of worship, schools, hospitals/health clinics.



Collective Impact⁵

It takes a combination of various lenses, relationship networks, and areas of expertise **working collectively to create enduring positive change**. Therefore, it is important that individuals and groups from various backgrounds are deliberately sought out and included to work together on a shared and common goal.

Impact

We are pursuing a long-term impact goal in the neighborhoods where we serve that will lead to the building of strong, healthy and sustainable communities. In order to achieve that goal, we consider our potential impact in phases:

- 1. Phase 1: Immediate and visible impact:** Our activities, what we physically do in communities, may leave long-standing physical reminders of our work, such as when we build a butterfly garden at a school, create a family gathering space at a community center, or clear debris on a park trail.
- 2. Phase 2: Short- to medium-term impact (0-5+ years):** Our activities are ultimately focused on achieving our outcomes of more robust positive changes in communities over time. For example, if we create a playground basketball court, then we want to learn how the court may (or may not) be a space where people gather.
- 3. Phase 3: Long-term, sustainable impact (10-15+ years):** Sustainable impact refers to change that will remain regardless of The Mission Continues. Sustainable positive change is the result of multiple parties working together to achieve a shared goal. For example, if a community garden that TMC created went on to be maintained and utilized by local community residents for years to come, then The Mission Continues contributed to increasing residents' access to local and nutritious food.⁶

Community-Driven Development

Successful community work is rooted in building and maintaining strong relationships with people who best

know their local neighborhood: community residents. Community-driven development puts community residents at the center of community work and is a key component in Asset Based Community Development. It acknowledges that **local residents are the strongest assets within their community**—and that they know the goals their community has prioritized, as well as already-existing resources and solutions within the community. To successfully engage in community work, TMC recognizes that **we work alongside and behind community members as they drive the changes they have prioritized**.

We are committed to being present in local neighborhoods throughout the country, where we can build long-lasting relationships with community residents and established community partner organizations. **Building trusting relationships takes time, but ultimately is the most efficient course of action because it enables us to be a trusted and valuable partner in collective impact.**



APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY IMPACT OUTCOMES

1. Increased access to gardens and green spaces

– Access to gardens, green spaces, increases as a result of TMC’s work. Example: a community garden was developed and built with TMC in a community with few or no other gardens available for community use.



2. Improved educational environment

– Refurbishment or improvements made to educational spaces. Example: Building outdoor classrooms or repainting classrooms within a school led to a better learning environment.

3. Increased organizational capacity (funding, program development, etc)

– Organizations generate more funding, develop new or expand ongoing programs, or are able to increase capacity in other ways as a result of TMC’s work. Example: A TMC service platoon renovates a resource lab at a community organization, and our partner is able to provide more services. Then the organization creates a resume writing program and a one-on-one tutoring program because of the newly-available room.

4. Increased access to recreational spaces

– Access to spaces where people for play, rest, or social connection. Example: TMC removes debris and invasive species from a biking and walking trail at a local park.

5. Increased access to essential needs

– Ensuring community members have access to basic or pressing essential needs (e.g., food, clothing). Example: TMC collects non-perishables for community pantry that serves low-income residents.

APPENDIX C: BUILDING BLOCKS OF A TMC OPERATION

Operations are well-organized Activities and Objectives that will achieve a set of Desired Outcomes in a community. The goal is to create long-term sustainable Impact in the community. Operations must be:

- Community partner driven
- Focused on important and tough community issues
- Coordinated across and supported by all of our programs
- Led by veterans and leverages veteran skills and interests
- Supported by a clear set of Activities and Objectives that are linked to Desired Outcomes
- Integrated with existing civic, business, and/or community organizations

An **activity** is a tangible product, or output, completed at a service project. This may include building a bench, a garden bed, painting a mural, hosting a community dinner, and many other things. An activity may also be referred to as a task. Activities enable us to create immediate and visible impact.

A group of completed and related activities are considered **objectives**. Objectives describe the intention of the activities (e.g. creating a green space, building a community garden, refurbishing a school). Objectives are the measurable amount of work performed to convert inputs into outcomes.

Completed objectives ensure we can reach our desired **outcomes**. Outcomes are the focus of all planning (i.e., our desired results). Outcomes are the basic tools that underlie all planning and strategic activities and ensure we can create a safe place for the community, provide nutritional food, assist in the elimination of a food desert, and more.

Reaching our outcomes enables us to contribute to long-term and sustainable **community impact**. Community impact is the ultimate long-term value provided to our communities throughout the country.

1 Kretzmann, J., & McKnight, J. P. (1996). Asset Based Community Development. National Civic Review, 85(4), 23-29. The article can be found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/service-learning/wp-content/uploads/sites/519/2018/07/Assets-Based-CommunityDevelopment.pdf>

2 Local Initiatives Support Corp (LISC Greater Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky). Place Matters: 10 Year Retrospectives. Retrieved from http://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/a4/85/a485497e-4e90-40e2-b4e1-42aaa89b4e14/pm10yrretro_web.pdf

3 See Appendix C for discussion on how activities connect to objectives and longer term impact

4 See Appendix B for a detailed description of the outcomes we pursue

5 For more details on collective impact, see Stanford Social Innovation Review's article: Collective Impact. Retrieved from: https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

6 Community gardens serve as only one example of how The Mission Continues engages in multi-faceted and sustainable community building. For more information on the impact of community gardens in marginalized communities, read this external case study from Portland State University: Examining Sense of Place for Marginalized Communities in Community Gardens. Retrieved from: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1640&context=honorstheses>