



THE EMPOWERED VETERAN INDEX

THE MISSION CONTINUES



EMPOWERED VETERAN INDEX

I. BACKGROUND / INTRODUCTION

The Mission Continues empowers veterans who are adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community impact. We deploy veterans on new missions in communities that need their help.

Over the past several years, the organization has been dedicated to bringing together veterans and innovative community organizations to create transformational change for communities in need all across the country. We operate under the strong belief that communities and veterans can and should mutually benefit each other—veterans benefit from the skills and experiences they gain through working with other veterans, as well as non-veterans, to uplift communities in need. Simultaneously, veterans have unique skills and experiences that can help transform communities and solve problems.

We are guided by our organizational vision to deploy veteran volunteers alongside non-profit partners and community leaders to solve some of the most challenging issues facing our communities. Through this work, we have produced meaningful outcomes for all involved, and our internal research has shown our programs positively impact both veterans and the communities they serve in a variety of ways.

PURPOSE OF FRAMEWORK

Through a careful analysis of our programs over our first 10 years, we discovered that despite our many strengths as an organization, much of TMC's work has been fragmented and disconnected. In the spirit of building on our success, unifying the organization, and increasing TMC's value by producing more positive and consistent outcomes for participants and the communities they serve, we have developed a framework meant to guide the work we do across the organization, The Empowered Veteran Index. This framework incorporates our mission, vision and guiding principles in coordination with the needs of our veteran volunteers and communities. It dovetails with our theory of change to empower veterans who adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community impact.

The goal is to use The Empowered Veteran Index to provide a foundation to guide TMC work—including conceptualization, development, programming, and measurement. Our organizational work should grow out of this framework, which is meant to function as guideposts for the implementation of TMC work. That is, the framework does not provide direct instructions for program development, but rather serves as a blueprint from which programmatic goals are set.

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We took a two-pronged approach to develop the Empowered Veteran Index by examining internal and external research of programs that serve similar veteran and community populations. Internally, we examined TMC conducted research and program evaluation data to identify the top motivators for participation in TMC programs. We reviewed what veterans say they get out of our programs and what benefits stand out from their experiences with us. Understanding what about our programs attracts participants and the benefits they reap is key to determining the inputs to our framework.

Externally, we examined the current academic literature on the needs of returning veterans, ensuring our programs and services address the needs of veterans and the communities in which they serve through The Mission Continues. To ensure TMC is a relevant, innovative organization that is in touch with the needs and concerns of veterans who are reintegrating to civilian life, it is imperative to assess the challenges and struggles this population faces with the intention of developing a framework that addresses such needs.

Based on our research, we designed The Empowered Veteran Index with three components: **1) Personal Growth; 2) Connectedness; and 3) Community Impact.** Each component is engrained in every program and event of The Mission Continues. See Figure 1.

Through our research and analysis, we found that the three components of The Empowered Veteran Index often overlap and are not completely distinct from one another. For example, by working in underserved communities, veterans are directly impacting community members, but veterans also personally benefit from the work they do because they learn skills, connect with other veterans, and practice working together with people of different backgrounds. Thus, the community impact of a program might also produce connectedness and personal growth for veterans. We see these overlaps as a strength of our framework in that they produce a cyclical relationship in which several simultaneous benefits are occurring through TMC programming, ultimately adding up to the fulfillment of our mission to empower veterans who are adjusting to life back home through continued service.

Figure 1. The Empowered Veteran Index



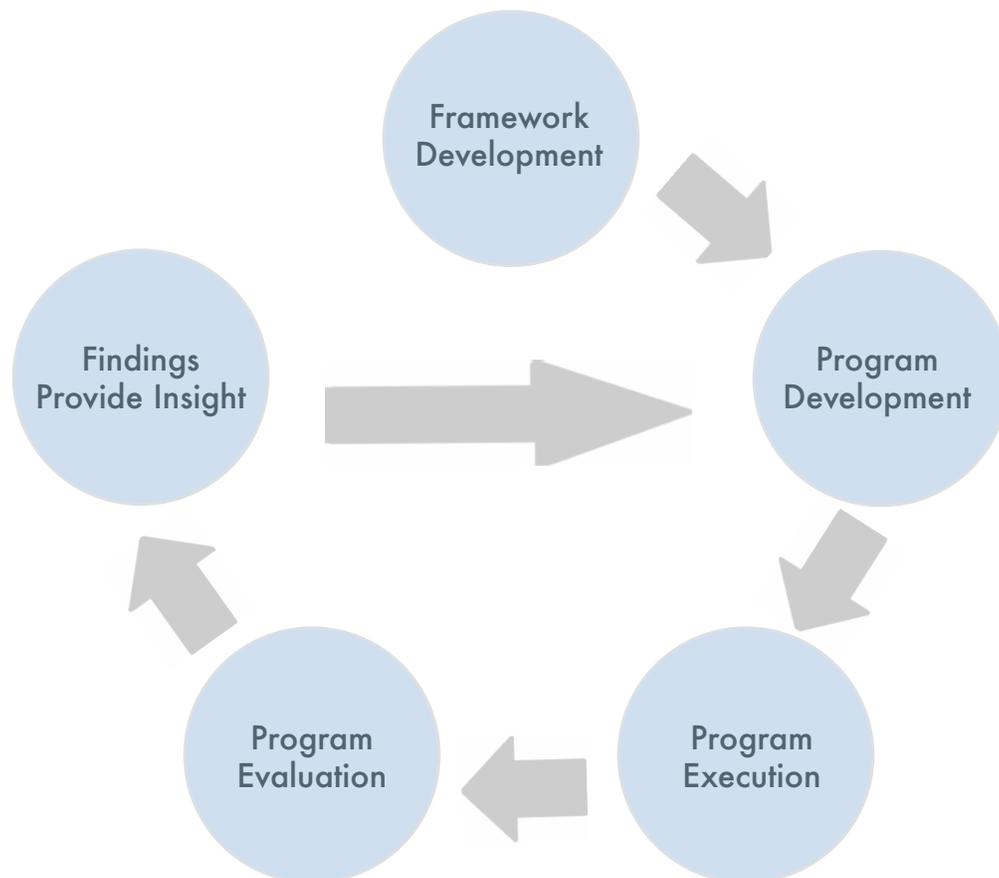
The Mission Continues empowers veterans who are adjusting to life at home to find purpose through community impact. We accomplish our mission by ensuring all of our programming focuses on providing veterans opportunities for personal growth, connectedness and making an impact in their community.

The Empowered Veteran Index is foundational to program design, delivery and evaluation at The Mission Continues. Each of our programs and events are designed to provide veterans with an opportunity for personal growth, connectedness and community impact. Upon program delivery, we employ rigorous evaluations and assessment tools to learn where we might improve or strengthen our programs. We then use these insights to further improve and develop our programs to better serve our veterans and communities.

The definitions of each component are especially important to allow for measurement and evaluation of our work. We need to have a clearly delineated vision of what our work is intended to accomplish so that we may then measure how we achieve that goal and where we can improve upon it. At the same time, we recognize the need to allow for some flexibility and customization in the design and development of TMC programs.

The intention is not to create structure that stifles creativity, but to provide guideposts that all work should take into account when developing and refining programming. See figure 2.

Figure 2. Cyclical nature of The Empowered Veteran Index and programs



II. TMC'S FRAMEWORK: THE EMPOWERED VETERAN INDEX

Within this section each component of The Empowered Veteran Index is identified. Included is external research on veterans' needs, as well as a summary of internal TMC conducted research, in relation to each component. It concludes with a definition of each component and its conceptualization for evaluation purposes.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Research on Veterans' Needs

Several studies of returning veterans show they often come home unprepared for civilian life. A 2014 study conducted by the University of Southern California¹ found that nearly two-thirds of veterans in Los Angeles County reported feeling unprepared when they left the military. Additionally, 80% of veterans leave the military without a secured job, and at least 40% depart without a permanent housing plan. The lack of preparedness can lead to a host of problems once veterans return home, including un- or under-employment, economic distress, homelessness, and physical and mental health issues.

The American Psychological Association reports² that among returning OEF and OIF veterans, about one-third report symptoms of mental health or cognitive problems. And because many veterans are often reluctant to report mental health issues, real numbers are likely higher. The APA also indicates that on a single night, there are approximately 50,000 homeless veterans in the United States. Homelessness is often compounded by undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues.

A study of Massachusetts-area veterans conducted by RAND³ found that most un- or under-employed veterans were not so by choice, but were constrained by a variety of factors that impeded their ability to get a well-paying, meaningful job. The most commonly cited barriers included not having the right experience, skills, or education and being constrained by health limitations, child care responsibilities, and access to transportation. Another barrier is the struggle with translating the skills learned and honed in the military to civilian obligation—something one study found 40% of returning veterans struggle with.⁴

Many volunteer programs have been established to give veterans a sense of purpose that they often feel they lack when they return home. One study⁵ found that completion of The Mission Continues civic service program, the fellowship program, improved the overall health of returning OIF and OEF veterans, as well as decreased PTSD symptoms and increased perceived self-efficacy. The authors of this study speculate that arming veterans with a renewed sense of purpose is a powerful strategy that increases their resiliency and ability to successfully navigate the contours of reintegration. Another study⁶ of the general population found that having a meaning, or purpose, in life is associated with reduced stress, more adaptive coping, and greater engagement in health-promoting behaviors.

¹ Carl Andrew Castro, Sara Kintzle, and Anthony Hassan, "The State of the American Veteran: The Los Angeles County Veterans Study," University of Southern California School of Social Work (2013).

² "The Mental Health Needs of Veterans, Service Members and Their Families," American Psychological Association, Accessed September 25, 2017.

³ Carrie M. Farmer, Terri Tanielian, Shira H. Fischer, Erin L. Duffy, Stephanie Dellva, Emily Butcher, Kristine Brown, and Emily Hoch, "Supporting Those Who Served in Massachusetts: Needs, Well-Being, and Available Resources for Veterans," RAND (2017).

⁴ Syracuse University, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Accessed September 25, 2017.

Related to the idea of finding purpose is the concept of resiliency, which means the ability or capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or challenges. Many studies⁷ have identified resiliency as a key quality that moderates the effects of PTSD and other mental health issues that veterans struggle with. Veterans need the tools to increase their resiliency and bounce back from negative situations that may unfold in the future.

The Mission Continues is well-equipped to help veterans develop new skillsets as well as learn how to translate the skills they learned in the military to civilian careers. Providing veterans with effective tools to harness their skills is an essential part of preparing them for successful careers, which can help offset the economic risks many veterans face today. Given the tremendous needs of the returning veteran population, many efforts have been made to address these needs and provide support. While TMC is not a direct service provider and cannot claim to help veterans directly with mental health issues or other struggles like homelessness, we can empower veterans with the tools they need to navigate these challenges on their own, by helping them build skills, increase their self-confidence, find their purpose, and become more resilient.

TMC Internal Research

Internal research indicates personal growth is a top motivator for veterans who participate in TMC programs. In a 2017 survey of all program participants, a majority (55.5%) alluded to personal growth as one of the reasons they participated in TMC programs. Nearly two in five (39%) cited finding a purpose as their reason for participating. Moreover, many participants reported being motivated by an interest in furthering their careers/employment opportunities: 25.7% said they participated for professional development, while 15% sought a new career opportunity.

Internal research also reveals that TMC programming effectively answers veterans' needs for personal growth. Among TMC program participants responding to the 2017 annual survey, 75.6% report feeling a stronger sense of purpose, and more than two-thirds (69.7%) say they are better able to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Nearly half (47.5%) indicate they feel more equipped to work in the civilian world.

TMC programs have the potential to teach or bolster leadership skills. A study of the Service Platoon Program (2014-2015) found that more than three in five (62%) participants report that their participation helped them become a leader. Additionally, employment of participants increased 14 percentage points after participation in the program. 32% of participants reported improved job performance and 28% said their participation improved their chances of finding a job. One participant described his experience with TMC as being a "pipeline" to his personal growth and success:

"I highly recommend the program to anyone looking for greater purpose in life following their military career. The platoon has been a pipeline to my own personal success and I know it has the potential to do the same for many more."

In summary, internal research suggests personal growth through skill building, sense of purpose and achieving goals they have set for themselves (resiliency) are top motivators for veterans who participate in TMC programs, and is an observable outcome that is produced through participation in TMC.

⁵ Monica M. Matthieu, Karen A. Lawrence, and Emma Robertson-Blackmore, "The impact of a civic service program on biopsychosocial outcomes of post 9/11 U.S. military veterans," *Psychiatry Research* 248 (February 2017).

⁶ Stephanie A. Hooker, Kevin S. Masters, and Crystal L. Park, "A Meaningful Life Is a Healthy Life: A Conceptual Model Linking Meaning and Meaning Salience to Health," *Review of General Psychology* (2017).

⁷ Brett T. Litz, "Resilience in the aftermath of war trauma: a critical review and commentary," *Interface Focus* 4, no. 5 (2014).

Definition of Personal Growth:

Through participation in TMC programming and service, veterans develop and grow both professionally and personally in ways that help them successfully reintegrate to life after the military. Areas of growth include skill competency (job readiness), leadership, sense of purpose, self-confidence, communication and well-being.

The professional and personal development outcomes veterans are expected to increase are defined as follows:

Professional development

- **Job Readiness:** The veteran has received tangible skills that can be used in employment or continued service. The skills can be broken into two categories:
 - Skill-building: The veteran learns or hones a skillset that can be used in future employment or working in the community.
 - Skill translation: The veteran learns how to translate skills learned in the military to a civilian context
- **Leadership:** The veteran has reapplied and/or increased his/her leadership skills and can successfully manage a team.

Personal development

- **Purpose:** The veteran feels an increased sense of purpose or motivation in his/her life.
- **Confidence/empowerment:** The veteran feels more confident and self-assured in his or her ability to set goals and meet them.
- **Communication:** The veteran feels confident he/she has the tools needed to confidently communicate about his or her experience as a veteran—to other veterans as well as to non-veterans.
- **Wellbeing:** The veteran observes an increase in resiliency and ability to pursue and accomplish goals.

Addressing Veterans’ Needs by Promoting Personal Growth

<i>Unmet need</i>	<i>How TMC addresses need through Personal Growth</i>
Professional Development	By helping veterans build new skills and translate existing skills into the civilian world, the TMC empowers veterans with greater opportunities for economic security and making an impact in the community. TMC programs can also help veterans reapply leadership skills and experience which will benefit them on the job market and in continued service.
Personal Development	The TMC creates experiences for veterans that help them find a sense of purpose, inspire confidence within themselves, and endow them with the tools they need to increase their resiliency. Learning how to communicate about one’s own experience may be key to development of purpose and self-confidence. Finding a sense of purpose and becoming more resilient increase veterans’ wellbeing.

CONNECTEDNESS

Research on Veterans' Needs

One of the most significant barriers to successful reintegration for veterans is the social isolation many experience upon returning home. Only about 1% of the U.S. population has served in the military, meaning most veterans are coming home to communities that may not understand their specific needs and experiences.⁸ The Department of Veterans Affairs identifies social isolation⁹ as a major risk factor for suicide, which itself has become an epidemic among the veteran community.¹⁰ The risk may be higher among older veterans whose social resources dwindle with age. Moreover, women veterans experience especially high rates of isolation because of the many unique experiences they endure in the military.¹¹ Social isolation, even when it does not lead to suicide, can have deleterious effects on veterans' physical and mental health.¹² One study found that its effect on mortality is similar to the effects of smoking and substance abuse.¹³ Furthermore, social isolation also affects employment outcomes, with those who are socially isolated, or low on "social capital," being less likely to be employed.¹⁴

Connecting veterans to other veterans has proven a successful strategy to reduce the effects of social isolation. Studies of veteran peer support programs have been concluded that such programs can help veteran reintegration by promoting relationship building and also creating social networks that act as links to services and resources.¹⁵

Service programs that connect veterans together to achieve common goals or solve problems also have beneficial effects. A 2017 study of veterans who completed The Mission Continues civic service fellowship program found veterans reported decreased rates of social isolation and loneliness and an increase in sense of social support. Another study found that re-creating a familiar culture of camaraderie among veterans helps foster a sense of connectedness that helps veterans reintegrate into civilian life.¹⁶

While TMC programming will not directly address veterans' mental health needs, it can reduce the burden of social isolation by connecting veterans with each other, as well as non-veterans. The connectedness our programs inspire can help veterans feel less alone and ultimately aid in their reintegration process.

And as much as connecting vets with other vets is critical, connecting them to non-veterans is also important. Several studies have found evidence of a veteran/non-veteran divide that can increase social isolation among veterans and preclude their successful integration into civilian life, including employment.¹⁷ Programs that have attempted to bridge this gap have focused on promoting connection through storytelling and communication on both sides.¹⁸

⁸ Carl Andrew Castro and Sara Kintzle, "Suicides in the Military: The Post-Modern Combat Veteran and the Hemingway Effect," *Current Psychiatry Reports* 16, no. 460 (2014).

⁹ Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Services Research & Development Service, "Strategies for Suicide Prevention in Veterans," January 2009.

¹⁰ The VA estimates that 22 veterans commit suicide every day.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Liyun Wu and Marilyn W. Lewis, "Disabilities among veterans and their utilization of health care," *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine* 3, no. 1 (2015).

¹³ Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, and J. Bradley Layton, "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review," *The Public Library of Science* (2010).

¹⁴ Cecilia Aslund, Bengt Starrin, and Kent W. Nilsson, "Psychosomatic symptoms and low psychological well-being in relation to employment status: the influence of social capital in a large cross-sectional study in Sweden," *International Journal for Equity in Health* 13, no. 22 (2014).

¹⁵ Christopher Brown, Karen Besterman-Dahan, Margeaux Chavez, Eni Njoh, and William Smith, "'It gave me an excuse to get out into society again': Decreasing Veteran Isolation through a Community Agricultural Peer Support Model," *Journal of Veterans Studies* 1, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁶ Derrick Kranke, June Gin, Rebecca Saia, Kevin Heslin, and Aram Dobalian, "A qualitative investigation that applies an ecological strengths-based perspective to veterans' experience of reintegration into civilian life," *Military Behavioral Health* 4, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁷ Jenny Lu Mallamo, "Bridging the Civilian-Military Divide With Stories," *Time*, April 11, 2015.

¹⁸ "The other one percent: Bridging the military-civilian divide in Brooklyn," PBS, November 9, 2014.

TMC Internal Research

Internal evaluations have found veterans cite connecting with other veterans among their top reasons for participating in TMC programs. More than two-thirds (67.8%) of participants in a 2017 survey said connecting with veterans was a reason they got involved with TMC. Additionally, three-quarters of participants reported feeling more connected with other veterans’ post-participation with TMC. This sense of connection with other veterans is critical not only for support and camaraderie, but because veterans can help other veterans find the resources they need, like job opportunities or services for health needs.

Feeling more connected to veterans can be especially beneficial to veterans with special needs or experiences who lack opportunities to connect with veterans like them in their natural environments. As one woman participant explained in a 2017 focus group:

“Being around veterans is a total plus. Because one, my husband is a civilian. There are still some things that I haven’t shared with him, but other female veterans and veterans in general understand.”

In addition to connecting with other veterans, the TMC also offers opportunities to connect more deeply with non-veteran populations. After participating in TMC programs, 59.6% of veterans said they felt more connected to the non-veteran community. Many times veterans are able to make stronger connections with non-veterans in their lives once they develop the tools to communicate about their experiences as veterans and tell their stories to people in their lives. The tools to communicate about one’s own experiences is part of the personal growth TMC programs help foster (See Personal Growth above) that allows veterans to foster that connection.

Veterans can also build connections that will help them in future activities, like finding a job. More than three in five participants (63%) in the Service Platoon Program said they were able to build more networking opportunities through their participation.

Definition of Connectedness:

Through participation in The Mission Continues, veterans feel a deeper sense of connection—to other veterans, to their own community or social network, and/or to professional networks.

Specifically, connectedness can mean the following:

- Better connected and/or closer to other veterans
- Better connected and/or closer to their own community/social network
- Increased professional networking opportunities

Addressing Veterans’ Needs by Promoting Connectedness

<i>Unmet need</i>	<i>How TMC addresses need through Connectedness</i>
Social support and camaraderie among veterans	Connect veterans with other veterans by creating a team of veterans dedicated to service.
Veteran/non-veteran divide	TMC creates experiences for veterans that connect them with teams of non-veterans in pursuing community impact.
Professional networking	TMC provides additional opportunities for professional networking to facilitate veterans’ career prospects.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Research on Veterans' and Community Needs

Communities all across the country are facing uphill battles and unable to serve their constituencies. Many communities in America are under-funded and under-resourced.

Poverty¹⁹ is rampant and families living in poor communities are less likely to have adequate healthcare and more likely to be unemployed; educational resources are slim, food insecurity is widespread, and safety is of great concern.²⁰ So many communities need support to solve their problems and lift up their families, but without resources, many communities' problems only intensify.

Communities can benefit greatly from allowing The Mission Continues and their veteran participants to serve them. Veterans are uniquely qualified to help disadvantaged communities because of the skills and mindsets they have honed through their military service, including:

- Problem-solving
- Endurance
- Team-focused
- Efficient
- Mission-driven
- Action-oriented

As a group, veterans have the ability to infuse American communities with fresh ideas, energy, and human capacity to problem solve and build stronger communities. Moreover, allowing veterans to impact communities through their service is the mechanism by which we promote personal growth and connectedness. Substantial evidence indicates helping others boosts one's overall happiness and wellbeing.²¹ Studies²² have found positively impacting the lives of others can help enhance one's own sense of purpose as well as one's resilience.²³ Helping others also increases empathy and one's ability to understand one's colleagues as well and the community they serve.²⁴

When veterans return home, oftentimes they experience a feeling of being "lost," without a sense of purpose.²⁵ Their desire to continue serving and impacting people around them often goes untapped. TMC programs can help fill that gap by creating opportunities for veterans to continue serving others and impacting communities that need their help.

Veterans also benefit from working in communities because they work alongside nonprofit organization partners, who are often non-veterans. This creates opportunities for veteran/non-veteran connections (See Connectedness above), but also allows veterans to practice working with people of different backgrounds. At the same time, non-veterans can also gain a better understanding of the veteran population. Promoting empathy on both sides helps further alleviate the military/non-veteran divide that is common in workplaces, schools, and communities across America.²⁶

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States*: 2015.

²⁰ "The High Cost of Being Poor in the U.S.," Coalition on Human Needs, September 20, 2016.

²¹ Katherine S. Nelson, Kristin Layous, Steven W. Cole, and Sonja Lyubomirsky, "Do unto others or treat yourself? The effects of pro-social and self-focused behavior on psychological flourishing," *Emotion*, 16, no. 6 (2016).

²² Carolyn E. Schwartz, Penelope M. Keyl, John P. Marcum, and Rita Bode, "Helping Others Shows Differential Benefits on Health and Well-being for Male and Female Teens," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 10, no. 4 (2009).

²³ Eran Melkman, Yifat Mor-Salwo, Katharina Mangold, Maren Zeller, and Rami Benbenishty, "Care leavers as helpers: Motivations for and benefits of helping others," *Children and Youth Services Review* 54 (2015).

²⁴ Laura R. Welp and Christina M. Brown, "Self-compassion, empathy, and helping intentions," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 9, no. 1 (2014).

²⁵ Lisa A. Brenner, Beeta Y. Homaifar, Lawrence Adler, Jessica H. Wolfman, and Jan Kemp, "Suicidality and veterans with a history of traumatic brain injury: Precipitating events, protective factors, and prevention strategies," *Rehabilitation Psychology* 54, no. 4 (2009).

²⁶ Christina L. Lafferty, Kenneth L. Alford, Mark Davis, and Richard O'Connor, "Did you shoot anyone? A Practitioner's Guide to Combat Veteran Workplace and Classroom Integration," *Advanced Management Journal* 73, no. 4 (2008).



Finally, when veterans see how they've impacted communities, the sense of accomplishment that results often encourages them to continue to utilize their skills and experiences in their own communities. Thus, creating opportunities for veterans to serve inspires them to continue serving well after their participation in TMC ends.

TMC Internal Research

Giving back and lifting up communities were key themes in a several 2017 focus groups of TMC participants. When asked what they got out of participation in TMC programs, many participants cited was their ability to help communities in need:

"The number one reason was ultimately because we are serving communities that nobody else wants to go into."

"The number one reason for me was because this is an organization that gives back to underserved communities."

Many reported that seeing the impact of their work was particularly rewarding:

"It was amazing, to be able to go into these places and help out. To see the reactions to that little bit of work that we did...it was just eight hours out of my day, but it's going to help these folks 24 hours a day for a long time. It makes me feel really, really good to be able to go in and help the people."

Veterans who experience having an impact in communities often feel inspired to engage in additional work in their own communities. A 2017 survey of TMC program participants revealed that 92.1% of participants said they felt they could make a positive difference in their own community. According to a 2015 study, among Service Platoon members, 80% reported TMC programs helped them sustain a role of service, even one year after program completion. Platoon participants also feel more confident in their ability to impact their communities: 75% say they have the ability to make a difference, and 60% are aware of what can be done to meet community needs. Thus, TMC programming that includes a focus on community impact can help ensure veterans continue their mission to serve communities in need, which in turn will also impact participants in their personal growth and connectedness.

Definition of Community Impact:

By working to support the creation of empowered community organizations and/or the building of strong, healthy, and sustainable communities, veterans impact communities that need their help. Veterans also reap personal benefits (personal growth, connectedness) from their engagement, including better understanding non-veteran populations and being inspired to continue their service at home.

- **Tangible community benefits:** The community or community organization reaches some pre-defined intended goal that they could not have reached without the service of veterans.
- **Empathy (Community):** The community has a better understanding of the needs of veterans or feels more closely connected to the veteran population.
- **Empathy:** Veterans learn how to work with others of different backgrounds and develop a sense of empathy for the communities they work in.
- **Further engagement:** Veterans feel equipped to engage with their own communities, through service or other forms of engagement.

Addressing Veterans’ Needs by Promoting Community Impact

<i>Unmet need</i>	<i>How TMC addresses need through Community Impact</i>
Under-resourced and under-served Communities in America	Veterans use the skills they honed in the military to help and empower struggling communities to solve their problems
Desire to continue serving	Provide opportunities for veterans to help under-served communities
Veteran isolation and lack of purpose	Veterans learn and recognize they can make a difference and impact people who need their help, which inspires them to continue serving in their own communities
Veteran/Non-veteran divide	Create opportunities for veterans and non-veterans to connect and work together

III. CONCLUSION

To review, veterans return to civilian life with a host of needs that are not currently being properly addressed or met. From under-employment, to social isolation, to the lack of an outlet to continue one’s desire to serve, there are a panoply of issues veterans face, oftentimes on their own and without proper support. This is where TMC can step in and help fill the gaps with our work.

For veterans to thrive economically, they need to develop themselves both professionally and personally. That means building their skills and learning how to translate the skills they’ve learned in the military to civilian life. It also means reclaiming their sense of purpose, building their self-confidence, becoming more resilient, and improving their communication skills to equip them for employment and beyond when they return home. TMC can support and promote these personal growth outcomes in our programming.

But learning new skills or finding one’s sense of purpose are not panaceas for the issues veterans face when they return home. Connectedness to other veterans and to non-veteran populations are also essential outcomes that address the social isolation so many veterans feel when they encounter post-military life. Fostering connectedness through service projects is an essential prerequisite for veterans’ personal growth to flourish.

Finally, promoting personal growth and connectedness is best done through engaging veterans in service projects that positively impact communities. Several studies have found that helping others leads to several personal growth outcomes and also fosters a sense of connectedness among participants who become more empathetic as a result. Additionally, veterans are uniquely qualified to help communities in need because of the skills and qualities they developed through their military service. Lastly, engaging veterans in impacting communities fulfills their desire to continue to serve and prepares them to continue a life of service back home in their own communities.

To successfully implement The Empowered Veteran Index outlined in this document, we will develop a measurement and evaluation program to monitor its implementation and examine how well our programs are producing the three components of this framework. By using research that examines best practices, we will develop an evaluation program that will not only keep our organization accountable, but will allow us to identify shortcomings or barriers to successful implementation.

APPENDIX

Veteran Reintegration Organizations: Other Frameworks

Team Red, White, and Blue's mission is to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity.

The organization's guiding principle is the concept of enrichment, defined as creating quality relationships and experiences that contribute to life satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Team Red, White, and Blue believes enrichment is made up of three core elements: health, people, and purpose. Each program is guided by these three elements, which the organization delineates as follows:

Health: Increasing opportunities for participants to connect through physical activity (fitness, sports) to improve physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.

People: Creating authentic (genuine, quality, and supportive relationships that instill mutual trust and accountability) connections that lead to improvements in participants' sense of belonging, purpose, and community engagement.

Purpose: Engaging members in meaningful team and community-based experiences and service that renew self-identity and purpose in life.

Evaluation studies confirm the effectiveness of Team Red, White, and Blue's programs on some of the outcomes described above. A recent survey showed 90% of participants believe being a part of the organization increased their sense of belonging to a larger community, 86% felt they have made lasting, positive relationships, and 81% feel more valued by others.

The Wounded Warrior Project's mission is to honor and empower wounded warriors. WWP is the hand extended to encourage warriors as they adjust to their new normal and achieve triumphs. Offering a variety of programs and services, WWP is equipped to serve warriors with every type of injury—from the physical to the invisible wounds of war.

WWP's work is guided by three principles: connect, serve, and empower.

WWP connects warriors, their families, and caregivers to peers, programs, and communities.

WWP serves veterans by providing free programs, including for mental health and wellness, physical health, career and benefits counseling, and support for the severely injured.

WWP empowers warriors to live life on their own terms, mentor fellow warriors, and embody the WWP logo by carrying their peers toward recovery.

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