

## White Oak VI PARTICIPANTS

American Legion  
American Red Cross  
America's Warrior Partnership  
Armed Services YMCA  
Association of the United States Army  
Association for Defense Communities  
Bipartisan Policy Center  
Be The Change, Inc.  
Bob Woodruff Foundation  
Blue Star Families  
Center for a New American Security  
Council on Foundations  
Department of Defense  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Elizabeth Dole Foundation  
Fisher House Foundation  
George W. Bush Institute  
Got Your 6  
Institute for Veterans and Military Families  
Lockheed Martin Corporation  
Military Child Education Coalition  
Military Officers Association of America  
Military Spouse Behavioral Health Clinicians  
National Guard Bureau  
National Military Family Association  
The Philanthropy Roundtable  
Purdue Military Research Center  
RAND Corporation  
Robert R. McCormick Foundation  
Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving  
Student Veterans of America  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors  
Unite US  
United Health Foundation  
United Services Organization  
United States Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installations Management  
United States Army, Army Installations Command  
United States Marine Corps, Marine and Family Division  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation  
USAA Foundation  
Vets' Community Connections  
The White House  
Wounded Warrior Project

**Overview:** The sixth “White Oak” convening continued the tradition of bringing together leading advocates working on behalf of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors to encourage independent thinking and collaboration among major non-profit military service organizations, related government offices and other key philanthropic contributors to this cause. The main goals were to take stock of recent public, private and philanthropic collaborations to identify top priorities, gaps and potential for growth; to assess local community engagement with the purpose of strengthening families, smoothing veteran reintegration and improving overall civil-military relations through increased familiarity and cooperation; and finally, to improve understandings of “public private partnership” to elicit better collaboration and innovative approaches to critical issues such as spouse employment, military family life and veteran transition.

**Resolution:** White Oak partners commit to supporting each other and fostering an environment of trusted collaboration to generate innovative, scalable concepts that can be translated into evidence based, empirically driven legislative action and valuable new programs. Guided by a human-centered approach, members resolve to develop and strengthen public private partnerships that improve military-veteran population connectedness, thereby naturalizing positive images of military members, veterans and their families and facilitating family strength, spouse employment and veteran transition.

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

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

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

- Across all sectors—government, philanthropy, community organization, and military family/veteran organizations—the top priorities identified involved reducing barriers between military/veteran populations and non-military populations. These roadblocks are recognized as physical, policy-based and/or ideational, to include: unnecessarily aggressive “red tape” impeding partner access to bases as well as sources of data, information and know-how; social misperceptions of military members, veterans and their families; a lack of common metrics and language amongst collaborating public and private entities; and educational, financial and

quality of life limitations that disadvantage and distance military and veteran populations from wider society.

- A common desire expressed was that fellow sectors converge on the idea that many problems faced by military and veteran families are in fact the same as those faced by the non-military population. As a result, tackling these issues with scalable approaches is to the benefit of the country, as a whole. Government and military family/veteran organizations therefore seek outside assistance in promoting this message of similarity, *“we serve you; we are you,”* to the American people. Conversely, philanthropic and community organizations call for military members, veterans and their families to *“self identify”* as military, evidencing this positive messaging with their own examples of community participation and contribution.

Additionally, sectors emphasize the primacy of the national security mission, the speed and efficiency of private organizations over public, the budgetary and experiential benefit of inviting partners to the decision-making table, and the slow-changing, uneasily quantified nature of communities.

- Inter-Sector reflections also unite on calls for increased emphasis on data and leveraging technology. All sectors seek improved data sharing and collection, specifically performance data, demographic comparisons and disaggregated data. Technology platforms by which to exchange data and the development of common metrics allow for helpful cross-sector analysis, while geography-based data and support mapping reveal physical and functional gaps and/or duplicity.

### **Community Engagement**

- Significant agreement centers around the idea that community engagement between military and civilian populations at the local level requires a *“red line”* approach to define common objectives and unite the diverse populations and levels of governance involved.

A campaign of data and explanatory findings, visuals to communicate meanings and powerful narrative that energizes players to action is required to secure the value proposition of embracing military members and veterans within cities and states.

- A critical node of influence is identified as the garrison/base level commander. This individual uniquely impacts military and veteran family strength, connecting families to local community resources, facilitating cross community social networks beneficial to spouse and veteran employment opportunities, and communicating a positive image of these active contributors in the wider community. Through such connections, military service is revealed as an attractive lifestyle, enhancing recruitment efforts, while military family strength is boosted by positive *“at home”* experience that fosters readiness and retention. Thus, overall national security is bolstered while civil-military social distances are reduced.
- In geographies distant from military installations, collaborative partnerships with national level organizations are particularly important. Connecting grassroots efforts to a countrywide common narrative empowers the diffusion of the idea that military and veteran families are integral members of their local communities, that military service is an attractive lifestyle, and transition from active duty to veteran status is a normal and natural process with significant benefits for the local communities to which veterans return.

Formally instituted, community level veteran representatives with connectivity to state and federal echelons are highly recommended, but these should include the currently serving military too. Informal National Guard members, veteran or military-affiliated individuals, such as adult *“military brats”* also offer valuable pathways to engagement in regions without military presence.

**Public Private Partnerships/Collaboration**

- Despite noteworthy legal, cultural and policy-oriented challenges, general agreement favors public private partnerships as major opportunities for continued and expanded support to military and veteran families amidst austere budgetary environments and conditions of stretched resources. Strong partnerships are characterized by proof of need and a workable concept, a well-researched and user-friendly plan, an advocate within the partnering organization(s), solid policy support and persistence. The value of a well-established partnership—or “collaboration,” as the military prefers for legal reasons—is the capacity for growth and scalability, multiplying the forces at hand by facilitating greater access to information, offering multidimensional/inter-subjective analysis and amplifying impact.
- Better collaboration among sectors is best achieved through tailored, local level initiatives that can be scaled up, as fitting. Public outreach to educate and increase awareness of needs enables community members who want

to engage but often do not know how to help. Finally, creating mechanisms to ensure accountability is vital to success.

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

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

*Convening themes coalesce around the argument that overcoming negative stereotypes to reveal military/veteran families as positive contributing members of local society is key to diminishing “community indifference” to service. Through collaborative data compilation and a well-established common language, partners can promote a narrative capable of bridging civil-military social distance, removing misperceptions, and inviting greater familiarity between the general population and military/veteran families.*

**Next Steps:** There are opportunities to outbrief White Oak outcomes on the Hill, to philanthropies and to the corporate sector. The steering committee will solicit attendee interest in organizing such briefings. There are specific opportunities to look for legislative action to facilitate military spouse hiring. Corporations should be encouraged to hire, and we can all disseminate the corporate “playbook” which was created after White Oak 2016. The philanthropic sector emphasizes the importance of linking established charitable interest areas to related or similar military/veteran needs.

**Conclusion:** White Oak VI witnessed the successful gathering of creative, individual thinkers dedicated to transformative dialogue, collaboration and the development of innovative approaches to producing tangible outcomes for military members, veterans, their families, caregivers and survivors. Attendees importantly conclude that by reducing barriers to partnership, community interaction can travel in both directions, not only allowing partners to enter into military/veteran spaces, but also encouraging the military-veteran population to engage locally, reducing feelings of social distance/divide. One participant summed up this sentiment saying, “Ask not what your community can do for you; ask what you can do for your community!”