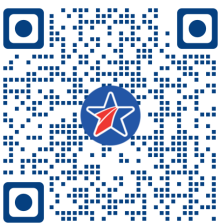


Belonging and Perceptions of Community Support



Since 2009, the Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS) has collected responses annually from military families addressing issues related to housing, financial security, employment, food insecurity, healthcare, childcare, and community belonging. The 2025 MFLS heard from more than 6,000 military-connected respondents, including 2,608 active-duty family respondents: 15% ($n=401$) active-duty service members and 85% ($n=2,207$) spouses/domestic partners of active-duty service members). *Belonging and Perceptions of Community Support* describes how active-duty families' feelings of belonging relate to their perceptions about support from their neighbors and local communities.

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors: AARP, Chobani, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Macy's, Inc., and USAA for their generous support of the 2025 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS). We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to The BlackRock Foundation, craig newmark philanthropies, CSX Transportation, and the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation for their ongoing support of Blue Star Families as a whole. Your contributions enable us to continue serving military families with impactful programs and research year-round.

Active-Duty Families in Their Local Communities

Most active-duty family respondents reported **feeling safe in their local communities** and **trusting their neighbors**, but few felt their local communities would be prepared to support military families if the U.S. engaged in a major conflict.

Nearly three-quarters (73%, n=1,546) of active-duty family respondents reported they trust their neighbors and **more than three-quarters (83%, n=1,743) indicated they feel safe where they live.**¹ However, only 52% (n=1,084) were satisfied with their local community. Of the remaining respondents, 15% (n=306) were unsatisfied, while the rest were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied.

The 2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey² found that a majority (83%, n=2,428) of active-duty family respondents anticipated the U.S. would engage in a major conflict in the next 3–5 years. To further understand, the 2025 MFLS asked respondents if they believed neighbors in their communities were prepared to support military families if the U.S. engaged in a major conflict and only 37% (n=787) agreed.³ Only 19% (n=489) of active-duty family respondents to the 2024 MFLS agreed that the American public appreciates the sacrifices of military families.⁴ This is in contrast to the 45% of Americans⁵ who say they do — demonstrating a potential gap between experience and perception between these two communities.



Likelihood to Share Military Experiences with a Neighbor⁶

23% (n=551)

Unlikely to share experiences⁷

51% (n=1,077)

Likely to share experiences



Active-duty family respondents volunteered (55%, n=1,153) in their local communities at nearly double the rate of the U.S. population (28.3%).⁸

37% agreed that neighbors in their community would be prepared to support local military families if the U.S. engaged in a major conflict.



¹ Respondents were asked to consider their local community for these questions. In previous iterations of the MFLS, the phrasing was local civilian community or separately, local military community. Based upon answers to multiple choice and qualitative data in 2025, many respondents were considering both their civilian and military communities in this year's responses.

² Blue Star Families. (2025). "2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Pride in Service." https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/BSF_MFLS24_Comp_Report_Pride_Svc-v2.pdf

³ 24% (n=499) said neither agree nor disagree, 32% (n=679) disagreed with the statement, and 7% (n=145) selected "I don't know."

⁴ Blue Star Families. "2024 MFLS: Pride in Service."

⁵ Blue Star Families. (2024). Americans' perspectives on military families. [Infographic]. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/BSF_YG_Infographic_Jun24_2-1.pdf

⁶ Throughout this finding, 'neighbor' is interchangeable with 'civilian' or non-military connected individuals in respondents' local communities. See the glossary for more information.

⁷ The remaining 26% (n=551) were neither likely nor unlikely.

⁸ Hanson Schlachter, Laura, and Tim Marshall. 2024. "New U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps Research Tracks Virtual Volunteering for First Time." Census.gov, November 19, 2024. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/11/civic-engagement-and-volunteerism.html>

Perceptions of Local Communities and Sense of Belonging

Active-duty family respondents who **did not** feel a sense of belonging were the **least likely to report understanding, appreciation, or support from neighbors** in their local communities.

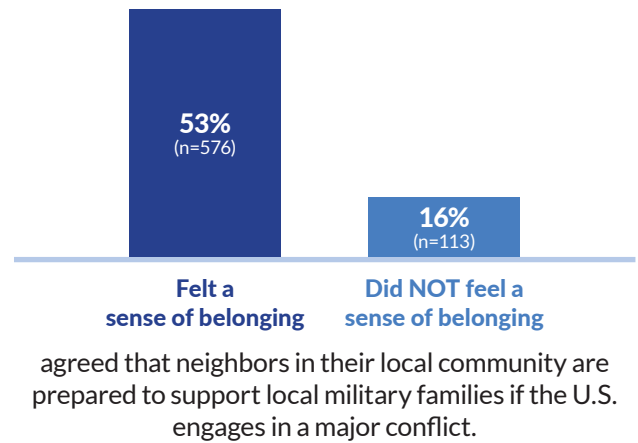


Table 1. Perceptions of Local Community Support Differ by Belonging
Active-Duty Family Respondents

Of those who felt a sense of belonging ⁹ to their local community ¹⁰		Of those who did NOT feel a sense of belonging ¹¹ to their local community
60% (n=647)	Were likely ¹² to share military experiences with a neighbor in their local community	42% (n=289)
71% (n=769)	Agreed ¹³ that neighbors in their local community truly appreciate the sacrifices made by local service members, veterans, and their families alike	32% (n=266)
53% (n=576)	Agreed that neighbors in their local community would be prepared to support local military families if the U.S. engaged in a major conflict	16% (n=113)

NOTE: Of those active-duty family respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community:"
43% (n=135) were likely to share military experiences with a neighbor in their local community
37% (n=115) agreed that neighbors in their local community truly appreciate the sacrifices made by local service members, veterans, and their families
31% (n=96) agreed that neighbors in their local community are prepared to support local families if the U.S. engages in a major conflict

⁹ Those who reported a sense of belonging to their local community are defined as those who selected "strongly agree," "agree," or "somewhat agree" with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community."
¹⁰ Of those active-duty family respondents who neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community," 43% (n=135) were likely to share military experiences with a neighbor in their local community; 37% (n=115) agreed that neighbors in their local community truly appreciate the sacrifices made by local service members, veterans, and their families; and 31% (n=96) agreed that neighbors in their local community are prepared to support local military families if the U.S. engages in a major conflict
¹¹ Those who did not report a sense of belonging to their local community are defined as those who selected "strongly disagree," "disagree," or "somewhat agree" to the statement "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community."
¹² "Were likely" is defined as those respondents who selected "likely" or "very likely."
¹³ "Agree" is defined as those respondents who selected "somewhat agree," "agree," or "strongly agree."

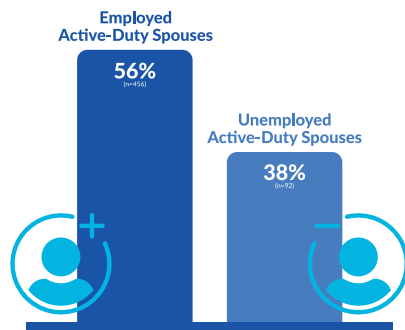
Quality-of-Life Challenges and Sense of Belonging

Active-duty family respondents who reported quality-of-life challenges (e.g., recent PCS move, military spouse unemployment, food insecurity, etc.¹⁴) were less likely to feel a sense of belonging to their local community.

Fewer (46%, n=322) active-duty family respondents who had PCSed in the 12 months prior to survey fielding felt a sense of belonging to their local community compared to 54% (n=760) of those who had **not** PCSed in the past 12 months.

More than half (56%, n=456) of active-duty spouse respondents¹⁵ who reported they were employed full or part time felt a sense of belonging to their local community, compared with 38% (n=92) of those who reported they were unemployed.¹⁶ Fifty-four percent (n=761) of those active-duty families categorized as having high food security reported a sense of belonging to their local community, 49% (n=150) of those with low food security, 37% (n=95) of those with very low food security.

Felt a Sense of Belonging to Their Local Community:



Respondents who did **not** report a sense of belonging were asked what would help make them/their family feel a sense of belonging to their local community and, 23% (n=153¹⁷) reported they would like actionable support (e.g., childcare help and information on services). **Many respondents reported wanting support that was more than “thank you for your service.”** Other top themes were related to community programs and events where military families are invited/ the focus (23%, n=153), and for non-military and military communities to be more connected (15%, n=99) through policies, events, and stories.

¹⁴ There were no major differences in the proportions of respondents who reported a sense of belonging to their local community when comparing white active-duty family respondents to respondents of color, LGBTQ+ active-duty families to those who did not identify as LGBTQ+ families, or caregiving active-duty families to non-caregiving active-duty families.

¹⁵ In this instance, ‘active-duty spouse respondents’ refers to those who indicated that they were not also an active-duty service member.

¹⁶ Unemployed’ refers to those who want or need paid employment and have actively sought in the past four weeks.

¹⁷ This data is from an open-ended question. In the instance of qualitative data, the ‘n’ here represents the total of three categories: actionable support, community programs/events, and connecting military and non-military communities. Here, and with all qualitative themes, ‘n’ refers to the instances (in this case, 403) any of these categories were mentioned.

What would you like to see in your local community to help you and or families like yours feel like they belong?

Respondents who did **not** report a sense of belonging said:

Actionable support (providing information on services, childcare, etc.) and community programs/events (23% for each, n=153)

“I would love to see more opportunities for genuine connection within the community-spaces where military families and civilians can get to know each other, build trust, and form lasting relationships. Feeling trusted and welcome is so important, especially for our kids. When families feel safe and included, children feel more secure and supported too. Community events, mentorship programs, or even casual neighborhood gatherings would go a long way in helping us feel like we truly belong.”

– Active-Duty Spouse

A stronger connection between military and non-military communities (15%, n=99)

“Thoughtful welcome to the community – open house to local government, information packet, picnic – really anything that acknowledges your value and existence in the community.”

– Active-Duty Spouse