

# MILITARY SERVICE INITIATIVE: RESEARCH PROJECT ONE

In 2014, the George W. Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative undertook a research project to determine key issues facing the 2.5 million men and women who have served in the United States military since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Specifically, the research project had three key objectives:

- 1. Give Americans a more accurate sense of who our veterans are so the Nation can better understand what they need;*
- 2. Illustrate the landscape veterans navigate as they leave the military so the Nation can develop a more productive approach to helping them build successful civilian lives;*
- 3. Identify key issues, especially issues related to transition to the civilian world.*

The first two objectives were met (respectively) with the publication of "I am a 9/11 Veteran" and "My America: Navigating the Post-9/11 Veteran Landscape." The third objective was met by conducting an evaluation of the research material on military veterans and their transition to civilian life. This evaluation involved studying existing literature and data as well as media reports and reports on philanthropic organizations. A survey of thought leaders was also conducted. The Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University conducted the thought leader survey as well as the evaluation of existing research.

Based upon this research, the Military Service Initiative along with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families identified 10 significant findings to be addressed by the private, non-profit, and philanthropic sectors, in coordination with the public sector, in order to improve the lives of those who make up the Post-9/11 Veteran Generation:

***Independent Sector Involvement:*** *There is a significant and enduring role for the private sector, philanthropy, and non-profit organizations in advancing the social, economic, and wellness concerns of post-9/11 veterans and their families.*

***Community Connectedness:*** *While coordinated and effective policies, programs, and resources are critical at the national level, the most urgent need for support services for the post-9/11 veteran is at the local and community-based level where they ultimately transition and reintegrate.*

***Social Connectedness:*** *The social and cultural distance between post-9/11 veterans and the Americans who did not serve in uniform since 2001, described as the Civilian-Military Divide, represents a pervasive barrier to veteran post-service life and to the all-volunteer force.*

***Media:*** *The media has not accurately represented the issues of post-9/11 veterans well, but can play a powerful and enduring role in shaping the narrative that will define this generation of veterans.*

***Transition Readiness and Sense of Identity/Purpose:*** *Post-9/11 veterans, particularly the youngest veterans – are generally unprepared for the transition from military to civilian life.*

**Veteran Cohort Programming Differentiation:** *Post-9/11 veterans are not a homogeneous group and transition and reintegration concerns vary significantly by cohort. Veterans with disabilities and junior enlisted personnel are examples of two distinct cohorts with specific concerns.*

**Interconnected Transition Issues:** *While many veterans transition seamlessly, still others face a complex web of interconnected transition issues. Resolving any one specific problem usually requires addressing a range of additional underlying and interconnected financial, social, and wellness transition challenges.*

**Employment and Education Primacy:** *Employment and education are the primary transition and reintegration concerns of all post-9/11 veterans, as they impact so many other social, economic, and wellness outcomes over the veterans' lives.*

**Reintegration with Family:** *Family transition and reintegration issues are among the most pressing of concerns for post-9/11 veterans, yet are too often overlooked.*

**Women Veterans Efforts:** *Women veterans face a distinct set of challenges.*

These key issues, and appropriately addressing them, were identified after consulting a large variety of sources, which are listed alphabetically by category below. This research project is intended to be informative. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all sources, nor was it intended to develop broad new original research. The steps outlined above, however, will improve the lives of veterans and help them become the civic leaders the Nation needs while also encouraging a new generation of Americans to consider military service.

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