

Chapter 15

The White Oak Retreat: Iterative Retreats as a Uniquely Effective Mechanism for Building Consensus and Coordinating Support in the Military Community 2010–2016

Jennifer L. Hurwitz, Cristin Orr Shiffer, and Hisako Sonethavilay

15.1 Context Leading to White Oak

The concept of a collaborative retreat among government and nonprofit actors in support of service members, veterans, and their families emerged following the 2008 election amid a rising consensus in the military and veteran support community that support for the challenges facing the American military in wartime required cross-sector solutions, and the perception that a new president presented an opportunity to engage the new Administration and increase the Commander in Chief's understanding of military family and veteran concerns. No one sector or organization had the ability to identify, organize, and fund solutions to the problems arising as a result of, at that time, nearly 8 years of continuous war in a post-9/11 world. Active duty service members and veterans who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan were returning to their local communities with high and increasing rates of depression, brain injury, and suicide; their families were trying to cope with the disruption of family life by repeated deployments (Berglass, 2010). As the public became more aware of these issues impacting military and veteran families, support for the all-volunteer force and veterans increased substantially. Philanthropic funders, corporate entities, and nonprofit organizations began trying to piece together services within local communities that would meet the growing needs. However, this vast "sea of goodwill" that included more than 40,000 philanthropic organizations across the United States was in need of coordination (Carter & Kidder, 2015) and while recognition of the need for support had increased among national governmental actors such as Congress

J.L. Hurwitz, Ph.D. (✉) • C.O. Shiffer • H. Sonethavilay
Research and Policy Department, Blue Star Families, Encinitas, CA, USA
e-mail: jhurwitz@bluestarfam.org; cristin@bluestarfam.org; hsonethavilay@bluestarfam.org

and the new Obama Administration, identifying and prioritizing ways to provide that support required guidance from the “front lines”—the warfighters, veterans, and their families.

15.2 Background of White Oak

In light of this conclusion, military family and veteran support organization leaders envisioned a candid retreat under Chatham House Rule to incubate creative thinking and collaboration among participants across government, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors; this is where the story of White Oak begins. In the fall of 2009, with the Obama Administration’s transition more firmly in place, deliberation over a renewed Afghanistan engagement or “surge,” emerged. A new Afghanistan policy for a new Administration, along with a number of critical assessments of “on the ground” progress suggested that significant American military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan would be continuing for the foreseeable future—and it also generated interest on developing improved and expanded support for the military and veteran community. Doug Wilson, a leader in the veteran community support space who was also serving as a board member of a large philanthropic foundation, was able to obtain use of one of the foundation’s assets, the White Oak Conference Center, and connected with Kathy Roth-Douquet, CEO of Blue Star Families, with the aim of convening a cross-sector retreat that could focus attention on the need for increased military family and veteran support and incubate an effective, collaborative strategy to that end. Together they formed a core team comprised of senior government, nonprofit, and philanthropic leaders to design a conference to bring the required actors together to address the concerns described above. Given that many of the challenges required cross-sector solutions, a retreat-like conference was felt to be the best structure to facilitate the needed coordination. The retreat would bring together public and private sector leaders for a weekend of focused discussions aimed at developing a common agenda without interfering with the ongoing individual efforts being pursued by participants and a date was set for January 2010.

15.3 Importance of Format at White Oak

During his time as executive vice president for policy at the Howard Gilman Foundation, Wilson established the Leaders Project, which brought together innovative, next-generation policy leaders from around the world to discuss global challenges. Using his insights from and experiences with this project, he envisioned a specific format for White Oak.

I proposed a format that would minimize formal presentations and maximize interactivity, informal discussion, and extracurricular bonding in an environment that was conducive to strengthening personal ties and to listening to each other, rather than talking at each other.

To that end, White Oak participants began a tradition of everyone around the same table; opening with very brief introductions to give all involved a sense of belonging, inclusion, and openness to different approaches for common issues; identifying springboard questions that would frame discussion of the issues to emphasize new and creative thinking rather than “show and tell” presentations; informal dress to reinforce a relaxed atmosphere; breakout sessions to provide venues for more focused discussion and brainstorming of general session discussions; and final report sessions in a very informal atmosphere (couches and chairs in a big lodge) at the end to help foster a sense of productivity and teamwork (Wilson, 2016).

15.4 Historical View of White Oak Responses and Strategies

15.4.1 *White Oak I*

Although the retreat’s formal title was “America Joins Forces with Military Families,” the simplified “White Oak” title was, and continues to be, more commonly used. At the inaugural meeting in January 2010, 55 participants from key military family and government organizations convened at White Oak Plantation. The group included both subject matter experts and generalists with considerable impact on the development and implementation of government policies and private sector programs. The retreat was designed to highlight new thinking, develop networks, and update frameworks within which many of those invited were already addressing independently. Individuals at the first White Oak participated in an agenda specifically designed to build cross-sector partnerships in order to foster innovative public–private strategies that would better meet the needs of veteran and military families and establish a common approach moving forward. Three central themes of community, empowerment, and asset mapping structured this agenda at White Oak I.

15.4.2 *White Oak II*

Throughout White Oak II, participants were buoyed by the progress that was being made at the Federal level and the refocusing of efforts for the military and veteran communities through the Presidential Study Directive-9, Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America’s Commitment, and Joining Forces¹; however, participants also recognized that much more needed to be accomplished. The objectives of White Oak II included: (1) continuing to address gaps in military family and veteran support; (2) highlighting areas where the private sector could be more effectively

¹For more information, please refer to Results.

engaged; and (3) exploring ways to reduce competition and overlap while promoting joint efforts toward realizing common goals. Both government and nongovernmental representatives cited miscommunication, confusing messaging, a myriad of barriers to public–private cooperation, and lack of access to military community populations as the main hurdles to collaboration across sectors. Additionally, education, employment, and wellness were discussed as key concerns.

15.4.3 White Oak III

By the time of White Oak III, several of the original White Oak organizers and participants were serving in key positions at the White House, on Congressional staffs, and at the Defense Department. Other participants had established significant collaborative initiatives, yet many new challenges loomed on the horizon. With the majority of combat troops removed from Iraq and Afghanistan, the public’s attention to military and veteran issues was waning while at the same time the Department of Defense’s (DoD) spending was significantly curtailed due to 2013’s Budget Control Act. Amid this financially constrained environment, White Oak III was an important opportunity to evaluate progress and discuss ways to preserve public support.

White Oak III was structured around three objectives: (1) sharing knowledge, perspectives, needs, and opportunities in working for the benefit of military families; (2) creating new relationships and building upon existing ones in support of operational and intellectual partnerships; and (3) achieving consensus in identifying new, scalable “big ideas” that could serve as galvanizing actions moving forward. The following priorities for moving the community forward were established during White Oak III: (1) resource multipliers are needed to counteract declining resources; (2) resource mapping is needed to improve knowledge and delivery of services; (3) decentralized services needed to foster local community integration; and (4) positive messaging to counteract “damaged service members and veterans” narrative and draw attention to the significant contributions military and veteran members bring to the communities in which they live must be an accompanying part of initiatives.

15.4.4 White Oak IV

During White Oak IV, the participants continued their line of forward thinking in the military and veteran community space, while strategizing how to maintain interest and awareness after almost 15 years of war. Three key issues were discussed: collaboration, communication and strategy, and gaps and solutions. Based on these discussions, the following topics were viewed as joint impact areas with collective

support and viable solutions: (1) continue to develop shared best practices for funders and their communities; (2) record and maintain data to better prepare for support during future conflicts; (3) formulate a 2016 Government Transition Strategy that presents a nonpartisan, united message of support for military and veteran families; (4) ensure asset mapping for maximum impact; (5) synchronize and align positive messaging; and (6) formalize the White Oak Consortium.

15.4.5 White Oak V

At White Oak V, dialogue and collaboration continued working toward the ultimate goal of providing military members, transitioning veterans, and their families with comprehensive support networks and superior care. Three themes structured the retreat: (1) defining priorities, opportunities, and challenges; (2) improving support through policy, specifically considering retention, the voice of military families, and personnel management; and (3) communicating a collective agenda and strategy to ensure the preservation of the Joining Forces initiative to continue support and partnership with the next administration, not on the basis of politics, but rather on the foundation of bipartisan civic responsibility to serve those who serve our great country.

15.5 Research Methodology and Themes from Participant Interviews

15.5.1 Research Methodology

The research team, consisting of two independent research contractors, used qualitative research methods to conduct interviews, analyze data, and develop themes from White Oak participant interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data “often have been advocated as the best strategy for discovery, exploring a new area, and developing hypotheses” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10) and as such was determined to be the best strategy for a more formal evaluation of the White Oak process. Out of 32 possible White Oak participants identified by the research team in conjunction with Blue Star Families, 19 agreed to be interviewed by phone or by email in August and September 2016. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the White Oak process and gain a better understanding of the outcomes. With five White Oak conferences completed and a new administration on its way into power, the timing seemed well suited for an evaluation. Structured formal interviews using phone or email were based on participant preference. The interview questions were developed by the research team and the same questions were asked of each participant.

Interview Questions

(1) What is your favorite memory or outcome from White Oak? (2) What are some examples of efforts that your organization has been involved in because of your participation in White Oak? (i.e., partnerships, collaborative programs, events, research) (3) What progress that has been made for military families do you believe can be attributed directly to White Oak? (4) Had White Oak not occurred, what progress might have been lost?

Additionally, respondents had the opportunity to make additional comments if desired; however, specific follow-up questions were not asked.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Following the collection of interview data, interviews were transcribed and entered into a spreadsheet. The qualitative data were imported into NVivo, a Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS), to further assist with data analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Designed for applied policy research, Spencer and Ritchie's (2002) framework approach for the qualitative data analysis was employed. The framework provides a structured process that systematically analyzes the qualitative data through a process of five stages: familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation (Spencer & Ritchie, 2002).

15.5.2 *White Oak Themes*

Based on the qualitative analysis of the interview responses, three central themes surfaced to provide a clear picture of the White Oak process and how it works to achieve outcomes: (1) harnessing the power of the community; (2) collaborating for maximum impact; and (3) expanding perspective and innovating solutions. Each of these themes will be described in more detail in the following sections.

Harnessing the Power of the Community

Harnessing the power of the community is viewed as a critical element for the White Oak retreats among the interview participants. Six supporting themes illuminated the overarching theme (Fig. 15.1). Participant quotes will be used to illustrate and support the theme.

First, White Oak provides a safe space for dialogue on key issues facing military and veteran families, face-to-face networking, and an environment where all participants feel respected and welcomed. One respondent reported, "I am very appreciative of the thought that has gone into the invite list...everyone is there with such

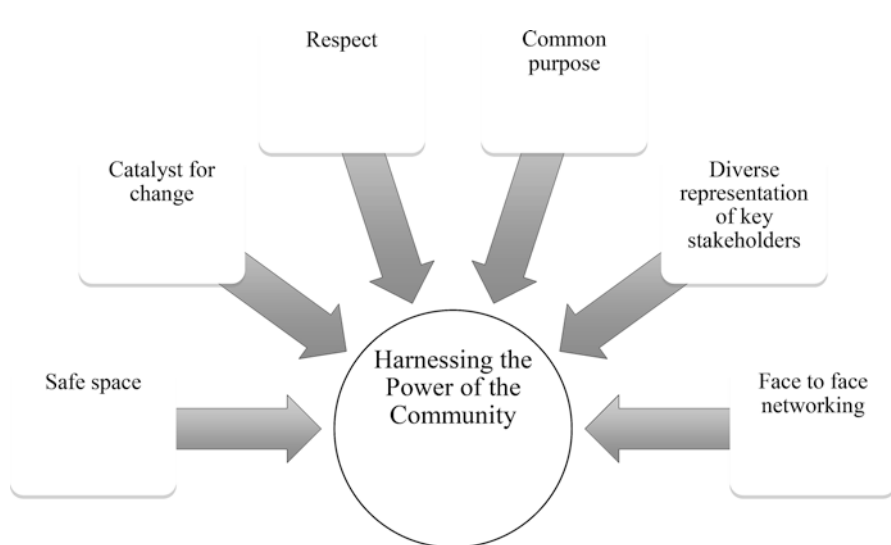


Fig. 15.1 Harnessing the Power of the Community

great intent. The ground rules are very important so everyone has clear expectations and a safe space is created to have tough conversations” (personal communication, September 1, 2016). Another member added, “I entered the 2015 evening reception a complete stranger to all organizers and participants, and I left the function feeling like part of the long-standing team. Everyone was very welcoming...” (personal communication, August 31, 2016).

Moreover, White Oak participants share a common purpose yet diverse representation of key stakeholders is also carefully considered. As one respondent explained,

I have been to every White Oak, and I feel that its strengths are the diversity of the people asked to join the conversation. It seems there was a concerted effort to ensure all stakeholders were included. For someone who works for the government, it was incredible to hear from people in philanthropy and nonprofits, who all work for a common cause. The diversity was the strength of the conference and made it so successful. (personal communication, August 18, 2016).

White Oak is also a catalyst for change, “Had White Oak not occurred, it would have been years longer before many initiatives like the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s] Hiring Our Heroes program, close collaboration with the government offices, or the engagement of the funding community would have taken place...White Oak has served as a catalyst to make things happen quickly” (personal communication, August 17, 2016). Respondents agree that harnessing the power of the community is a key ingredient in making White Oak a process that evoked action.

Collaboration for Maximum Impact

The White Oak participants also cite the importance of collaboration for maximum impact. Six sub-themes provide further support for this primary theme (Fig. 15.2). Statements taken from the participant interviews are utilized to offer insight into how this collaboration works.

The White Oak process is distinctive in that few attempts at military support work on so many levels and across sectors in a collaborative, iterative, retreat process that allows for natural development of relationships. It is “a process by which positive transformation is made possible...a rare blend of national, regional and grassroots efforts working toward the ultimate goal” (White Oak V Summary Report, p. 6). One interview participant emphasizes that the retreat “has been wonderful at building partnerships...it is collaborative, not competitive...people really do follow through and want to work with each other” (personal communication, September 1, 2016). White Oak also carves out the time and environment for “collaboration of people who work together frequently [but] never have the chance to connect reflectively...White Oak establishes side bar conversations that lead to relationship building” (personal communication, August 19, 2016). Moreover, the White Oak retreat and its associated outcomes are “a testament to the power of the private sector to help federal agencies see inefficiencies in duplicative, disparate, and sometimes ineffective programs...to better align programs and services for maximum impact” (personal communication, August 18, 2016). The collaborative opportunities that begin at White Oak and continue after the retreat are viewed by interview participants as critical for achieving timely outcomes and the greatest effect.

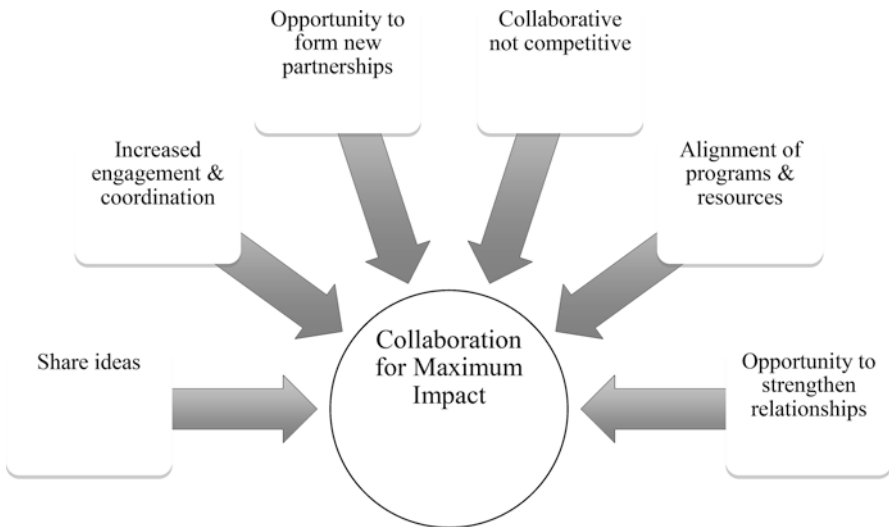


Fig. 15.2 Collaboration for Maximum Impact

Expanding Perspective and Innovating Solutions

Expanding perspective and innovating solutions is the third and final overarching theme developed from the interview transcripts. Again, this theme is illuminated by six supporting themes (Fig. 15.3). Quotes from the interview responses are used to provide further support for the theme.

Participants appreciate the White Oak process because it provides the opportunity to learn from one another. “Access to such a wide array of perspectives taught me more than six months of listening tours...it has greatly expanded my knowledge and perspective” (personal communication, August 17, 2016). Moreover, the retreat is a forum where understanding is shaped, philanthropy is informed, and messaging is focused on the positive. One interview participant explained, “It shaped my understanding of the military person. I had been adding to the narrative of the down and out service member, but I have learned, and we have changed our approach.... it educated us and improved the way we engage in military philanthropy” (personal communication, September 8, 2016). Finally, White Oak provides disparate sectors with a big picture view and the critical inspiration needed for continuing what can be difficult work. “To see what was happening on the national front, as a small local organization, was very helpful” (personal communication, September 7, 2016). Maintaining perspective and feeling inspired can be challenging at times, but White Oak is “powerful and inspirational, and that helps folks who have been in the space for a long time...a little inspiration” (personal communication, August 17, 2016). By expanding perspective and reminding participants of the reasons they initially committed to military family and veteran work, White Oak creates conditions necessary for continuing and innovative support.

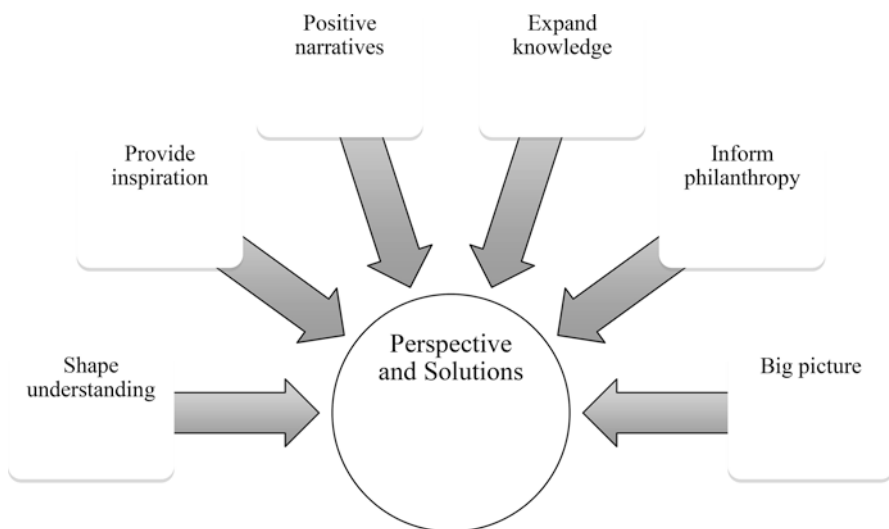


Fig. 15.3 Perspective and Solutions

15.6 Lessons Learned

Examining what has worked well and what could be improved in the White Oak process is crucial after five retreats. A number of participants feel White Oak should be formalized into an annual gathering of key stakeholders. The size of the White Oak gathering is also considered a strength yet a possible limitation to impact. The total number of participants is kept at roughly 70 people each year to foster an intimate experience while significant attention is paid to ensuring the most representative group possible. The smaller forum is perceived as essential for creating an environment conducive to building the necessary trust through small group discussion and development of personal relationships. Moreover, participants indicate that the use of the Chatham House Rule for non-attribution is critical to the success of the retreats. This confidentiality has allowed participants to share openly; by stepping out of their organizational paradigms, discussions among cross-sector participants are candid and a myriad of solutions to frequently politically contentious problems are more earnestly considered. It also allows military family and veteran support actors to build personal networks through which they are able to share information from their respective sectors and organizations, thus advancing the collaboration necessary to successfully address military family and veteran support.

Institutionalizing a process like White Oak provides the military and veteran family support community with a venue where individual relationships are created, nurtured, and mature in the form of collaborative partnerships and cross-sector solutions. In the retreat format, participants commit to a dedicated 2-day period, making them more likely to shed organizational paradigms which tend to favor competition for scarce resources in the military and family support space, they are better able to evaluate the problem as it is, rather than as they would like it to be. This type of environment facilitates interaction among individuals who would not normally find themselves in the same space to develop a mutual understanding without institutional pressure or explicit support.

A future White Oak process would benefit from increased institutionalization should it bring more reliable funding and a commitment among key organizations to collaborate on the event planning, attendee selection, and topic selection working groups. Independent and reliable funding would also reduce the risk of disproportionate influence from individual sectors or organizations. The retreat is only one weekend; time is precious and effective planning is critical. Further success is likely to be achieved through development of working groups who continue collaboration efforts throughout the year. Topic areas found to be most challenging and in need of continual, rather than ad hoc attention include: post-traumatic stress, military spouse employment, modernizing defense personnel policy, government integration and support, increasing morale and resilience during deployments, and caregiver support.

15.7 Results

White Oak provides a unique forum where participants can harness the power of the community, collaborate for maximum impact, and expand their perspective while innovating solutions. The genesis of ideas takes root at White Oak and grows through post-convening interactions. Five key achievements resulted from the first five White Oak retreats and should be considered as crucial steps for support during a future large-scale military conflict.

15.7.1 Presidential Study Directive-9 (2010)

White Oak I participants contributed research that prompted action resulting in the Presidential Study Directive (PSD-9), titled Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment. The policy focused the Federal approach to supporting military families to ensure that government agencies and organizations worked collaboratively. This directive facilitated a "Whole of Government" approach to military family support that will be a critical early step in obtaining federal government support in future wars. For example, the DoD's Military Spouse Employment Program was created, an outdated and ineffective Transition Assistance Program was updated and expanded to include the needs of transitioning military spouses, coordination and information sharing when possible between the DoD, the Department of Labor, and the VA was prioritized, and the Defense State Liaison Office undertook an examination of state-specific legislative fixes in support of military families and transitioning veteran families.

15.7.2 Joining Forces (2011)

The First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden developed the "Joining Forces" initiative to raise awareness and channel support for military members, veterans, and their families among the American public. White Oak participants recognized the need for a "bully pulpit" in educating and engaging the broader U.S. society about the nature and challenges the armed services face during wartime. The prioritization of military and veteran support via the First Lady's office and the Joining Forces initiative also served to galvanize the DoD to increase military family support and quantify progress, as success metrics were reported back to the East Wing. Hearing the First Lady and Dr. Biden prioritize military and veteran issues opened doors to increased funding and in kind support from major philanthropic foundations, corporate America and other sectors not traditionally involved, but critically needed, in military and veteran support.

White Oak retreats provided a “crash course” on military cultural competency, educating and engaging some of these non-traditional actors whose resources and ideas were extremely helpful to the military and veteran support community. The retreat setting enabled both more formal research briefs and more informal community input that provided guidance, real world context, and feedback that supported the crucial Executive branch Joining Forces efforts. For example, identifying the need for a national dialogue about the skills, value, and service of military personnel and their families as a method to increase public awareness of the positive role military families play in their communities was initiated at White Oak.

15.7.3 Community Blueprint (2012)

Engaging local communities is central to ensuring support for military and veteran families during future conflicts. The first two White Oak retreats led to the Community Blueprint: a program that emphasizes local grassroots level action where community leaders and military families work together toward positive change. Military families will all eventually become civilian families; as such civilian communities need to be understood as the first and best line of support as the most important resources used by military and veteran families tend to be located at the local and state level. Early state and local integration and collaboration with the Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs is critical to successful support in future wartime.

15.7.4 Non-Governmental Organization Consortium

Future military and veteran support initiatives should consider the benefit of a voluntary consortium of veteran and military family nonprofits. The United Kingdom’s British Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO) served as one example along with similar institutions. A DoD policy memorandum signed by the Secretary of Defense in 2015 was designed to ensure smooth pathways for nonprofits’ provision of benefits or assistance to active duty members and their families on military installations, and further steps are required to ensure nonprofit organizations are able to reach military families.

15.7.5 Philanthropy-Joining Forces Impact Pledge (2014)

The philanthropic community must be educated and included early in future wartime. The landmark Philanthropy-Joining Forces pledge initiated by Blue Shield of California Foundation, the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, the Lincoln Community Foundation, and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation united the philanthropic community in prioritizing and providing funding for programs supporting

service members, veterans, and their families. The Council on Foundations took leadership for the pledge and developed the Veterans Philanthropy Exchange to share resources and data and encourage smart, collaborative funding in the military family and veteran landscape. This structure or one similar must be nurtured and maintained so that the philanthropic community is able to respond early during future large-scale national conflict.

15.8 White Oak Themes in Context

Additional collaborations and projects found their genesis in the White Oak retreats; three examples of collaborative efforts will be discussed to illustrate the interview themes in context and demonstrate how White Oak participants addressed specific areas of need. These examples could be used to inform collaboration during future wartime. However, new wars will bring new problems; thus, new solutions may need to be developed also.

15.8.1 Harnessing the Power of the Community to Increase Community-Level Engagement

White Oak participants benefit from a diverse representation of key stakeholders; government representatives along with veterans' service organizations, military service organizations, and other nonprofits use the White Oak retreat as a catalyst for change. For this example, community-level engagement is used to provide context. A number of resources and support programs do not always need to be done by the DoD or the VA. They are frequently already performed by local organizations, so it is not always necessary to replicate support programs already offered outside of the installation. However, the responsibility for ensuring cultural competency and connecting military families to these community resources is critical to their success and should remain with the DoD and the VA. White Oak participants understood the need for increased community-level engagement, which led to the idea for and formation of Vets' Community Connections, a community-based initiative focused on supporting veteran reintegration, which has led to relationships with San Diego 2-1-1, Vista, Salesforce, and the Chamber of Commerce, as well as a partnership with the National Association of Counties.

15.8.2 Collaborating for Maximum Impact Through Coordinated Philanthropy

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, before White Oak began, philanthropic funders, corporate entities, and nonprofit organizations were struggling as they tried to coordinate efforts and piece together support services within local

communities for military and veteran families. White Oak provided the opportunity to assess the “sea of goodwill” that included more than 40,000 philanthropic organizations and to discuss methods for better coordination. The “Spouseforce” program, a partnership between Blue Star Families and the Clinton Foundation’s Health Matters Initiative, is one example that could be used as a future model. Salesforce, a cloud-based technology company, donated the training for “Spouseforce,” while the Walmart Foundation provided programmatic funding, and San Diego 2-1-1 offered to host the “Spouseforce” classes. By providing the time to share ideas and the opportunity for discussions of possible partnerships, White Oak has started paving the way to more coordinated philanthropic efforts that will benefit military and veteran families.

15.8.3 Expanding Perspective and Innovating Solutions for Military Spouse Employment

Military families are less likely to field two incomes than average U.S. families and the majority of military spouses want and need to work (Blue Star Families, 2014; U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). Employed military spouses also appear to experience less distress than their counterparts who do not work (Blue Star Families, 2015). In recognition of this, the expansion of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Hiring Our Heroes program to include military spouses was also explored at White Oak and launched in 2011. This program hosts hiring and networking events across the country throughout the year and continues to grow and address military spouse employment issues. Without White Oak, the expansion of the Hiring Our Heroes program to include military spouses may not have happened, or at least it would not have happened as quickly; the inclusion of military spouses occurred due to White Oak participants shaping the understanding of military spouse employment challenges.

15.9 General Recommendations

Much has been accomplished since the first White Oak in 2010; however, focus must be maintained in order to preserve the results achieved. With every new administration, new priorities arise, and attention given to veteran and military families can decrease in times of perceived peace. The White Oak process has illustrated the need for continuous cross-sector, multi-organizational relationship building to collectively support America’s military and veteran communities. If participants work together regularly, we create the opportunity for programs and services to be in place to meet the needs of veteran and military families. Thus, when the next war happens, the hope is that there will not be a need to build services from square one or recreate programs.

Another area that will benefit from continued focus is positive, shared messaging. White Oak participants have strived to coordinate messaging, but more work needs to be done. With a unified and representative voice, there will be more opportunities to influence policy on the national stage and shape understanding for philanthropic efforts.

Going forward, White Oak participants and those seeking to learn from the White Oak process could consider the value of identifying communities where veteran and military families are integrating with less difficulty. These communities could be used as models when developing additional programs and services. In order to further reduce the civilian-military divide, focused education regarding the value of veteran and military families in local communities should be encouraged. By garnering the investment of local entities in the integration process, programs will have a greater chance of success.

15.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the background of White Oak, a historical view of responses and strategies employed, a discussion of the themes developed from participant interviews, a review of lessons learned and results achieved, and recommendations to consider for the future. The White Oak process has led to coordination of national, regional, and grassroots efforts focused on providing beneficial programs and services to veteran and military families. White Oak participants understand that their voice is more likely to resonate and be heard when they present a unified message. As one interview participant articulated, “The issues and challenges have to be approached from a holistic perspective, and having a group with expertise in so many areas where there is need, working together towards common solutions, is critical” (personal communication, August 17, 2016).

References

- Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (Eds.). (2013). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Limited.
- Berglass, N. (2010). *America's duty: The imperative of a new approach to warrior and Veteran care*. Center for a New American Security. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/CNAS_AmericasDuty_Berglass_0.pdf
- Blue Star Families, Department of Research and Policy. (2014). *2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/239928121/Blue-Star-Families-2014-Military-Family-Lifestyle-Survey-Comprehensive-Report>
- Blue Star Families, Department of Research and Policy. (2015). *2015 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/bsf_2015_comprehensive_report.pdf

- Carter, P., & Kidder, K. (2015). *Charting the Sea of Goodwill*. Center for a New American Security. Retrieved from https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/VeteransPhilanthropy_151207_rev.pdf
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Spencer, L., & Ritchie, J. (2002). Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. In A. Michael Huberman & M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2016). *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea10.htm>
- Wilson, D. (2016). Personal communication of August 18.