

A Web Content Analysis of Veteran Services in U.S. Cities

By

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About the Author

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to gauge veteran-related support programs offered in 30 U.S cities using web content analysis. The services listed on the city websites will be assessed using the City of Austin veterans' program as the benchmark. This research will categorize the services offered and provide some insight and recommendations to other cities that are considering the initiation of services for veterans in their jurisdiction. The methodology used can be separated into four categories: Level of Support for Veteran Related Programs, Tools Available to Help Veterans, Veteran Needs and Services, and Resources for Program Development. The cities were assessed by the subcategories of specific findings of the highest needs that veterans and service members may require. Each website was gauged on the findings, programs, services, and resources they provide to measure the standards of the correlated cities with the City of Austin Veterans Program. The results showed that a possible federal enactment of veteran support within cities might be influential in providing specific measures and special training to ensure that every city has a similar level of available support as has been done by some states that have implemented them in the cities they govern. The websites do not disclose all services the program offers, reviews of the personnel, and level of service provided to those seeking assistance. A transitioning veteran's first step to seeking resources might be through searching locally in the city in which they reside. The content provided on these city websites regarding veteran services will either make a difference or have a difficult process in terms of gaining the information and assistance they are searching for.

Chapter I: Introduction

Army Chief Officer Richard Gutteridge, while reminiscing about returning home from his service, said “reliving the horrors of evacuating fallen soldiers’ and Marines’ remains, searching through body bags for dog tags and watching soldiers die was too much. I became more withdrawn and distant from my family, I was having what I was later told were ‘suicidal ideation.’ I also began to increase my use of alcohol to cope, and I am not proud of this, and it is difficult to admit” (Driscoll & Straus, 2010).

Once a service member completes their military service commitment or retires, there is a possibility that they are not the same person you remember from before they joined the military. After surviving war, completing their military service commitment and returning home safely, are service members truly safe from the trauma they faced in combat? According to Veteran Affairs (VA) data, more than 6,000 veterans have killed themselves each year since 2008, and veteran suicide rates increased by 25.9% between 2005 and 2016. The suicide rate was 1.5 times greater for veterans than for adults who never served in the military (Durkin, 2018). Therefore, the formulation and implementation of services and programs that save and support our veterans from becoming a statistic are absolutely vital.

Freedom is not free; the cost of freedom has been paid for by millions of people—whether it’s with their lives or health and well-being—for our country to remain free and protected from all enemies, both foreign and domestic. In World War II, 16,112,566 service members were lost in the fight against Germany, Italy, and Japan. In Korea, there are 5,720,000 men and women who will never have the chance to return home. In Vietnam, there were 8,744,000 service members who were unappreciated and no longer remembered for their sacrifice to this country (U.S. Department on Veteran Affairs, n.d.).



Figure 1. Attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941

War along with death, fear, pain, and loss is inevitable, especially for those who have answered our nation's call to protect and defend our country's freedom by serving in the United States military. Our founding fathers established this nation with the intention of having citizens no longer live in fear and tyranny but have life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness with the freedom to live peacefully with certain rights in a land full of opportunity and prosperity. The concept of war is well described by Robert A. Heinlein, who observes that "you can have peace, or you can have freedom, don't ever count on having both at once" (Heinlein, 2008, p.137).

Although we have service members returning home safely from combat zones, are they truly safe from the trauma they faced during their deployment? According to data from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, more than 6,000 veterans have killed themselves each year since 2008, and veteran suicide rates increased by 25.9% between 2005 and 2016. The suicide rate was 1.5 times greater for veterans than for adults who never served in the military (Durkin, 2018). Therefore, creating services and programs for veterans is an important step to have in order to help save and support them from becoming a statistic. The need for accessible, feasible resources and support is crucial for those who have served in the Armed Forces and the reason

why we as the public should do what we can to better serve and support those who have given their all to us.

Heightened Sense of Patriotism and Number of Americans Joining the Military



Figure 2. Raising of the Flag at Ground Zero on 9/11

According to The Seattle Times, “thousands of young men and women have enlisted in the military in 2011 who grew up in the shadow of 9/11. Some say they want to serve a country that's been in a war against terrorism since their early childhood; others say they want to find control in a world” (Lush, 2011). In another news article, an Army recruiter, Captain Kyle Wheeler, recalls the first full recruitment year after the attacks on 9/11 that had “79,585 people joining the Army, compared with 74,577 last year” (Engel, 2011). Captain Wheeler likened this increase in recruitment to the time when people flocked to recruiting stations after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II.

The war on terrorism continues today, and it has become America’s longest war even though the war was not officially declared by Congress. “More than 2.5 million U.S service

members have served in Afghanistan and Iraq wars, with 1.8 million leaving active duty” (Baikie, Geerligs, & Wilhelm, 2012) whether it is from completing their service commitment, becoming medically discharged or retiring.

The Challenge of Integrating Discharged Veterans

There are more than 45,000 military and veteran nonprofits (Veterans Advantage, 2018) along with government entities and for-profit organizations who cater to those who served in the military by providing assistance and creating innovative programs to ease any hardships they may face. A few of the major issues that veterans face difficulty in relation to readjusting to civilian life include “financial, employment, relationships, legal, homelessness, and substance abuse” (Stern, 2015).

Although an abundant amount of resources and programs are available to assist those in need, veterans still face barriers in obtaining services due to the gaps created by underserving and lack of availability. Mentally, psychological barriers for veterans play a crucial role and are a strong reason for why they do not seek services or help. Based on my experience with assisting veterans, they seem to be unwilling to seek help for various reasons such as the location not being nearby, the veteran representative being too busy or unavailable, frustrations of the overall process through Veteran Affairs, being answered by a machine or constantly being redirected on where to go and who to see.

When one thinks of veteran services, most people associate the organizations with seeking assistance from predominantly government entities at the federal or state level such as the Department of Veteran Affairs, a State agency such as Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), or veteran service officers (VSOs) within the county. There are several reasons why a veteran may not seek help from these programs or meet with a veteran service representative whether it

is due to past bad experiences, bad reputation, time consumption, or lack of compassion.

Regardless of the various reasons why someone would avoid a specific organization, there are plenty of individuals in the community who are dedicated to their work and perhaps a good referral from someone reputable like a city veteran representative will give them the encouragement and opportunity to try.

Veterans also seek assistance from nonprofit organizations such as the Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), and many others. However, some of these organizations have strict requirements on who they can serve and what requirements must be met, and some may believe that certain organizations are more interested in the number of veterans they see in a given timeframe versus the number of veterans served.

Local governments such as cities have the potential to play an important role and become a great resource and place to seek assistance from in relation to military services. One of the advantages of having a municipal representative is the ability to prefer and provide referrals to the best representatives for programs from personal affiliations. Another advantage of a municipal representative is the ability to act and become a valuable liaison to the mayor and council to provide information about veteran-related situations within the city. Another purpose they can fulfill is recommend and possibly guide special programs and policies towards veterans so that their needs are met and they do not become a suicide statistic.

Every day, veterans probably interact with cities when seeking employment, getting assistance from first responders or inspectors, going to a facility to pay their bills or going to a place of recreation, such as parks or libraries. Having cities with veteran services would be a great place for transitioning veterans, guards, and reserve members to seek assistance. In other words, it is not enough to just hire veterans; developing a focal center for supporting veteran

employees—including those seeking employment with the city and those who reside in and around the city who need services—is also important.

The City of Austin (Texas)

The City of Austin veterans' program became the first to be awarded the Department of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award. This award is the “highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their support of their employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve” (Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award). As of today, there are currently only four cities that have been awarded this recognition from the Department of Defense.

From a search through the web, it appears that there are three cities within the state of Texas that offer veteran services at a municipal level. Altogether, within in this assessment, there are 30 cities that indicated having some type of veteran supportive services at a municipal level. Thus, 30 cities within 14 States throughout the country—with the exemption of all but five cities out of 39 within the State of Massachusetts—will be analyzed based on their web content.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gauge veteran-related support programs offered in US cities using web content analysis. The services offered by the cities throughout the United States will be assessed using the City of Austin veterans' program as the benchmark. This research will categorize the services the cities offer and provide recommendations to other cities that may want to initiate services for veterans in their jurisdiction. This information will be useful for the cities that do not have a veteran program at a municipal level or for those seeking ideas to improve what is being done or even initiate their own internal veteran-related support program to better assist those who have served in the U.S. Military.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter reviews the academic literature supporting the four categories and subcategories in relation to municipal veteran-related services. The four concepts and subcategories that will be reviewed thoroughly are as follows

1. Level of Support for Veteran-Related Programs (Best Practice by the City of Austin)
 - 1.1. State Government Level
 - 1.2. Local Government Level
 - 1.3. Community Support
2. Tools Available to Help Veterans
 - 2.1. Website Content
 - 2.2. Human Resource Policies and Procedures
 - 2.3. Program, Services, Events
 - 2.4. Outreach
3. Veteran Needs and Services
 - 3.1. Employment
 - 3.2. Mental and Physical Health
 - 3.3. Needs of Women Veterans
 - 3.4. Housing/Homelessness
 - 3.5. Veteran Benefits and Programs
 - 3.6. Education
4. Resources for Program Development
 - 4.1. Effective Communication and Coalition Partnerships

4.2. Dedicated Staff

4.3. Training

The conceptual framework (see Table 1) lists these categories and subcategories along with the literature that supports these concepts.

Level of Support for Veteran-Related Programs (Best Practice by the City of Austin)

The development and accomplishment of any task, idea, or project can be deemed unfeasible without the support and understanding of influential leaders with the same vision and purpose of having a program come to fruition. The following subcategories are crucial to the implementation of veteran-related programs to provide the support and services similar to what the City of Austin veterans program currently has in place.

State government level. Governors, senators and representatives who are elected to lead millions of people within their state have the ability to make a difference and provide effective programs that are beneficial to members of the military, veterans and their families.

Most states, if not all, have a veteran department within the government agency to serve the population of those they represent. The leadership and organization of the agency varies based on the preferences of the Governors. The State of Texas's veteran department, TVC has a Director who reports to a Commission Chair who is appointed officially by the Governor and coordinates with a board of other officials to provide information to the Governor's office on the needs of our military, veterans and families. It is important for the city to have an effective working relationship with the leadership and members of the state veteran department, Governor's office and the commission if available. This correlation will assist the city in staying current with veteran-related issues, promoting and providing feedback to the state executive leadership, and be a beneficial liaison from the city to the Governor's office.

Through this assessment, research found that the State of Massachusetts is the only state throughout the country to have a law requiring cities and towns to appoint a veteran service officer (VSO) in the absence of an advisory committee or a local veteran service officer. (“Local Veterans’ Service Officers,” n.d.). This is a prime example of what state government leadership could do to better support our servicemembers by emulating Massachusetts’ example to ensure that veterans in cities, towns and counties are well represented with a veteran service office, especially for those residing in the rural areas.

Many governors from each state have shown initiative by providing support, policies, and programs to better serve veterans and their families. In Texas, Governor Abbott has emphasized the importance of assisting our veterans once they have returned home. Governor Abbott’s goals that were outlined in a state speech were the following: 1) Facilitate employment of skilled veterans by waiving examination and fee requirements for veterans obtaining licenses issued by state agencies; 2) Exempt newly created, veteran-owned businesses from the Texas Franchise Tax for the first five years that the business is in operation; and 3) Exempt newly created, veteran-owned businesses from business registration fees. (Abbott Governor, 2019).

State officials can make decisions that impact the total population rather than a limited group of people. It is important to have a good working relationship with the Governor’s office and other official representatives in the state to promote and coordinate the ability to benefit everyone as a collective. This partnership with state representatives and the Governor facilitates the creation, advisement, collaboration and planning of events as well as the ability to form committees and workgroups to provide services to our past and current service members.

Local government level. The development of a veteran’s program at the municipal level will only be attainable if there is support from city leadership, key staff members and executive

management such as the Mayor, City Manager, and Council Members. Their backing alone will ensure the creation and continuation of a successful program that will carry out the mission to help veterans and their families for years without the possibility of becoming temporary or obsolete.

In particular, the veteran services office in the City of Austin was established in 2007 by former Council Member and then-Mayor Lee Leffingwell who initiated the idea to create a local supportive program for veterans due to their valuable skills, loyalty and sense of public service to their jobs (City of Austin, n.d.). Under his direction, leadership, influence, and support, he was able to create an internal City of Austin veterans' program, and the program manager he selected was able to help develop it into the award-winning program that it is today.



Figure 3. Former Council Member and Mayor Lee Leffingwell at the City of Austin Veterans Parade

Having department management—such as the director, supervisors and managers—support their employees to utilize services under the veteran's program and hire veterans is also a

contribution to local government support as much as the leadership creating the policies and procedures.

It is essential to create concepts, goals, and objectives to ensure that programs and collaborations with other veteran-service related organizations become successful. Without the support from those in leadership positions, the chances of a program being delayed or never enacted becomes conceivable. Therefore, the lack of supervisory support may be related to negative outcomes, especially for post-deployed veterans in the workplace (Bodner, Hammer, Wan, Brockwood, & Mohr , 2018). Employee support is also significant at the local level as they provide reviews and feedback of the services they receive. If an internal program does not exist, the veteran's liaison will not be able to mediate, and consequently, the necessary rapport will never be established between management and their employees.

Community support. Resources do not only come from the Federal Government (VA), state, county, and the city. They also from many non-profits and other organizations that exist to provide the support and immediate assistance that other government entities may lack the ability to do in an expedited manner. Well-known veteran organizations such as the American Legion and the Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) are generally comprised of those from the older generation with a strong orientation towards community service (Whittle et al., 2010) with the mindset of making a difference and making connections with service members.

These organizations were created by veterans to help other service members, especially since they went through similar experiences in the military or life in general. Some of the larger organizations include the American Legion, Veteran of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Wound Warrior Project (WWP), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) and

the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). There is caution that should be taken as there are many groups that sound legitimate but take advantage of service members and those who support them. However, the large organizations listed above are trustworthy and able to provide recommendations to other services if requested (Ainspan, Penk & Shinseki 2012).

Veteran organizations collaborate and meet to understand the needs of those who served in the military to come up with initiatives, partnerships, and projects to create an atmosphere where veterans can come together as one and accomplish something worthwhile. The City of Austin has partnerships with numerous non-profit organizations locally to assist them with their mission when requested, promote their events and services and overall, assist with their aspirations.

In a community toolkit for action, one of the recommendations provided was to “identify gaps and duplications by not replicating similar programs that already exist to save time, energy, and resources by offering programs for different groups of people to help determine if the program and services are making a difference in the community” (“Energize our Community,” 2005).

In a city, the Mayor and Council can appoint and create an advisory board, commission, or working group comprised of veterans within the community to represent them to better support one another and the veteran community’s concerns. These appointed members are regular citizens within the community with the goal to assist and serve those who were in the military. Without their contributions and support, some of the initiatives and incentives for veterans would not exist or be an issue that is brought to the Mayor and Council’s attention.

City employees who served or continue to serve in the military in the Guard and Reserves are also part of the community, and one of the best forms of outreach to promoting the city’s resources available to veterans. The benefit of being an internal program promotes awareness that

the city supports our military and is willing to provide aid and care. The positive reputations of organizations, people, and resources are important so that others do not refer a veteran in need to an unreputable resource that could create frustration, resentment, and in the worst case, result in suicide.

Supporting the community is just as essential as having the community support the program once it is in effect. The photograph below was taken when the City of Austin established Interstate 35 as a Purple Heart Trail on September 17, 2015 with collaboration from the city's Veterans Program, Mayor's office and Chapter 1919 Military Order of the Purple Heart.



Figure 4. Members of the City and Military Order of the Purple Heart

Tools Available to Help Veterans

In a recent study, veterans have stated that there are “barriers to accessing culturally competent mental health care in the government and civic sectors and verbalized support for existing veterans and mentor organizations” (Albright et al., 2018). However, some veterans like to think that everything is fine due to their strong and tough mentalities. This enables them to not seek help or any assistance when they need it the most. Having these tools to structure the municipal veteran’s program will help establish ideas, create new policy and content, and possibly encourage the creation of an internal veterans’ program within various organization.

Without a support structure or guidance that service members may need, there is a chance that they will be stuck in the infinite loop of fighting with themselves to become healthy, both physically and mentally. The concept of mentorship between other veterans and personal referrals could encourage a service member to look at certain situations from a different perspective that would enable them to try to seek help without forcing themselves to think that everything is alright.

Having someone internally within the city or organization be dedicated to veteran services could be beneficial as they become a great resource locally for those who are unfamiliar with where to go, who to see and what benefits or programs they are entitled to as military veterans. The following tools being available to them would be an initial start.

Website content. The advancement of technology enables the feasibility and allows for the convenience of everyone being able to search for options and resources through the internet. Most cities are expected to provide website content that enables people to gain some insights on what is available within the city and what departments exist to serve the veteran community. Upon further review of the cities with veteran supportive services, a select few only had a

mission statement and contact information, while others provided great content that was detailed and comprehensive with resource guides that included all services along with the direct contact information of the person overseeing the program.

A government website's "concept of transparency is a tool for enhancing transparency" (Harder & Jordan, 2013), and the information available to the public allows everyone to see what services are available or lacking. As a government entity servicing the community, public information requests and transparency is an important factor to consider when establishing a program to ensure the staff and resources provided to service members are accommodating and that the services provided are accomplishing specific goals and measures for our veterans.

A simple google search on the internet could provide a person with numerous websites, contact information, and an abundance of organizations with programs and veteran-related services. However, this could be a frustrating process if they do not know where to look or who to see. One of the possible places that a service member may go to find information regarding veterans is the actual city's website. Further, since it is a city entity, they will perhaps be more inclined to trust and contact the representative.

Human resource policies and procedures. Most government agencies and private companies take part in developing human resource policies to ensure that they have some type of preference to assist and hire more veterans to join their organization. Hiring a veteran is not only a benefit in terms of gaining an employee who is a dedicated, disciplined and organized professional with a good sense of work ethics but also, this hire will enable the organization to be eligible to receive a considerable tax break.

Since adding veterans to the list of the Internal Revenue Service's Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) program in 2011 (IRS, n.d.), the unemployment rate for veterans has

decreased substantially over the years to 2.9% in March 2019 from its peak at 9.9% in 2011 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

A federal law and procedure that all companies and organizations should be familiar with is the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA 38 U.S.C., 4301–4335) which “protects civilian job rights and benefits for veterans and members of Reserve components” (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). USERRA was enacted in response to reports of firings, layoffs, and other adverse employment actions taken against deployed National Guard and Reserve members” (Vasil, 2018). Through approved legislation by USERRA, all cities and companies are mandated to enact specific policies within the workforce such as the employer being mandated to provide those serving in the Guard or Reserves 15 days of military leave per fiscal year.

With regard to the creation of human resource policies and procedures, the City of Austin enacted some veteran-related policies such as a paying the employees who are currently active in the Guard and Reserves for the 15 days of military leave that is not a requirement. Another policy enacted is the “Military Pay Supplement program where if an employee who is serving in the Guard or Reserve makes less in active duty than their current position, the City of Austin will make up the difference” (City of Austin, 2019). Another benefit and policy that a veteran employee could apply is a service credit of no more than four years toward their city retirement for their active-duty military service at a reduced rate compared to those who will purchase a different type of credit.

Many government entities, such as the state, counties and cities, as well as private companies have enacted their own policies to offer veterans’ preference in hiring to promote employing more veterans into their workforce. In particular, the City of Austin has a veterans’

preference in hiring where 20% of qualified interviewees must be a veteran (City of Austin, n.d.). This allows a veteran the opportunity to meet with a hiring manager or staff and have an opportunity to impress them in person rather than have only a resume and cover letter to represent themselves.

With the ability to track and identify employees who are veterans and those currently serving in the Guard or Reserves, this enables the program to assist with data compilation, develop measures, prevent discrepancies from taking place and ensure that the hiring of our service members is consistent throughout the city. Ever since the veterans' preference in hiring was established, there has been an increase of veterans being hired by the City of Austin, and today, there are approximately 1,800 veterans as well as National Guard and Reserve members serving the City of Austin and the community.

The "history of veterans' preference in federal hiring and retention predates to the foundation of the modern, merit-based civil service in the Pendleton Act of 1883 where preference towards jobs especially in government was given to those who were honorably discharged in the military" (United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 2014). A veteran preference in hiring would possibly increase the city's potential to attract and recruit transitioning veterans to work for the public sector and become an asset to the organization and the people they serve within the community.

Program, services, and events. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) defines a program as "a federally funded, organized sets of activities directed toward specific purposes or goals that agencies undertake and are being administered" (Marsh, 2016). Once a service member starts their transitioning process out of the military, there are programs and services available to help them, such as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which

is a mandated workshop. The quality of resources and counseling available will be dependent on the size and location of the military base, and this is one of the many programs the military provides for those exiting the service (Ainspan et al., 2012).

A review of the literature with respect to how the military to civilian career transition of post 9/11 veterans with service-connected disabilities is portrayed or described includes barriers to employment due to mental health issues, challenges associated with career-related identity, workplace stereotype and stigma and disability benefits, rating and unemployment (Stern, 2016).

A municipal veterans' program "provides a relatively risk-free atmosphere in which interaction with peers who are familiar with the language and culture of the military affords its veterans a safe harbor away from the probing questions that sometimes arise in interactions with employees who have no military experience" (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

One of the things that veterans miss the most from their military life is the comradery they felt with other service members and the family atmosphere they lose once they transition. A comprehensive calendar of events similar to an organization named TexVet here in Texas will enable a service member to participate in volunteer opportunities, physical activities, support programs and other common interest events where they could have the sense of community and family come back into their lives.

If the military can provide support programs for a departing service member through the transition assistance program (TAP), then there should be no reason why cities cannot have a program to reintegrate veterans into the public/private sector and provide the services to help them become successful. An advantage to having programs and services readily available at a city level could help promote events, networking opportunities, and possible

employment prospects that would enable a veteran to have a less difficult time readjusting to civilian life and make it more effective and attainable.

Outreach. For the benefit of the organization, outreach plays an integral part in promoting the mission, values, and knowledge of the services that are offered within your program. The outreach you provide regarding your program along with the personal interaction with others with the same goals and outcomes will inform them of your presence within the community. The “Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement” explains that the concept of outreach is “likely to have an element of inquiry and discovery, leading to new knowledge in both directions. Firsthand involvement in the field provides new insights and understanding” (Lynton, 2016).

“The collaboration with external partnerships is effective when the representative is involved with veteran organizations in federal, local, colleges, national guard or reserve personnel or community organizations when designing and providing services for veterans” (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

Initiating steps to make an appearance and participate in networking opportunities are essential to learn more about other veteran service organizations. This provides the chance to meet other people with the same mindset goals of helping veterans and for them to learn about the roles and resources offered by their city representative. This connection to the city enables the community to contact the representative directly when they are in need of referring veterans who need services for possible city related issues, assistance with contacting leadership officials of the city or state, or to seek the thoughts and opinions about a specific subject from that representative.

In the “VA Integrated Post-Combat Care: A Systemic Approach to Caring for Returning Combat Veterans,” the authors explained the seven touches of outreach that the VA has implemented that could also be applicable in various ways within the municipal level. The demobilization initiative where services are not central but in various locations could be implemented throughout the city. Attendance at the Reserve and National Guard Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program support initiative and partnership with the National Guard Bureau’s Transition Assistance Advisors (TAAS) will promote outreach and services that the city offers. Collaboration with the local 311 or 211 call centers to ensure that they are always trained and equipped to handle veteran-related questions and to have a specific and designated contact and internet webpage available (Amdur et al., 2012).

Veteran Needs and Services

It is not unknown that veterans have specific needs and services when they are transitioning out of the military and that there is a vast amount of information they will need to know along with where to find it. The Department of Defense has compiled a list of the types of services and programs that veterans will most likely need; this includes: 1) Mental Health and Substance Abuse 2) Information and Referral 3) Case Management and Care Coordination 4) Counseling 5) Spiritual Health 6) Physical Health 7) Disability 8) Caregiver Support 9) Others (Marsh, 2016).

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) “identified 99 programs by the Department of Defense to help address the effects of combat on post 9/11 servicemembers, their families, or both” (GAO, 2014).

Military and Veteran Support

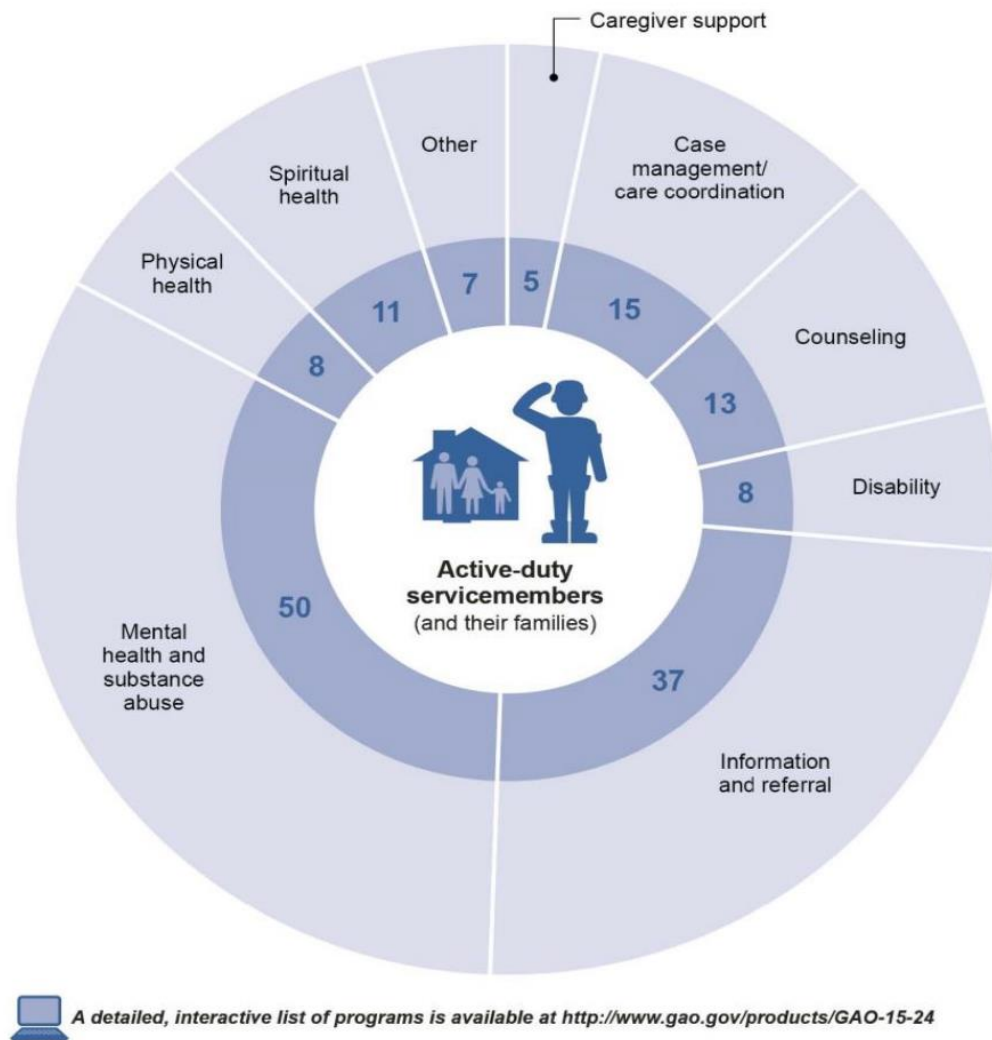


Figure 5. The Number and Types of Services in the Department of Defense

The GAO also identified “87 programs administered either by the Department of Defense (DOD) or Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to help post 9/11 service members’ and veterans’ transition to the civilian life” (GAO, 2014).

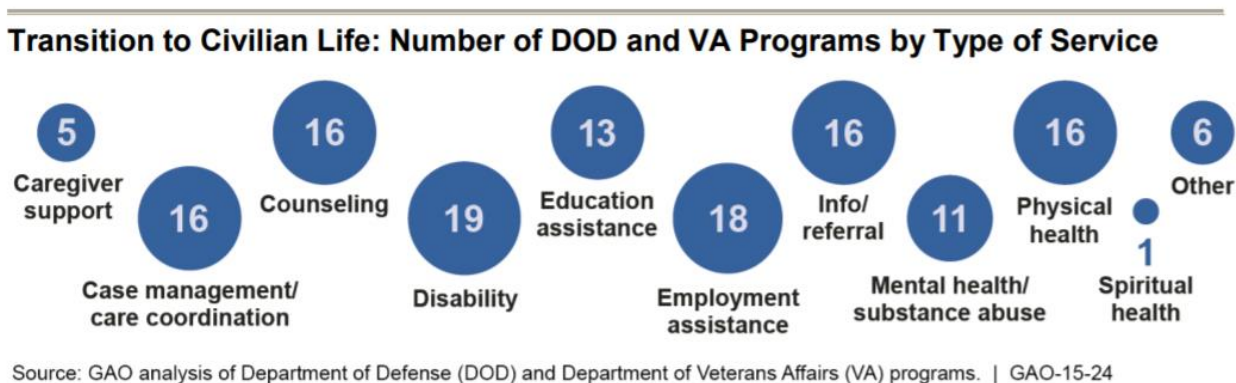


Figure 6. Number of Services Within Each Program of the DOD and VA

It is imperative to find out what the needs of the veterans in the city and community are, and many cities and organizations are starting to implement veteran resource centers where assistance can be provided and services can be obtained at one central location. On July 23, 2019, a town hall meeting was conducted by a 501 c (3) organization named “Combined Arms” that is contracted through the City of Austin to conduct a needs assessment on the value and need of developing a Veterans Resource Center. If approved, this resource center will be a collaborative “one-stop-shop” of all veteran services in one central location to obtain services, networking, and a sense of comradery between fellow veterans. During the town hall meeting, it was shared that Austin and its surrounding cities had the following top needs indicated as follows: 1) Veteran Affairs Benefits (disability and other programs), 2) Mental Health, 3) Employment, 4) Social and Community, 5) Healthcare, 6) Volunteering, 7) Legal Services, 8) Education, and 9) Housing.

Not every city and town will have the same type of need or services available due to its location, resources and population. However, in general, every community will have similar needs to the programs and services listed by the Department of Defense in Figure 5 and 6 along with the City of Austin and surrounding cities current needs from the needs assessment study.

Employment. “According to federal data, the unemployment rate for veterans who served after September 2001 is higher than the unemployment rate for nonveterans” (Marsh, 2016). A transitioning service member is mandated to take a class called TAP (Transition Assistance Program) prior to leaving the military to “provide pre-separation services and counseling” and to provide “additional guidance on broader transition issues such as financial management and health care” (Marsh, 2016).

“The second most common need identified is employment as many veterans have a difficult time finding employment in the civilian sector” (Perkins, Aronson, & Olson, 2017). Employment after the military may come naturally to some people but for a vast majority, building a resume and interview skills as well as the job searching process may produce apprehension and discouragement from the long response of being offered a position.

Recruiting and employing veterans, Guard, or Reserve members could be a benefit to the organization as seen in Figure 7 in terms of both finances and operation as veterans have acquired the traits of discipline, work ethics, training, and longevity from their military training and the resulting tax break from the government. The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) states the following:

Veterans bring sought after soft skills to the workplace as well as applied work experience, education, licensures, and credentials. However, they may also lack industry-specific experience, have trouble translating their work experience into civilian terms or have trouble determining how to apply that experience to a civilian job. (Bradbard, Armstrong & Maury, 2016)



Figure 7. Reasons to Hire a Veteran (IVMF)

Employment is one of the focal points where transitioning veterans leaving the military have their lives' direction turn in a positive or a negative way. If a veteran is unable to find employment, this would lead to poor financial management and an increased strain on any disability they may have occurred during their service; this could eventually lead to homelessness, substance abuse, or even suicide.

In "Post 9/11 Veterans with Service-Connected Disabilities and their Transition to the Civilian Workforce", Stern states that following:

The vast majority of Americans have little to no understanding of military service or the impact service may have on civilian employment outcomes. Establishing independent employment is fundamental to a veterans' successful reintegration into society even though finding a job could be a veteran's biggest challenge. (Stern, 2017, p. 67)

The military provides the service member with all the basic needs to be successful such as housing needs, stipends, additional funds for dependents, clothing and the school/training applicable in their MOS (military occupational specialty) that they may carry on after they

transition out of the service. After the military, they are no longer in an organization where mentorship and guidance are innate and automatic, and they are officially on their own to provide for themselves and their families with no chain of command keeping them in order. Some veterans will have a difficult time transitioning, especially since the military has provided the necessities from day one and continues to provide the programs and skills for them to continue on their success after they become veterans.

Guidance in employment services is a great process to focus on to strengthen and promote as most veterans not continuing their education look for jobs in the civilian sector to get accustomed to their new life out of the military. City employment is a great transition for veterans due to its similar views of serving the community and receiving good benefits. Most cities have a veterans' preference in hiring within their human resource policies, but specific veteran policies and programs would be difficult and possibly impossible to achieve without at least one-person spearheading and leading the effort for that idea to come to fruition. The City of Austin veterans program recruits, advises and promotes veterans by obtaining local and known military job hiring fairs and encouraging other departments to join them. The program assists service members and veterans on how to apply with the city and guides them with translating their resumes, refers them to great representatives or employment specialists and informs them about the veterans' preference in hiring to provide them with the support that they may need.

On the other hand, many veterans decide on a different path from being employed by someone and start their own business or franchise to support themselves. Various veteran service-related organizations are now implementing and promoting entrepreneur programs in starting a business plan and providing resources in obtaining a loan. Financial

management classes would also be a great resource for transitioning service members who struggle to find employment as effectively.

Mental/physical health. News around the country report veterans committing suicide as an epidemic with 22 lost a day. Organizations today are implementing more mental health services to assist these veterans and the Department of Veteran Affairs and Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration are also contributing to fix this issue by initiating the Mayor's and Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among service members, veterans and their families (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2019).

In April 2019, The Austin VA Outpatient Clinic was shut down due to a veteran committing suicide in front of hundreds of people in the waiting room. This veteran was enrolled in the Phoenix program at the VA "Olin Teague Center" in Killeen and was transferred to the Austin VA where he was unable to get the help he requested, and he chose to take his life instead (Gately, 2019). Reports and increasing media attention have only prompted intense scrutiny, stigma, and concerns where the public might automatically assume a person on the news who is causing harm or creating problems are veterans instead of people suffering from mental health issues.

"These invisible wounds of war, psychological responses to stress such as posttraumatic stress, depression, and anxiety have been acknowledged by the U.S. Government and general public as legitimate and serious injuries" (Hazle, Hassan & Wilcox, 2012). In "Invisible Wounds of War," the authors focused on these three specific post-deployment conditions of PTSD, depression and TBI where it is linked to exposure to a traumatic or life-threatening event such as combat. "Major depression is often linked to

grief and loss, and can be salient for servicemembers who lose their comrades. Also, TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) which is the result of a service-or combat-related injury to the brain shows that PTSD and TBI are the most signature injuries of our most current veterans” (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

Linderman states that “post-war phenomenon, in terms of psychological and physical symptoms, are consequences of the service member and difficult to discern which requires a study of primary sources when they are available.” Linderman also feels that the “overall patterns of American culture cause veterans to retreat into silence and do not allow themselves to contemplate their physical or psychological wounds” (Marlowe, 2001).

Unfortunately, “mental health issues can be associated with PTSD, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide and justice involvement” (Stern, 2017, p. 70), and it is imperative that we continue to advocate and promote healthy lifestyles both mentally and physically. It is important to know that in the realm of combat-related injuries, PTSD is not the only mental health problem that service members and veterans encounter but that experiencing traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and depression (Hazle et al., 2012) also have stressors and signs we should look for and provide assistance when needed.

More organizations are starting to switch to a peer mentality of promoting health and wellbeing to veterans. The Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) is a program under the TVC that is a “peer to peer support through training, technical assistance and certification to local mental health authority based MVPN peer service coordinators and their peers to create a statewide network of military trauma-affected veteran peer support” (Military Veteran Peer Network, n.d.). Grace After Fire also promotes a peer-to-peer network but for women who have also experienced specific issues in the military or as veterans.

Physical health is another important need that should be focused on as we gain healthcare services and medication through either Tricare or the Veteran Affairs Health Care System. Through an alternative approach, there are veterans who decide to not take medication for their mental health issues but instead choose an alternative holistic approach such as exercise or art. Many organizations are turning to this option instead of medicating and one of the many organizations that have created a holistic approach is Team RWB (Red, White, Blue). This organization's mission for veterans is to "define enrichment by creating quality relationships and experiences that contribute to life satisfaction and overall well-being in health, people and purpose" (Team RWB, n.d.). Yoga, meditation, acupuncture, artistic revenues, and various other exercise groups are alternate ways that veterans today use to cope with either their physical or mental illnesses.

Needs of women veterans. Since the Revolutionary War, women have been contributing and serving alongside men in wars even though they were not recognized or permitted to serve. Women were only called to duty during times of war and were officially recognized as "permanent members of the military through the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948" (Task & Purpose, 2017). According to the Department of Veteran Affairs, there are more than two million female veterans in the United States, and women are the fastest-growing group within the veteran population. With the expected increase of women veterans, it becomes essential to understand the unique needs as they do not fit neatly in the category of "veteran" or their civilian female counterparts" (Strong, Crowe & Lawson, 2018).

Since 2001, approximately 200,000 women have served in wartime Iraq or Afghanistan and it was not until recently that women were not 'allowed' to serve in combat roles even though they have been in combat support and support roles such as

gunners, combat pilots, military police and a whole host of military professionals that are in the direct line of fire. (Ainspan et al., 2012)

Women veterans are generally unrecognized for their military service and the needs required and allotted to them differ from our male veterans in dissimilar ways. “Women’s roles and representation in the military have changed over the past few years, and they are a vulnerable population as they report poorer health, including higher rates of mental health disorders, high burden of trauma exposure across their life span” (Chen, Lehavot, Beckman, Simpson, & Williams, 2019, p. 2).

The following general female-specific healthcare services and needs are indicated based on the most requested services from women veterans: pelvic examinations, clinical breast examinations, pap smears, prescription of contraceptives, and pregnancy tests. It also includes specialized healthcare services such as treatment of abnormal pap smears, prenatal care, labor and delivery, benign gynecological disorders, postpartum care, surgical, medical, and radiation treatment of breast, ovarian, cervical and uterine cancers. Further, the availability of behavioral health services such as psychotherapy or substance abuse treatment that are not gender specific were limited or not available, and accessibility to these programs that are female-only would possibly increase participation or encourage women veterans to seek help (Powe & Waits, 2013, p. 3).

In 2010, females made up 15% of the Armed Forces and had had high exposure (20–40%) to sexual assault during their service; this is known as military sexual trauma (MST) (Hazle et al., 2012, p. 234). A few of the unique needs and challenges that women veterans face is the “lack of community of fellow female veterans, lack of childcare assistance for single mothers, and financial instability due to the lack of financial literacy” (Mittal, 2019).

It has become the government's and community's duty to better provide for and recognize our women veterans in various ways.

There are many ways to highlight and appreciate our women veterans such as the City of Austin hosting its annual Women Veterans Appreciation luncheon during Women's History Month in March. This is a time where all City of Austin employees who are women veterans were invited to a lunch with a guest speaker and organization representatives for women services—it made for a great networking opportunity.



Figure 8. City of Austin Women Veterans Luncheon Attendees

In the past year, the “I Am Not Invisible” exhibition featured 30 portraits of Texas Women Military veterans “to increase awareness and dialogue about women veterans as well as open viewers eyes to the myriad contributions, needs and experiences of women who have served in the military” (Texas Veterans Commission, n.d.).



Figure 9. “I Am Not Invisible” Campaign

Housing/homelessness. The definition of a “homeless veteran” to qualify for assistance under the homeless veteran programs governed by Title 38 of the U.S. Code is a person who served in active military, naval or air service and was not dishonorably discharged. Veterans are also considered “homeless” if they meet the definition of a “homeless individual” codified as part of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of someone lacking a fixed regular and adequate nighttime residence. There are several stipulations of how a person is defined as homeless such as being in a nighttime residence that is temporary, institutionalized

or a public or private place not designed for nor ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (Monte, 2013). In the 111th congress, the definition was expanded for “homeless individuals” and categories including those who will imminently lose their housing whether it is their own or one that they are sharing or a hotel or motel not paid by a government entity was added. The imminent loss of housing must be evidenced by an eviction notice requiring them to leave within 14 days, the lack of resources to remain in a hotel, motel or with another homemaker or renter for more than 14 days, no subsequent residence identified, or the lack of resources needed to obtain permanent housing. More changes have and will continue to be made regarding this definition and recently, it was expanded to include those fleeing a situation of domestic violence or other life-threatening conditions (Monte, 2013).

Throughout the community, the VA and many veteran organizations have adopted the phrase “The words *homeless*, and *veterans* do not belong together” as those who have served our country should never have to suffer in the streets. Over the past years, many cities and states have been moving forward with initiatives to house veterans in an expedited manner to achieve and sustain “functional zero,” and many states and cities have successfully reached this goal.

Unfortunately, the goal of having no more homeless veterans will never be accomplished whether it is a personal preference of staying where they are, substance abuse or even worse, when no one knows that they are a veteran. Thus, “functional zero” is reached when the number of veterans who are homeless whether sheltered or unsheltered is no greater than the monthly housing placement rate for veterans” (HUD Exchange, 2016).

According to the VA, “veteran homelessness has declined from 5.4% between 2017 and 2018” (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2019), and they have accomplished this with a threefold focus on the involvement of key players of the community. The plan to achieving the end to veteran homelessness consists of “1) Conducting outreach to proactively seek out veterans in need of assistance, 2) Connecting homeless and at-risk Veterans with housing solutions, health care, community employment services and other required supports, and 3) Collaborating with federal, state and local agencies; employers; housing providers, faith-based and community nonprofits; and others to expand employment and affordable housing options for veterans exiting homelessness” (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2019).

The City of Austin’s Mayor joined the Mayor’s Challenge to end veteran homelessness and created a task force of realtor, nonprofit organizations, senators, council members as well as employees of the VA, county, and state to collaborate to achieve functional zero together. Another way that the City of Austin’s veterans program contributes to assisting our homeless veteran population is an initiative called the “Furniture for No Longer Homeless Veterans” program where they seek volunteers to pick up slightly used and like-new furniture and have them delivered to those in the HUD-VASH (Housing and Urban Development – Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing) program. Since 2012, they have successfully delivered to more than 150 veterans.

The partnerships between leaders, community, and organizations dedicated to ensuring every veteran had a home contributed toward the success of three states and 66 communities who announced that they had ended veteran homelessness as of February 19, 2019 (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2019).

Homeless veterans are not the only category that the community should be focused on in regard to housing, but the issue of finding affordable housing for low income and at risk veterans should also be included. These veterans fall between the gaps of being eligible for obtaining veteran benefits and government assistance, so they become a population that is forgotten. Today, nonprofit organizations have initiated programs such as rent assistance along with other well-known organizations like the VFW providing resources and funding for the specific needs of veterans. Understanding and learning about each local organization's programs and grant structure will enable the veteran representative to refer out and be familiar with the right point of contact to ensure the veteran seeking assistance is helped.

Veteran benefits and programs. Veteran benefits and programs range from healthcare to elderly care and comprehensively have the following programs available. "Health care hospitals and services, elderly care for veterans, disability pay, veteran pension, payment to families, life insurance, home loans, education and training, and taps which comprises of burials, headstones, cemeteries and final honors for the veteran" (Budahn, 2011) as summarized in Figure 10.



Figure 10. List of Veteran Affairs Programs

Some states may have a specific veteran department available similar to the TVC in the State of Texas. The TVC is another valuable resource to Texas veterans as it provides support with claims, education, employment, entrepreneurs, grants, healthcare advocacy, mental health, and women veterans. (Texas Veterans Commission, n.d.).

Counties throughout the country also have the resource of veterans service officers (VSO) who are available to promote events, provide resources, file claims for benefits, and be an integral part of the veteran community. The Travis County Veteran Service Office's mission is "providing eligible veterans, their dependents and survivors direct and general support in assistance in obtaining all benefits they are entitled to from the Veteran Benefits Administration" (Veteran Services, n.d.). Many county offices vary on which services they provide, what events they promote and are affiliated with, and the support they give to the community, but they will still be able to aid and provide information when it comes to claims and benefits.

Navigating through the system is considered one of the most tedious and complicated processes a person could go through, and the help of organizations and dedicated personnel are recommended in order to successfully receive the benefits owed to a service member.

One helpful resource that the city representative could offer is to have a comprehensive guide of all the services within the community for veterans to access through their website. These specific guides, resources, and information that veterans and their families can immediately access will alleviate some of the volume of calls and emails a person may have to deal with on a given day.

Many city websites provide general and basic information, such as contact information, to the local VA, VSOs, and organizations, such as the VFW, for veterans to contact. There are a select number of impressive city websites that provide a comprehensive list of what is available locally as a one-stop resource page versus the alternative of going to many other websites to search for the answer they need.

Education. Other than employment, many transitioning veterans choose to continue or further their education credentials, and with the help of federal assistance, they can accomplish this. Educational assistance programs are a benefit for service members and “intended to avert unemployment, adjust to civilian life, reward military service, encourage recruitment and retention in the military, and make education affordable” (Marsh, 2016). Veterans who served after 9/11 are entitled to the Post 9/11 GI Bill, and for others, the Montgomery GI Bill “provides 36 months of full-time schooling or equivalent in part-time attendance” (Marsh, 2016).

Many colleges and universities have veteran service offices to guide and provide support to transitioning veterans who are starting their education journey, and there are

strategies implemented on how to create a veteran-friendly campus for transition and success. However, veterans who choose to return to college must “negotiate an identity change, figure out how to identify and access appropriate VA resources, and overcome feelings of alienation on campus” (Kelley, Smith & Fox, 2013).

Other than the traditional community college or university, some veterans choose to participate in the VA Vocational Rehabilitation program. Vocational Rehab is a “special program for disabled veterans to help prepare them for suitable employment or achieve greater independence in daily living” (Budahn, 2011, p. 172). In this program, the government pays for all school-related expenses for college institutions, trade schools or business and technical schools, on the job training and apprenticeship training, on the far training combinations of classroom instruction and on the job experience, special rehabilitative facilities, and some at-home study”. (Budahn, 2011, pg. 173).

Texas is one of the states to offer education assistance for veterans and service members who either enlisted or commissioned from the State of Texas. The Hazelwood act is a “state benefit that provides qualified veterans, spouses and dependent children with an education benefit of up to 160 hours of tuition exemption, including most fee charges at public institutions of higher education in Texas” (Texas Veterans Commission, n.d.). The American Legion has provided a resourceful, comprehensive list of other specific state education benefits on their website.

Providing resources and guides for how veterans can obtain these educational benefits and contact information of the veteran service office at the local schools will be useful on a city website for when a veteran seeks assistance through the city’s veteran program.

In summary, there are currently five educational assistance programs that are available to veterans and servicemembers with two available to spouses and children. The oldest is the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), followed by the Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty (MGIB-AD), the Montgomery Bill – Selected Reserves (MGIB – SR), the Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP), and the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Program (Meyers & Glaskin, 2011).

Resources for Program Development

Although the military provides amazing opportunities and skills that will be useful in everyday life, a veteran will be against a lot of competition when it comes to employment opportunities. After transitioning from the military, veterans gained skill sets and years of experience but may lack a specific program accreditation and educational degree in order to be as competitive to others who have them. We are fortunate today to live in a country where the majority of the people are grateful to those who served and continue to serve in the military in comparison to decades before where resources were limited or unavailable.

Without the appreciation of the general public today, our veterans would have even more difficult barriers to overcome, which is why programs specific to our veterans are important to their health, success, and wellbeing. Further, the appreciation from city leadership will enable the creation of an internal veterans' program. It will either take a citizen, veterans advisory, or commission to initiate the concept of better serving local veterans by creating a specific program just for those who served in the military, National Guard and Reserves.

Many universities and colleges have programs in place that are successful and can be used as a guide in terms of what current veteran needs are and which services are important. In reference to “Creating a Veteran-Family Campus,” study participants noted that several areas

that concerned them during their transition were as follows: 1) Veterans Administration (programs), 2) veteran service offices and other support services, and 3) re-entering civilian life (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009, p. 15). The type of concerns that the study participants cited in “Creating a Veteran-Family Campus” would also be a benefit to the community if they were implemented as services obtained through a city veterans program.

Establishing networks, communicating with others, and researching the community needs of what is available is crucial to the development of a new program, especially when it concerns reinventing the wheel and duplicating services. Once support from leadership has been initiated and granted, the purpose and development of a veteran’s program will only be as strong as the dedication, compassion, and motivation from the ones responsible for its success.

Effective communication. In “Effective HR Communication: A Framework for Communication HR Programmes with Impact,” the author explains the following:

Communications are critical to the success of the organization and that the key reasons why it is important to communicate effectively is because of the following. 1) Reinforce company culture and values, 2) Build employee trust, 3) Improve engagement, 4) Provide information and education, and 5) Deliver a return on investment. (Corey, 2016)

Communication is key to ensuring that a person is heard, that something gets accomplished, and that there is an understanding between people. A personal example of effective communication was when a city employee was having difficulty in managing their time, concentrating on their duties, and showing up to training events due to their service-connected PTSD. A co-worker who is also a veteran encouraged this person to seek out assistance and resources from the City of Austin veterans’ program instead of doing it alone. Upon meeting, this employee confided in me that in the previous months, they had tried to

overcome and endure the situation on their own, but it was not effective. This employee trusted the staff of the program and disclosed their concerns about communicating with the supervisors of the department regarding the issues they were having with their disability. They also stated that they did not want to be seen as weak and lazy in completing their assigned tasks due to their disability.

Through effective communication, the staff of the veteran's program got involved and mediated conversations between the veteran and the city department. In the end, the communication provided the ability to provide flexible accommodations to this employee, thus allowing them to thrive in the workforce with a newfound motivation to complete their assigned tasks successfully and to have better relationships between their coworkers and family.

Dedicated staff. It is recommended that the staff should be led by an individual or team who are committed to veterans and understands the strengths and challenges faced by their unique experiences (Kelley et al., 2013). It may be beneficial to the program if the staff is comprised of those who are easily accessible, relate to a person's military service, understand current veteran issues and programs, and are especially trustworthy and dependable in terms of having information disclosed to them. It is also important to note that some women veterans have special needs where they may feel more comfortable communicating and seeking assistance from only women who could relate to and understand what they have experienced during their service. Having a female staff member be available to provide outreach, services, and support would benefit the organization in catering to the specific needs of other women veterans.

A transitioning service member provided her view on why an internal veteran's program is important, saying that "it would have assisted her, help her feel at ease, and be a guide for her success" (Ackerman, DiRamio, 2009). Websites, brochures, and papers can only provide a

limited amount of information in comparison to meeting with someone who has the personal knowledge and is in proximity, which would provide a safe and accessible environment for our veterans who transition and adapt to change. The dedication, innovation, motivation, and passion that the staff has for service members would be the biggest benefit with respect to creating a successful veterans' program internally, within the city, or via any organization.

Training. The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) “is a federal law that establishes rights and responsibilities for uniformed service members and their civilian employers” (USERRA, n.d.). An organization known as Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves (ESGR) provides training for others to protect and serve those currently serving the Guard, so that they do not have any fear of losing their jobs once they become activated on military orders. This organization also trains individuals to become well versed with USERRA and to implement its rules and procedures while supporting those in the Guard and Reserves from their employers' violations and the discrepancies of the law itself.

Training to file benefits claims are available to those who are interested, and there are many organizations—federal, county, and non-profits—who offer this service to their communities. The City of Austin veterans' program itself does not file claims but refers such services out to those who are dependable and reliable, so that they could concentrate on other programs to fill the gaps and better serve other areas of interest.

“Military personnel exposed to combat service are known to be at greater risk for developing PTSD” (Figley & Nash, 2007, p. 97). Although any person could be suffering PTSD without having served a single day in the military, it is imperative for managers, supervisors, and leadership to know and understand the signs and symptoms of those who experience and strive to overcome this disability.

A study in the “Supervisor Support Training Effects on Veteran Health and Work Outcomes in the Civilian Workplace” recommends that two specific modules in training would be beneficial with regard to supervisor and coworker support being properly implemented in the workplace. The first module recommended is to “highlight the positive attributes of veterans such as their leadership abilities, potential concerns like PTSD, and identify places to get additional information and resources for veterans who may be dealing with these stressors” (Bodner et al., 2018, p 8). The second module they recommend for the workplace “focuses on supportive supervisor behavior of two dimensions, which include 1) Veteran and family support that helps employees better manage work and nonwork demands. 2) Performance support that addresses information on fundamental supervisor practices, including the importance of measurement and direction, feedback, coaching, and provision of clear objectives and goals. 3) The training reviewed on how to put supportive behaviors into action” (Bodner et al., 2018, pg. 8).

Generally, people support our military service members for their contributions to our nation, but some people do not share the same sentiments. Bodner explains that although “many organizations are now implementing veteran hiring initiatives with departments dedicated to veteran support along with some supervisors knowing and understand about the military culture to see the beneficial experiences of bringing veterans into the workforce. Many will still have biases and negative attitudes towards veterans that will, unfortunately, keep them from being hired and being supported” (Bodner et al., 2018, p 17).

An internal veterans’ program will be able to mitigate any issues or concerns regarding USERRA between Human Resource Managers and the employees who are in the Guard or the Reserves. A designated military point of contact would be a useful resource for all personnel,

since they will be well versed in the federal laws, so that there are no violations and possibilities of conflict between an employer and an employee, or the chance of an employer being sued for violating any policy.

It is important that the law “USERRA prevents employment discrimination against an individual based on service” performing some type of military service on official orders, and “not be denied initial employment, reemployment, retention in employment, promotion or any benefit of employment by an employer on the basis of that service” (Vasil,2018). Without the support and guidance of those who are still serving our country in the Guard/Reserves, the motivation to remain or apply to a specific organization will only produce negative results along with the loss of some potential candidates and leaders.

Leadership traits are taught in many forms throughout everyday lives; the following roles and goals could be fulfilled by any organization to be successful: 1) Envisioning: Provide a shared objective that inspires commitment and helps them improve their shared mental model; 2) Organizing: Help others decide how to attain their visions or goals and engage in concomitant planning and scheduling. To meet these standards, one must adhere to methods for assessing progress and performance, arrange and conduct ideas to solve problems, and make important decisions; 3) Social integrating: Maintain internal and external cohesiveness (encourage mutual trust, acceptance, and cooperation among other groups, facilitate open communication, participation, and tolerance of dissenting views, and mediate conflicts, among others; 4) External spanning: Help keep group decisions compatible with the needs of the people whom one is serving. This implies monitoring the external environment, influencing people outside the realm of veterans and the military, and provide adequate resources, approvals, assistance, and cooperation (Beeres, Fenema & Soeters, 2010).

Generally, building awareness to provide opportunities to better understand the different kinds of military experiences (that may be absent from their own set of experiences or knowledge base) would provide the services and fulfill the needs that a veteran might be searching for. Overall, the consistent messages heard from other veterans is their need for a strong sense of community and belonging (Ackerman & DiRamio, 2009).

Table 1

Conceptual Framework

Title: Assessing veteran-related support programs within Cities throughout the United States and the implementation of an internal support program for former and current service members. Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gauge veteran-related support programs offered in U.S. cities using web content analysis. The services offered by the cities throughout the United States will be assessed using the City of Austin veterans' program as the benchmark. This research will categorize the services the cities offer and provide recommendations to other cities that might want to initiate services for veterans in their jurisdiction. This information will be useful for those cities who do not have a veterans' program at a local level, or to get ideas, improve what is being done, and perhaps even initiate their own internal veteran-related support program to better support and provide the best possible care for those who have served in the U.S. Military.	
Practical Ideal-Type Categories	Supporting Literature
1) Level of Support for Veteran-Related Programs (Best Practice by the City of Austin)	
1.1. State Government Level	Local Veterans' Service Officers (n.d.); Greg Abbott on Helping Veterans (2019);
1.2. Local Government Level	Veterans Services Office (n.d.); Bodner et al. (2018)
1.3. Community Support	Whittle et al. (2010); "Energize our Community" (2005)
2) Tools Available to Help Veterans	
2.1. Website Content	Harder & Jordan (2013);
2.2. Human Resource Policies and Procedures	Work Opportunity Tax Credit (n.d.); Latest Unemployment Numbers (2019); Vets USERRA Fact Sheet 3 (n.d.); USERRA (n.d.); Veterans Services Office (n.d.); United States Merit Systems Protection Board (2014); Vasil (2018);]
2.3. Program, Services, Events	Marsh (2016); Stern (2016); Ackerman & DiRamio (2009); Ainspan, Penk & Shinseki (2012).
2.4. Outreach	Ackerman, DiRamio (2009); Lynton (2016); Ainspan, Penk & Shinseki (2012); Amdur et al., (2012);
3) Veteran Needs and Services	
3.1. Employment	Perkins et al., (2017); Stern (2017); Marsh (2016); (Bradbard, Armstrong & Maury, 2016).
3.2. Mental / Physical Health	"VA, Health and Human Services" (2019); Gately (2019); Marlowe (2001); Stern (2017); Military Veteran Peer Network (n.d.); Tanielian, & Jaycox (2008); TeamRWB (n.d.);

3.3. Needs of Women Veterans	Strong, Crowe & Lawson (2018); Chen, et al., (2019); Purpose (2017); Hazle, Hassan & Wilcox (2012); Mittal (2019); Ainspan, Penk & Shinseki (2012); Powe & Waits (2013).
3.4. Housing/Homelessness	HUDEXCHANGE (2016); “Ending Veteran Homelessness” (2019); Monte (2013)
3.5. Veteran Benefits and Programs	Budahn (2011); “Claims, Education, Employment” (n.d.);
3.6 Education	Marsh (2016); Budahn (2011); “Hazelwood Act” (n.d.); Kelley & Fox (2013); Meyers & Glaskin (2011)
4) Resources for Program Development	
4.1. Effective Communication and Coalition Partnerships	Corey (2016)
4.2. Dedicated Staff	Ackerman, DiRamio (2009); Kelley & Fox (2013);
4.3. Training	“USERRA” (n.d.); Figley & Nash (2007); Bodner et al., (2018); Vasil (2018); Beeres, Fenema & Soeters (2010); Ackerman & DiRamio (2009)

Chapter III: Methodology

Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter's purpose is to describe the method used to analyze municipal veteran service websites within the United States and identify if any policies, practices, or related information are present for those seeking such resources. This chapter looks at the different services that cities may offer and a web content analysis of this research method. It also discusses the operationalization of the conceptual framework and concludes with a detailed operationalization table and a summary of the results.

Through a simple search on the web using keywords such as "City," "Program," "Services," and "Veteran," the following cities in Table 2 have been identified as containing some type of dedicated veterans' program and adequate staff to manage this department. The programs are essential to help those seeking resources and assistance through various programs and missions.

Table 2

Veteran Service Department Present at Municipal Level

VETERAN OFFICE/PROGRAM	
ALABAMA	
Auburn	https://www.auburnalabama.org/veterans/
CALIFORNIA	
Los Angeles	https://www.lamayor.org/veterans
Anaheim	https://www.anaheim.net/1594/Veterans
Mission Viejo	https://cityofmissionviejo.org/services-guides/military-veterans
Glen Cove	http://www.glencove-li.us/veterans-services/
CONNECTICUT	
Danbury	https://www.danbury-ct.gov/government/departments/veterans-affairs/
Norwich	https://www.norwichct.org/705/Veterans-Service-Contact-Person
Shelton	http://cityofshelton.org/community/veterans-corner/
ILLINOIS	

Chicago	https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/veterans.html
INDIANA	
Indianapolis	https://www.indy.gov/activity/office-of-veteran-services
MASSACHUSETTS (ALL CITIES - 39) – Largest 5 Populated Cities Indicated	
Boston	https://www.boston.gov/departments/veterans-services
Worcester	http://www.worcesterma.gov/veterans-services
Springfield	https://www.springfield-ma.gov/hhs/?id=veterans
Lowell	https://www.lowellma.gov/431/Veterans-Services
Cambridge	https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/veteransservices
MISSOURI	
St. Louis	https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/human-services/veterans-affairs/
MONTANA	
Miles City	http://montana.networkofcare.org/veterans/services/agency.aspx?pid=MilesCityVeteransServiceOffice_1131_17_0#
Belgrade	http://montana.networkofcare.org/veterans/services/agency.aspx?pid=BelgradeVeteransServiceOffice_1131_17_0
NEW JERSEY	
Jersey City	https://www.cityofjerseycity.com/cms/one.aspx?pageId=9290164
NEW MEXICO	
Albuquerque	https://www.cabq.gov/veterans-resource-center
NEW YORK	
Yonkers	https://www.yonkersny.gov/government/departments/veterans-services
Glen Cove	http://www.glencove-li.us/veterans-services/
Mt Vernon	https://cmvny.com/departments/veterans-service-agency/
New York	https://www1.nyc.gov/site/veterans/index.page
OHIO	
Columbus	https://www.columbus.gov/hr/Veterans-Services/
Berea	https://www.cityofberea.org/467/Veterans-Outreach
TEXAS	
Austin	https://www.austintexas.gov/veterans
Houston	https://www.houstontx.gov/vetaffairs/
San Antonio	https://www.sanantonio.gov/oma
VIRGINIA	
Norfolk	https://www.norfolk.gov/index.aspx?NID=2667

Although there is no internal city department dedicated to supporting veterans or any indication of a staff or a budget allocated within the city, there are a few cities that offer only information on their official websites. Having the resources available to veterans and service members visiting the city website is a good practice to show how supportive a city can be towards its military service members. In Table 3, the following cities were found through the data collection search using the keywords “veteran,” “program,” and “resources,” and 43 cities in 15 different states were found to provide at least some amount of information that can assist

veterans. Although this list is not inconclusive, there is no doubt that there are many cities, if not all, which offer some level of information for veterans to seek assistance on their official city websites.

Table 3

Veteran Resource Information Available on Website

INFORMATION ON WEBSITE	
ALABAMA	
Hoover	http://www.hooveral.org/BusinessDirectoryII.aspx?lngBusinessCategoryID=35
ARIZONA	
Mesa	https://www.mesaaz.gov/residents/diversity-office/vets-connect
Tempe	https://www.tempe.gov/government/human-services/veterans-military-resources
Scottsdale	https://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/veterans
Peoria	https://www.peoriaaz.gov/home/showdocument?id=2517
El Mirage	https://www.cityofelmirage.org/1657/Veteran-Services
CALIFORNIA	
Pomona	https://www.ci.pomona.ca.us/index.php/veterans-resources-home
Irvine	https://www.cityofirvine.org/government/veterans/resources
Covina	https://covina.ca.gov/rdh/page/help-veterans
Lake Elsinore	http://www.lake-elsinore.org/city-services/veterans-services
Lakewood	https://www.lakewood.org/Human-Resources/Veteran-Resources
Glendale	https://www.glendaleca.gov/government/departments/community-services-parks/verdugo-jobs-center/veterans-program
Norwalk	https://www.norwalk.org/i-want-to/veteran-services
Milpitas	http://www.ci.milpitas.ca.gov/our-government/commission/veterans/
Long Beach	http://www.longbeach.gov/health/services/directory-by-population/long-beach-veterans-commission/
Monrovia	https://www.cityofmonrovia.org/your-government/library/veterans
Lancaster	https://www.cityoflancasterca.org/residents/local-resources/veterans
Murrieta	https://murrieta-prod.civica.granicusops.com/getconnected/vetinfo.asp
COLORADO	
Aurora	https://www.auroragov.org/city_hall/boards_commissions/veterans_affairs_commission/veteran_resources
Denver	https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/denver-human-services/be-supported/additional-assistance/veteran-services.html
Fort Collins	https://www.fcgov.com/municipalcourt/veterans-information
MICHIGAN	
Dearborn	https://www.cityofdearborn.org/services/public-information/veterans-services
MINNESOTA	
Zimmerman	https://zimmerman.govoffice.com/index.asp?SEC=AE9F1D9B-E5E7-4328-9F0F-11049A0AE22F&DE=1020CECA-C98B-4F7F-A657-47434009DDB0

MISSOURI	
Richmond Heights	http://www.richmondheights.org/community_profile/veteran_s_services.php
MONTANA	
Billings	https://ci.billings.mt.us/2080/Veterans-Resources
NEVADA	
Carson City	https://carson.org/residents/veterans
Boulder City	https://www.bcnv.org/602/Veterans-Services
Las Vegas	https://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/Residents/Neighborhood-Services/Veteran-Services
Reno	https://www.reno.gov/government/departments/parks-recreation-community-services/adaptive-recreation/veteran-programs
NEW MEXICO	
Santa Fe	https://www.santafenm.gov/veterans_resources
OKLAHOMA	
Mustang City	https://www.cityofmustang.org/seniorcenter/page/veterans-services
OREGON	
Grants Pass	https://www.grantspassoregon.gov/1151/Veterans-Services
PENNSYLVANIA	
Pittsburgh	https://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/homefront-pgh/index.html
TEXAS	
Lubbock	https://ps.ci.lubbock.tx.us/departamental-websites/departments/city-secretary/boards-commissions/list-of-boards-commissions/veterans-advisory-committee-website/lubbock-veteran-resources
El Paso	https://www.elpasotexas.gov/veteran-resources
Fort Worth	http://fortworthtexas.gov/cap/programs-for-veterans/
McAllen	https://www.mcallen.net/departments/hr/veterans
Harlingen	http://www.myharlingen.us/page/veterans.home
College Station	http://www.cstx.gov/index.aspx?page=3809
Mercedes	https://cityofmercedes.com/4315
Flower Mound	https://www.flower-mound.com/1598/Veterans-Programs
VIRGINIA	
Alexandria	https://www.alexandriava.gov/Veterans
Hampton	https://hampton.gov/2000/Military-Veteran-Family-Resources

Web Content Analysis

Content analysis is defined as the “method of collecting social data through carefully specifying and counting social artifacts such as books, songs, speeches, and paintings” (Babbie, 2016). This methodology is ideal for the assessment conducted in this research as it will help gather the data necessary to compare the different cities without using too many resources and too much time.

Veteran services at the local level can be divided into four categories: Level of Support for Veteran-Related Programs, Tools Available to Help Veterans, Veteran Needs and Services, and Resources for Program Development. For this study, a web content analysis was performed on certain cities throughout the United States that have veteran-related services available at a municipal level. Each website was gauged with respect to the findings, programs, services, and resources they provided, and all of them were assessed in relation to the benchmark of the City of Austin Veterans Program.

Strengths of web content analysis. An important strength of using web content analysis is the feasibility of accessing a vast amount of information without the dependency on responses from individuals. The content is readily available and provides information based on a search criterion at a person's leisure. Earl Babbie noted that the greatest advantage of content analysis is that it is economical in terms of both time and money, and that there is no requirement for a large research staff or special equipment as long as there is access to the material that needs to be coded (Babbie, 2016). Another strength of content analysis is the permissibility towards the correction of errors where the need to repeat the research project as a whole is not required, since it is easier to repeat a portion of the study through content analysis compared to other research methods (Babbie, 2016). A third advantage of content analysis is its unobtrusiveness, of seldom having any effect on the subject being studied, as it is already established and available to be studied over time and is reliable (Babbie, 2016). Other methodologies prevent researchers from obtaining the results immediately; the amount of analysis used in a study could be dependent on the researcher, or with the degree of content availability .

In *Introducing Communication Research*, one of the strengths of content analysis is "its emphasis on the systematic coding, counting, and analysis content." Another strength of the

content analysis is that it is “readily accessible and that the study of media content, human participants are not involved, and human research approvals are typically not required” (Treadwell, 2016, p. 215–17).

With the ability to use and access technology within seconds, finding information about cities through content analysis enables the possibility of completing a search without relying on reciprocal communication from each provider. The information relevant to my research was readily available if I wished to go back to review the material in order to reassess what the website provided that could be included in the study. Moreover, content analysis provided an opportunity to compare what each city has done to its veteran services website, to emulate the City of Austin’s website.

Weaknesses of web content analysis. Earl Babbie states that the disadvantages of the research method of content analysis are the limitations to its application if it is used. Another weakness is to be found in interpretation; traditional perspectives on content analysis insist on counting manifest or observable content and its validity. The third weakness is its limitation regarding examination, for the content must be recorded in some fashion to permit analysis or approval for subsequent presentation without bias (Babbie, 2016). Donald Treadwell (2016) annotates that a limitation and disadvantage of content analysis is that it can only be used for comparisons and interpretation, where validity can be an issue.

A disadvantage in this research is that some websites do not provide enough information to effectively analyze and provide a detailed account of the particular program itself and its success. There is also a chance that some veteran representative might be unable to contribute their thoughts and ideas onto the website, which could also be managed by someone other than the veteran programs’ administration. The lack of content does not paint a true picture of the

services available and the amount of content does not provide the level of service that the staff provides to their community.

Operationalization of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is a practical-ideal type that presents the best practices related to veterans programs in cities. The practical-ideal type categories have been drawn from the literature and from the City of Austin Veterans program, which serves as the benchmark for gauging other cities with such programs. The operationalization is listed in Table 4, which lists four ideal components and their associated subcategories in the first column and the specific content available at each city in the third column.

Table 4

Operationalization Table

Category	Research Method	Evidence
1. Executive Management Support		
1.1 State Government	Web Content Analysis	1) Does the website provide information about state government support? 2) Does the website provide information about the type of state government support?
1.2 Local Government	Web Content Analysis	1) Does the website provide information about local government support? 2) Does the website provide information about the type of local government support?

1.3 Community Support	Web Content Analysis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Does the website provide information about community support? 2) Does the website provide information about the type of community support?
2. Tools Available to Help Develop Veteran–Related Programs		
2.1 Website Content	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide any veteran-related content, such as resource guides, links to programs, and/or organizations?
2.2 Human Resource Policies and Procedures	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide Human Resource policies and procedures directed toward veterans?
2.3 Specific programs and services and events	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide any specific programs, services, or events for veterans?
2.4 Outreach	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide any outreach opportunities, if any?
3. Veteran Needs and Services		
3.1 Employment	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide employment information for veterans?
3.2 Mental/Physical Health	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide any information for mental/physical help for veterans
3.3 Needs of Women Veterans	Web Content Analysis	Does the website list and identify the specific needs of women veterans?
3.4 Housing/Homelessness	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide information regarding housing and veteran homelessness?

3.5 Veteran Benefits and Specific programs	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide information on those veteran benefits and programs that are available to them?
3.6 Education	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide information on veterans seeking to further their education?
4. Resources for Program Development		
4.1 Effective Communication and Coalition Partnerships	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide and/or list effective communication strategies? Do they participate in some type of coalition with other veteran service providers?
4.2 Dedicated Staff	Web Content Analysis	Does the website provide information about a dedicated staff?
5.2 Training	Web Content Analysis	Does the website include information on the types of training required/recommended?

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a detailed list of cities that were found to offer veteran-related services at a municipal level, along with cities that were identified as only providing veteran resources, as a comparison. Content analysis is the methodological practice that was used to gather data from the websites of city veterans' programs and the services available to current and former service members.

This chapter also lists the known strengths and weaknesses of using web content analysis from a viewpoint of what each city website provided. It also presents the content used to present the operationalization of the conceptual framework and how the categories and subcategories connect to each other.

Chapter IV: Results

Purpose of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results from a web content analysis of 30 cities within 14 states that offer a municipal veterans' program. It is arranged according to the subcategories of the conceptual framework regarding the information provided by the city websites to present the research findings. The data from the web content analysis are categorized using the following coding categories: Information Present (IP), Partial Information Present (PIP), and No Information (NI). Table 5 provides an overall picture of where and in which cities and states the veteran service-related programs are located.

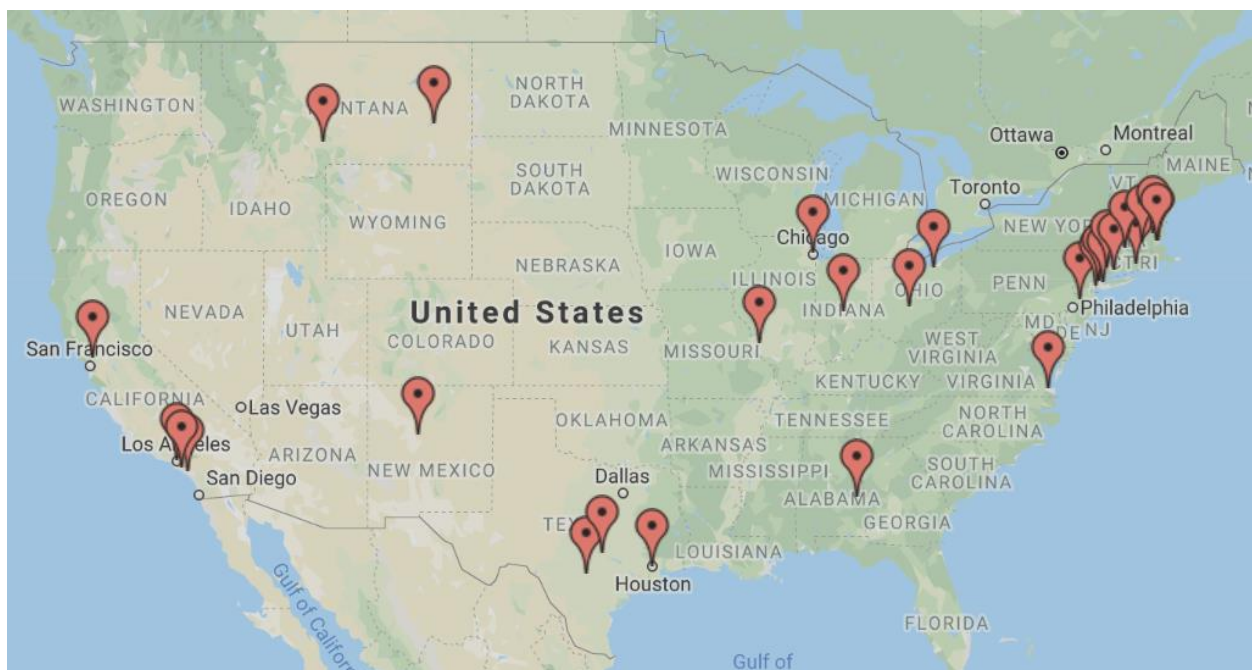


Figure 11. Pinpoints of Municipal Veteran-Related Programs

Executive Management Support

State government. Most governors and state officials have indicated their appreciation of and support towards those who contributed to the U.S. military. Their support may have influenced them to enact a specific state program or committee to assist veterans and provide

services similar to what the Department of Veteran Affairs offers. There are 15 (50%) city websites that were found to provide some type of link to the particular state's veteran program, similar to what the State of Texas has—the TVC. Further, these links to the state website provided the homepage and a list of resources, services, and programs available state-wide to enhance and better serve veterans and transitioning service members.

Although some websites provided an in-depth description and a list of the programs along with an explanation of any partnerships they may have with the state office, many other sites provided limited descriptions with respect to the state government's support. There were 18 (60%) cities provided at least some type of limited information or listing, stating the resources and support that have been made available by the governors. 60% of the websites just listed that a state veteran agency was available or only had information regarding a state benefit such as a bill, requiring the service of a veteran service officer through an executive order.

Alternately, 11 cities (37%) do not list any type of state support available or whether they have a relationship with the state government office. There is a chance that they may have limited or no partnership with their state and no information to provide, leading to their exclusion as a resource.

Local government. As a city, support from the city management, mayor, and the council is crucial to strengthen and continue the development of a municipal veterans' program for those employed by the city and for the benefit of the community. Local government support is normally composed of those in the country, town, city management, and the elected officials specific to cities, such as mayors and members of city councils.

The 16 (53%) cities that had support from their local governments displayed through some type of message or indication that their city mayor or management contributed to or

supported such a program. Cities that provided only partial information regarding availability were 3 (10%), as they only indicated that they worked with the city mayor or management or even the mayor's department. There was little to no information about the elected officials supporting the program through either messages, events or photos showing that they support the program and the military. Further, there were 11 (37%) cities that did not list any type of message or indication that they get support from the city, other than having the program developed internally, based on available website content.

The municipal veterans' program develops at this level unless it is state-mandated, like Massachusetts, but this is one step closer than the cities which do not have any support service or resource listed to help their local community in knowing whom to contact and where to go.

Community support. Without the community, such a program itself would cease to exist and not have the clout and referral services it needs to remain active and successful. As a government entity, we serve the citizens and the community; thus, their feedback and complaints matter to us.

Most of the cities had the community listed on their website with pictures or a description of their community partnerships. Also, those with an indication of a veterans' advisory committee or partnership with local military bases were identified using the information present, with a total of 20 (67%) cities ticking the box.

There were two (7%) cities which only listed the organization name with no description of their partnership or information indicating that they worked together as a community. In comparison, there were eight (27%) cities that did not provide any names of organizations, community support, citizen-run committees or information regarding whom they worked with and who supported them.

Most organizations, such as the Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the Veteran Affairs (VA), and local entities of both the private and public sector are generally active in every town and city. These popular organizations usually partner or coordinate with city programs. However, eight cities not acknowledging them or informing the public about the purpose of these entities is detrimental for those city programs themselves and the communities they represent.

Table 5

Executive Management Support (N = 30)

1. Executive Management Support				
Category	Evidence	IP	PIP	NI
1.1 State Government	1) Does the website provide information about state government's support towards veterans?	1) 15 / 50%	1) 4 / 13%	1) 11 / 37%
	2) Does the website provide information about the type of state government support available?	2) 18 / 60%	2) 0 / 0%	2) 12 / 40%
1.2 Local Government	1) Does the website provide information about local government support towards veterans?	1) 16 / 53%	1) 3 / 10%	1) 11 / 37%
	2) Does the website provide information about the type of local government support available?	2) 19 / 63%	2) 0 / 0%	2) 11 / 37%
1.3 Community Support	1) Does the website provide information about the community support towards veterans?	1) 20 / 67%	1) 2 / 7%	1) 8 / 27%
	2) Does the website provide information about the type of community support available?	2) 22 / 73%	2) 0 / 0 %	2) 8 / 27%

*Results are coded into three categories based on the level of information present:

Information Present (IP)

Partial Information Present (PIP)

No Information (NI)

**(Number of cities that showed evidence / Percentage of cities)

Tools Available to Help Develop Veteran-Related Programs

Website content. When a veteran or a transitioning service member relies on the internet for information on veterans, an official government website of city in which they reside might be one of the popular searches that they opt for. Websites being user-friendly is one of the biggest factors with regard to either helping or frustrating someone. The content provided on the veteran city websites were separated according to the resource content, guides, and links to other websites provided. 14 (47%) cities were found to provide helpful and relatable content such as a comprehensive resource guide, links to other websites with information, and specific programs available for the unique needs of veterans.

Six (20%) cities indicated partial information because their website had generic and basic information but no description or links were provided. Some had a few photos and contact information present and even listed the offered service, but the content was not descriptive enough and useful for transitioning veterans in search of services.

After reviewing all 30 city websites, 10 (33%) were found to not provide any relatable content that would make a person seeking information satisfied and obtained the answers that they might seek while glancing at the webpage. The content available on these city websites provides a perception of the services a program offers to help as many veterans possible, just by

providing local and federal resources that is easy to navigate and enable them to seek answers to their questions.

Human resource policies and procedures regarding veterans. Today, many federal and city tax breaks are available for hiring veterans and are being more frequently utilized, as more companies support and create initiatives to hire service members into their workforce. There are several benefits to hiring veterans, along with tax breaks—an organization would be gaining an employee with the expertise, discipline, and responsibility that the military member brings to the workforce to complete each job effectively.

When conducting this research, cities without municipal veterans' programs were found to cater to some of the veterans' preferences and hiring in line with their human resource policies. However, eight (27%) cities with a municipal veteran's program gave no indication of a veterans' preference in hiring or policies that benefit those who have served in the military.

The cities that were identified as meting out partial information were also those who did not have a veteran's preference in hiring. Still, they offered other measures, such as a veterans' business enterprise, whereby points are given to city contracts or a few points awarded by default to veterans appearing for civil service exams. Three (10%) of the cities fell within this category. The city of Chicago did not provide any information about veterans' preference in hiring, but their transit authority did, which is why it is included in the partial information category.

Although the information was not directly available on the veteran program's website, a search of the human resource polices revealed that 19 (63%) cities that provided some type of veterans' preference in hiring. These policies pertained to cities receiving veteran credit, providing an exemption fees to pay for civil service exams, adding extra points to their overall

score, or giving them preference in the rank order of reviews. A comprehensive list of the policies and the cities that have enacted them is presented in table 4.2 below.

The City of Austin's veterans' preference in hiring was found to have a different approach to increasing the workforce of veterans. The policy explains that 20% of the qualified candidates must be interviewed by the hiring manager, and since its implementation, an approximate number of more than 100 veterans have been hired per fiscal year, surpassing expectations.

Table 4.2

Specific Veteran Hiring Preference in Cities

Veteran Credit	New York, Mt Vernon, Glen Cove (NY), Yonkers,
Veteran Points	St. Louis, Springfield, Norwich, Danbury, Los Angeles
Preference	Norfolk, Houston, Austin, Columbus, Lowell, Shelton,
Rank Order	Cambridge, Worcester, Boston
Exemption from Fees	New York
Hiring Initiative	Albuquerque

Specific city programs, services offered, and events. The review of the cities' websites revealed that most of the services focused on by municipal veterans' programs were benefit and disability claims. Thirteen (43%) cities have some type of specific program directed toward veterans' needs and community involvement, ranging from hosting events, such as appreciation luncheons, Memorial Day, Veteran's Day Parade, among others, as well as organizing drives to collect care packages for deployed service members. If the programs were indicated in an internal resource guide or brochure, they were indicated as information being present when 30 cities were being gauged. Many events for the military and veterans were indicated and promoted on 15 (50%) city websites and their involvement as city veterans' programs.

Some of the cities' websites provided little to no information regarding the services, programs, and events they hosted or participated in. The review of the cities' websites revealed that 14 (47%) did not provide information pertaining to any specific or unique programs that were created by the staff of the program. They might not have listed every involvement they were affiliated with. Twelve (40%) cities did not provide any information of the events they hosted or attended.

If any website provided indication of involvement with at least one unique program, they were categorized as having provided partial information, and three (10%) of the cities mentioned a program that was not listed as claims, benefits, education, health, among others. Three (10%) cities only provided partial information regarding their events. Some of these websites had a calendar, but it was comprehensive with every other event going on in the city and another needed a sign in link to access specific events.

Some of the websites might not list all of the programs and events they participated in such as the City of Austin website. The website only lists a few programs they operate, but unless indicated on the brochure, the public wouldn't know about the Fort Hood Career Skills Program, their active participation in military job fairs, and their role in the creation of some and all the training programs and presentations offered by the staff to city departments.

Outreach. Volunteerism and outreach are two components of promoting an organization, involving the creation of awareness and the bringing together of people for a great cause. To identify the cities with outreach opportunities, a description of the events providing outreach or programs that involved the community was required on the websites. Ten (33%) of the cities directly provided some type of such information on their websites.

Two (7%) cities listed terms such as “volunteer,” “outreach,” or “get involved” on their websites with no description of how the cities had participated in the events. The majority (18, 60%) of the cities did not provide any terms pertaining to outreach or volunteering or information regarding what they had participated in and how they had created awareness for their programs and services.

Outreach is pertinent in terms of attending meetings and learning about what the other non-profit organizations and government entities do. To promote the creation and reputation of the city’s veterans’ program, it is important to have a presence within the community to create the positive indication of being a reliable resource to the other organizations and involve the citizens in the community.

Table 4.3

Tools Available to Help Develop Veteran-Related Programs (N = 30)

Tools Available to Help Develop Veteran-Related Programs				
Category	Evidence	IP	PIP	NI
Website Content	Does the website provide any veteran-related content such as resource guides, links to programs, and/or organizations?	14/47%	6/20%	10/33%
Human Resource Policies and Procedures	Does the website provide information on any Human Resource policies and procedures directed toward veterans?	19/63%	3/10%	8/27%
Specific Programs, Services, and Events	1) Does the website provide information on their specific City veteran programs and services offered? 2) Does the website provide information on events for veterans?	1) 13/43%	1) 3/10%	1) 14/47%
		2) 15/50%	2) 3/10%	2) 12/40%
Outreach	Does the website provide information about what outreach	10/33%	2/7%	18/60%

	opportunities are conducted and available?			
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*Results are coded into three categories based on the level of information present

Information Present (IP)

Partial Information Present (PIP)

No Information (NI)

** (Number of Cities that Showed Evidence / Percentage of Cities)

Veteran Needs and Services

Employment. One of the positive highlights a city provides is jobs, as it takes people to run a city. Details pertaining to the jobs available in a city should be highlighted on veterans' websites with regard to the process on how to be employed by the city, the benefits and support available from the city's veterans' program, the contact persons for assistance with resumes or interviews, among others. Not many veterans' websites probably saw the need to include the internal links to the jobs available in the cities, as 24 (80%) cities did not provide any such information. Two (7%) cities, including Yonkers, NY, were categorized as providing partial information, as they listed information about a service or career center where veterans could learn about the cities' job opportunities and other employment opportunities along with the preference to be seen first by the next available staff for being a veteran. The four (13%) cities of Norfolk, New York, Albuquerque, and Anaheim indicated the jobs available on their veterans' websites.

Twelve (40%) websites provided helpful links and resources pertaining to employment opportunities outside the city. At the same time, nine (30%) of the cities listed "employment" as a service with no job description or related links, so they were categorized as having partial information present.

Veterans transitioning out of active duty will more than likely need or want to find employment if they do not choose to go back to school. Employment remains to be one of the top needs of veterans consistently and a service that most organizations should offer as

assistance. Nine (30%) cities did not list any employment opportunities on their websites or provide links of where to find employment opportunities or any helpful information of where they can go and who to contact if they needed assistance.

Mental or physical health. Although post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has been around for centuries, the disability has been understood, recognized, and made aware of only recently, owing to the repercussions faced by the service members involved in the most recent wars. Suicide in veterans has been widespread, as they do not seek help or know where to go, and many resources are being developed nationally to prevent the suicides among veterans and service members.

Fortunately, the websites of 9 (30%) provide mental health resources available along with a veterans' crisis hotline number. The cities categorized as having such information provided links to clinics and organizations as well as the information from the VA on where to seek help. Ten (33%) city websites were categorized as having partial information, as they had listed "counseling" or "mental health" as one of their services. If veterans needed mental health help, they would have to call the city representative instead of approaching the actual organization that could provide immediate help.

A total of eleven (37%) cities did not mention any information regarding mental health services. It seems imperative to at least provide the veterans' crisis hotline number on any veterans' websites, for the fear of keeping veteran waiting may result in undesirable repercussions.

The physical health category involves information relating to weblinks to as well as contact information of VA clinics, hospitals, and organizations that promote health and exercise.

The search results on the topic were similar to what had been seen with regard to mental health, as eight (27%) cities listed this information.

The majority of the websites provided information pertaining to local medical facilities than that of health and exercise groups/organizations. Such 14 (47%) city websites were categorized as providing partial information, as they failed to include any information on the type of physical means to access health services other than that for medical assistance.

As most veterans require some type of physical health assistance after military service, providing information related to physical health assistance on veteran websites will be a positive contribution. Eight (27%) city websites did not list any type of information regarding both medical assistance and physical fitness assistance.

Needs of women veterans. According to the National Veterans Foundation, “women need to be part of a community, and many female veterans have difficulty transitioning from military life to life as a civilian” (Women Veterans Community – Participate and Make a Difference, 2019). Many women veterans feel invisible, and it is common that many do not get the recognition of being a veteran but are mistaken to be a spouse or family member of someone who served in the military. More programs specific to women veterans have been developed, and three (10%) cities listed a link and group name pertaining to assistance available for them and where to find it.

City websites lacking the term “women veteran” listed as a service and providing no additional information or helpful links of organization were categorized as those providing partial information. A total of six (20%) cities provided such partial information for women veterans.

As statistics indicated before, out of all the veteran needs and services in this assessment, women veterans were the most underserved. A total of 21 (70%) cities did not mention women veterans on their site or provide any related services or local programs and assistance they require. A total of twenty-one (70%) out of the 30 city websites did not provide resources for women veterans, revealing the importance to recognize the needs of women veterans.

Housing/homelessness. Many cities today have actively participated in the movement to end all veteran homelessness by partnering with federal, state, and local leaderships along with the community. “As of May 14, 2019, three states, and 71 communities have ended veteran homelessness by reaching functional zero” (VHA Office of Mental Health, 2015). The efforts to end veteran homelessness shall continue until it is made possible that all veterans have a place to call home again. The need for housing and veteran homeless services will always be an ongoing effort, as there will always be a group of people leaving the military every day with a possibility of ending up homeless.

The review showed that 10 (33%) of the city websites provided in-depth resources, information of where to go and who to see and what benefits are available to veterans experiencing homelessness. The majority of the city websites also listed information on HUD-VASH (Housing and Urban Development—Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing), SSVF (Supportive Services for Veterans and Families), and other organizations that assist veterans experiencing homelessness.

Nine (30%) city websites were categorized as having partial information present, as they listed terms “homelessness” or “housing” but provided no information on eligibility, who to contact, where to go, or even provide a helpful link of the VA or organizations that can help. There is a possibility that the majority of the homeless veterans without access to the internet

will not access their city's website, but listing such resources would be beneficial for families or friends to look them up from the city's source.

Eleven (37%) city websites did not provide any information on homeless services or housing, probably because homeless was not considered a major issue in the cities. The websites of the following cities did not provide any information on homeless services or housing: Auburn, Glen Cove (CA), Norwich, Shelton, Cambridge, Belgrade, Miles City, Yonkers, Glen Cove (NY), Berea, and Norfolk. If the information is not readily available on veterans' websites, there is the option to contact the veteran service office to find out more details, but it comes with a chance of not receiving an answer, the contact person not being available, or receiving a disappointing outcome once getting in touch.

Veteran benefits and programs (claims, disability, pension, eligibility, among others). The programs and resources available for service members and veterans are immense, sometimes confusing, but the programs and resources are worthwhile and benefit those who have served the country. Disability compensation is generally one of the programs that frustrate veterans the most due to its complicated process of filing, collecting evidence, or appealing a denied claim.

Eleven (37%) cities directly provided a description of the programs on their websites, stating it is a service they provide along with the additional information on how to file, make an appointment, and links to the VA. Only five (17%) websites provided detailed descriptions of the eligibility requirements to obtain the benefits. Eleven (37%) websites were categorized as providing partial information because they only listed it as a service or provided a link to a third-party website like the VA or other resource websites or resource guides. Although some cities

directly described the eligibility factors onto their websites, only 10 (33%) cities directed users to the specific eligibility page that the VA offered.

When users navigate a website, the benefit of having the information present on the same page makes things easier for them to understand the program and learn about the services that the city's veteran's program offers. Eight (27%) cities did not list any veteran benefits or disability services available at their office or links to a third-party website on their websites. A total of 15 (50%) of the websites did not provide any information on who is eligible and where to go to find out if they were eligible, which could save them time from researching the details on their own. There is a possibility that they offer such services or have information about the services, but in order to find out, the users will have to directly contact them.

Education. Many transitioning and current veterans may prioritize finding employment as one of their top needs, but many individuals make the decision to go back to school and further their education, whether it is to obtain their bachelors, masters or doctorate. Obtaining an education at little to no cost is one of the best benefits of serving the country can offer. These education programs consist of the Montgomery Bill and Post 9/11 bill along with specific state education benefits such as the Hazelwood Act, which is available for Texas residents who commissioned or enlisted out of the State of Texas.

Similar to the results of the information on benefits and disability services, the results of the program offering education information was close to what was indicated for veteran benefits. The websites of 9 (30%) cities provided information on the available education benefits, where to go, and a list of local schools or online programs. In comparison, the websites of nine (30%) cities did not list any information on related services, programs, or institutions/organizations.

The possible reasoning of why education is not listed as a service in some cities could be due to the low response and lack of local schools nearby.

The websites of 12 (40%) cities provided partial information relating to education, by only listing a direct link to the VA or state agency, delving into detail on what is available and how to apply. Some of these websites also did not provide information on local schools or organization where veterans can go to utilize their education benefits, so they were categorized as PIP (Partial Information Present).

Table 4.4

Veteran Needs and Services (N = 30)

Veteran Needs and Services				
Category	Evidence	IP	PIP	NI
Employment	1) Does the website provide employment resources for veterans?	1) 12/40%	1) 9/30%	1) 9/30%
	2) Does the website provide information on their own City Employment	2) 4/13%	2) 2/7%	2) 24/80%
Mental or Physical Health	1) Does the website provide any information for Mental Health assistance (i.e., Counseling, Suicide prevention? PTSD)	1) 9/30%	1) 10/33%	1) 11/37 %
	2) Does the website provide any information related to physical health (i.e., clinics, fitness class)	2) 8/27%	2) 14/47%	2) 8/27%
Needs of Women Veterans	Does the website provide or identify programs or resources related to women veterans	3/10%	6/20%	21/70 %

Housing/Homelessness	Does the website provide information regarding veteran homelessness	10/33%	9/30%	11/37%
Veteran Benefits and Programs	1) Does the website provide information on veteran disability claims and programs that are available?	1) 11/37%	1) 11/37%	1) 8/27%
	2) Does the website provide information on eligibility requirements and how to obtain the benefits?	2) 5/17%	2) 10/33%	2) 15/50%
Education	Does the website provide information/ benefits on how veterans could continue their education?	9/30%	12/40%	9/30%

*Results are coded into three categories based on the level of information present

Information Present (IP)

Partial Information Present (PIP)

No Information (NI)

**(Number of Cities that Showed Evidence/Percentage of Cities)

Resources for Program Development

Effective communication strategies and coalition partnerships. The websites of most cities did not provide a history of how and when their program had been initiated. However, certain websites provided such information ones that did, taking the first step to better serving its military members at a city level. When developing a program, effective communication between all support groups, the city management, and the coalition of partnerships involving other veteran service organizations is instrumental in creating an operative program. The websites of many cities (10/33%) provided information on their partnerships and connections with the veteran community and service providers. Some of the websites also provided the contact and location information of the cities' coalition partners. However, the websites of 14 (47%) cities did not list any type of information of who they work with, what programs they partner with, and where to find any of these organizations.

The websites of six (20%) cities provided partial information on who they work with, what relationships they have within the community, and any leadership roles or partnerships they have with the various entities of government. Some of these cities also listed the names, so they were categorized as PIP for this assessment.

Networking is one of the ways through which other organizations and people get to know what services are available and how the city they live in supports the military. Websites that provide a history and details of how their program was developed as well as the accolades they secured may provide a sense of the positive value of the program and its success in providing support and helping veterans.

Dedicated staff. The staff appointed or hired to run veterans' programs determines the programs' success, results, and reputation, so it would be ideal to provide information relating to the staff in charge of the programs. The competency of the staff overseeing veterans' programs ensures the overall development, measures, and success of the programs and reinforces the positive aspects that the programs bring to the veterans within the community. Thirty cities were identified to have municipal veterans' programs in this assessment, although there might be others that did not fall within the ambit of the search.

There are many benefits to having a dedicated staff for veterans' programs instead of just having veterans' programs fall under random city departments or being volunteer driven. Such programs will be able to collect and analyze the data of how many former and current service members are employed by a city, identify and communicate and know the best point of contacts through the city, and function as the liaison to the city management, mayor, and city council for any USERRA or general military questions. Confidential resources and mentorship should be provided to assist and provide support to veterans struggling or needing help.

This assessment was compiled on the basis of the information and identification of some types of veterans' programs existing and staff being present. All the reviewed websites of the 30 cities provided information regarding their city office or who directs the program, but some were categorized as PIP for the following reasons.

The websites of 17 (57%) cities fulfilled the complete criteria of providing the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of someone affiliated with the cities' veterans' programs. Some of the websites did not provide the information directly on their website, but if a link to a brochure or resource guide was available, then they were categorized as IP.

Some of the cities (13/43%) were only able to provide either one or two of the information on how to contact the representative. The website of the City of Norfolk provides a general email list but no name of the person in charge except in a video. Once the video is played, the name of the representative is introduced but no number is found in both the website and video. Also, if a city provided a general email address instead of the direct email address of a staff member, it was also categorized as PIP.

It is also important to note that Military Sexual Trauma (MST) is more prevalent among women veterans, even though there are some men who have experienced such trauma during their time in the service. It is a recommendation to have a female representative present in the veterans' program who has the knowledge and possible military experience in order to relate to the target population. The female representative should undertake research on all women veteran organizations and the specific benefits available to women, as well as possess the ability to create a comfortable environment. This will enable women veterans seeking services to open up about the experience and issues they are currently overcoming and the assistance they are seeking along with any recommendations they expect.

The majority of the reviewed websites had only one representative in the veterans' program, and some were staffed with two or more. The placement of the programs varied, and some were under the Health and Human Service Department, Human Resource Department, and the Mayor's office. Having a representative in a program is the initial step toward the creation of a program, but ensuring the staff are being active, helping others, and providing support to both the community are inevitable for the success of a veterans' program.

Training. Training or any indication that veteran representatives were trained or had secured accolades was one of the most limited in this entire assessment. This subcategory had the most information represented as NI (No Information), with the websites of 28 (93%) cities not providing any type of credentials or information of what training programs they offered or attended and their official recognitions.

Only the websites of the City of Austin and the City of Columbus (7%) listed the awards they had received for their services and support to those who were in the military and provided information regarding USERRA and the Department of Labor (DOL). Although the information of the training and awards secured specific to the veterans' program were not indicated, a total of four (13%) websites did list information on some type of law, such as Springfield and Lowell annotating the "Veteran Bill of Rights."

Without federal laws such as the USERRA, employers would not be able to fully support those who continue to serve in the military in the Reserves and National Guard. Only the websites of two (7%) cities provided information regarding the USERRA or mentioned a related law on their website. The majority of the reviewed websites—24 (80%)—did not list information on any laws or the USERRA.

The fact that veterans' programs mention the USERRA, DOL, or ESGR is a comfort, as this ensures that veterans will be aware of the Guard and Reserve members' rights. When the members of the Guard and Reserves are called for active duty, it is the city's job to alleviate any concerns regarding whether the job are available and capable of accommodating them. Also, it is important for the city or organization to understand the federal laws protecting the service members to avoid any legal situations and to ensure the awareness of the management regarding the process and regulations for the law itself.

Table 4.5

Resources for Program Development (N = 30)

Resources for Program Development				
Category	Evidence	IP	PIP	NI
Effective communication and Coalition Partnerships	Does the website provide and list effective communication strategies and if they participate in some type of coalition with other veteran service providers?	10/33%	6/20%	14/47%
Dedicated Staff	Does the website provide any information or contact information of the dedicated staff personnel overseeing the city veteran program?	17/57%	13/43%	0/0%
Training	1) Does the website include information on types of training they provide/required/recommended?	1) 2/7%	1) 0/0%	1) 28/93%
	2) Does the website provide information on any Federal laws/programs related to veterans and those who are in the Guard/Reserves?	2) 2/7%	2) 4 / 13%	2) 24/80%

*Results are coded into three categories based on the level of information present

Information Present (IP)

Partial Information Present (PIP)

No Information (NI)

** (Number of Cities that Showed Evidence / Percentage of Cities)

Chapter Summary

A complete assessment of 30 cities in 14 states providing local resources and services to meet veterans' needs were undertaken. The websites of the cities provided a basic overview of the local veteran needs and the contributions of the program representatives to their community. The websites of a few cities were lacking in the quality and quantity of the content presented, while others were impressive, presenting information on a wide range of services and unique features. The results provided a vague perception of the effectiveness of the veterans' programs in various cities and the services that each staff department contributed to the programs.

As some programs were created due to a mandate from the state, the question remains regarding the quality of the services of the representatives and treatment of the veterans. From a comprehensive standpoint of how these veteran programs performed, 35% of the cities met more than 10 of the categories listed in the assessment based on what type of content they provided. Table 4.6 provides a general summary of the performance of each city and the amount of information provided by the website of each city, based on the conceptual framework.

Table 4.6

Summary of All Cities based on Subcategories (N = 21)

ALABAMA	IP	PIP	NI
Auburn	3	0	18
CALIFORNIA			
Los Angeles	7	5	9
Anaheim	15	1	5
Mission Viejo	13	2	6
Glen Cove	0	1	20
CONNECTICUT			
Danbury	3	8	10
Norwich	2	1	18
Shelton	4	5	12
ILLINOIS			
Chicago	10	5	6

INDIANA			
Indianapolis	5	7	9
MASSACHUSETTS (Largest 5 Populated Cities Reported) 39 Cities			
Boston	14	4	3
Worcester	8	5	8
Springfield	4	7	10
Lowell	10	6	5
Cambridge	9	3	9
MISSOURI			
St. Louis	3	13	5
MONTANA			
Miles City	2	3	16
Belgrade	2	3	16
NEW JERSEY			
Jersey City	2	8	11
NEW MEXICO			
Albuquerque	14	2	5
NEW YORK			
Yonkers	11	3	7
Glen Cove	1	1	19
Mt Vernon	4	8	9
New York	15	1	5
OHIO			
Columbus	8	11	2
Berea	7	3	11
TEXAS			
Austin	18	1	2
Houston	16	1	4
San Antonio	9	9	3
VIRGINIA			
Norfolk	5	5	11

*Results are coded into three categories based on the level of information present

Information Present (IP)

Partial Information Present (PIP)

No Information (NI)

Chapter V: Conclusion

This assessment provided a basic overview of what the veterans program from each city provided to their local community. A total of 30 cities throughout the U.S. had some form of municipal veterans' program department indicated through a web search. A practical ideal type method formed and gauged all 30 of the veteran-related programs while using the City of Austin veterans' program as a benchmark.

Chapter one provided the introduction of the study and the purpose of the chapter. Chapter two provided the literature review and the conceptual framework to support the benefit of having a municipal veterans' program. Chapter three described and examined the research method of web content analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of such research. Chapter four comprised the results and observations regarding the four ideal components and their associated subcategories of the best practices related to municipal veterans' programs. Chapter five provided a summary of the details of all the significant findings of the study, followed by recommendations for the development and improvement of services related to veterans and those still serving in the military, and concluded with the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future research.

Important Findings

The review of the results revealed that the websites of many veterans' programs are lacking details concerning their awards or accomplishments other than that of two cities (6%)—the City of Austin and the City of Columbus. Both the cities were awarded the Department of Defense Award for their support to their Guard and Reserve members, and they set the standard for the services to be provided by the other cities. The websites of the other cities (94%) did not provide any information about the accolades secured for or the credentials of their achievements

of their programs; therefore, a question remains: how do the programs of the other cities assist and support their local veterans and the Guard and Reserve members? The absence of specific awards or personal reviews indicates that these cities may have either a positive or a negative impact of having a municipal veterans' program available.

It was unexpected that within executive management support, the support from local government 16 (53%) was not the highest form indicated on all the city websites, as the programs are within their area of responsibility. Having community support as the most indicated benefit is appreciable, as it shows that these programs have the support of citizens and their opinion and feedback matter the most. It would also be beneficial if the website of each city provided a direct link and information on how citizens could apply for the city jobs available, as the websites of 24 (80%) cities did not highlight or provide the information on where to go and whom to contact.

Regarding the tools available to develop veteran-related programs, out of the four subcategories, it was commendable to observe that the websites of 19 (63%) cities provided some type of hiring preference or initiative to promote the hiring of veterans. Website content was the second highest indication of what these city veterans' programs provide, and the resources and information available on websites serve as the first step for veterans receiving the assistance they are seeking.

For the past few years, tackling homeless veterans has been a priority throughout the nation, and it was an unexpected to see that the websites of 11 (37%) cities did not list any services or information on how to help this specific population. The service that most of the cities provided on their websites was employment—12 (40%) cities—which is understandable, as employment is one of the most requested needs of most veteran needs assessments. Claims

and benefits not being highlighted more than employment on these veterans' program websites was unexpected, as most veterans' programs offer such assistance and the concomitant resources. Only the websites of 11 (37%) cities provided information on availing such services.

In summary, Table 5.1 provides the categories under which the most reoccurring content was available on every reviewed veteran municipal website.

Table 5.1

Most Content Represented in 30 City Websites

1) Executive Management Support	Community Support	67%
2) Tools Available to Develop Veteran Related Programs	Human Resource Policies and Procedures	63%
3) Veteran Needs and Services	Employment	40%
4) Resources for Program Development	Dedicated Staff	57%

Recommendations

Many recommendations are pertinent to improve veteran services and, thereby, the quality of life of veterans. The first step would be to follow the State of Massachusetts' law (Chapter 115 Section 3) that has established the requirement of every city and town to have a veteran service representative be present. These service representatives are designated to assist with veteran programs and benefits and serve as local resources for the community.

Having a mandate in place stipulating all cities and towns to have a veteran representative would fix the gaps in the services provided in areas where services are not readily available and provide more resources to get as many veterans in the VA system and help them gain the benefits they deserve. The mandate for Massachusetts' law is provided in Figure 5.1.

The mayor of each city, except Boston, shall and the board of selectmen of each town may appoint a veterans' agent who shall serve for a term of up to 3 years and shall be eligible for reappointment. The veterans' agent may act for the mayor or the board of selectmen in the disbursement of veterans' benefits by the city or town; provided, however, that in each town that has a part-time veterans' agent, the town clerk shall receive applications and assist applicants for veterans' benefits and shall submit the applications to the veterans' agent. Two or more contiguous towns may, by vote of the selectmen, appoint one person to serve as veterans' agent for such towns and may apportion the payment of compensation among such towns.

Every veterans' agent shall, from time after the original allowance of any claim for veterans' benefits, make such investigations of the necessities and qualifications of the claimant as to prevent the payment of any such benefits contrary to any provision of this chapter.

Every such agent shall, within three days after his receipt of an application from or in behalf of a civil war veteran, his wife or widow, for special care, under the provisions of section two, notify the commissioner thereof upon blank forms approved by him; upon his refusal or unreasonable neglect to give such notice, such agent shall be punished by a fine of twenty-five dollars.

Upon the request of any veteran, the veterans' agent for the city or town in which he resides shall record his discharge or release papers, without charge, in books kept by him for that purpose. Said agent shall keep an index of papers so recorded, and copies thereof, if attested by him, shall be admissible in evidence to the same extent and with the same effect as the originals.

Figure 5.1. Massachusetts Title XVII. Chapter 115, Section 3 Law.

Once all cities enact laws mandating veterans' programs, it would be beneficial to have training seminars, summits, information of the best practices, and a list of services that should be provided for all programs. The state agency of Texas calls the TVC hosts in an annual summit and invites all veteran service organizations, TVC staff, and all county veteran service officers to come together and learn about the current issues and updates on relatable veteran topics and how to better serve veterans. This could also be an opportunity for each city to become a networking partner and strategize the types of different goals and visions regarding which they can collaborate with one another.

If a state mandate is not possible, a partnership and involvement with the International City/County Management Association would be a great recommendation, as most city managers and leaders are affiliated with this organization. Their direction to encourage other cities to possibly provide content that promotes the ideal to develop and provide veterans services at a municipal level would be more effective. Having the support of ICMA may motivate other cities to establish, develop, and promote veterans' programs with a similar structure of goals, accomplishments, and measures, which would only increase the effectiveness of having a municipal veterans' program available and fill the existing gaps in such services.

Federal funds are likely to be relayed directly to state agencies so that the involvement of the State's Department of Veteran Affairs could possibly provide a standard procedure or guide that is vetted nationally, in order to influence cities to create, develop, and implement a municipal-level veterans' program in order to meet the needs of military veteran locally. Once a policy or a program has been established and promoted nationwide, it would be influential to establish support from management, ensure that veterans' needs and services are met, and create a comprehensive website replete with information for local veterans to seek help when needed.

States could also emulate what the State of California's Department of Veteran Affairs (CalVet) has done by establishing a partnership between all California public libraries, called `veteransconnect@thelibrary`. Such a connection between the states and the cities leads to the provision of a veteran resource center at each library for veterans to receive federal and state benefits.

To initiate a municipal veterans' program, the most important step would be gaining support from the city's management, mayor, or council members. Once the program has been set up, attention should subsequently be focused on the staff and, possibly, a needs assessment to identify the needs of local veterans. This would also be an opportunity to gain community support in the establishment of such programs and let community members know that that the city is supporting and doing more for its veterans and service members.

Limitations

Various limitations are associated with gauging the quality of the services provided by veterans' programs through the content available on their websites. The identification of the content available on the websites was completed through a simple search using keywords to find the cities that offered veterans' programs. Currently, the amount of information a person can find on the internet is vast, but is the information updated, easy to navigate, and detailed for a person to obtain the required assistance?

Given the descriptive nature of the study, another limitation is its inability to provide a detailed description of the services that each reviewed city offers its community and employees. The information on the municipal websites may be influenced by various factors such as the lack of support from the city leadership, the limitations of website servers, or the lack of information on each service offered. Some programs may provide more services than those that are listed on

their websites, and this limitation could be mediated through personal contact with the director or a representative of the programs.

Upon reviewing the websites of 30 cities, a few cities were found to have impressive content that was easy to navigate, while other cities only provided the basics without listing many resources. As a book should not be judged by its cover, in this case, it is not possible to identify the programs' effectiveness with respect to its local veteran population. If researched more thoroughly, a few of the city veteran programs might have reviews from people who would either praise their service or warn others not to go there. Without personal referrals or reviews available, a person looking at a city website would not know the quality of the service rendered by the program and the competence of the representatives who oversee the program. The website would not provide any negative or positive details of the program, unless otherwise annotated somewhere else on a third-party website.

Future Research

Many states have an active veteran department, like Texas' TVC. When reviewing the websites of the cities with veteran services, the links to the main state's page was evenly represented. A future assessment of the state programs for veterans would be ideal to identify how the various practices and programs are available and the services they offer. This would enable the access to information regarding which states do (and do not) have a certain type of military or veteran service present at the government level.

Also, it would be beneficial for other states to implement a law similar to that of the State of Massachusetts (Chapter 115), requiring a veteran service representative at every city and town. Studies must be undertaken to identify if there are any other states with a similar law or to evaluate if having a veterans' program at the government level would be sufficient for the entire

state. Also, another recommended study would be to see if mandating a veteran service representative at specific locations would promote a positive or negative difference in the community, and whether or not the level of customer service and progress is prevalent.

Implementing a survey to be undertaken by every state would be beneficial, as websites generally summarize a given program, and gaining information from the staff would give an accurate description of the services they provide. The issue with surveys is that such a process would be extensive, susceptible to change, and the response might be limited. Therefore, a web content analysis assessing the states with a veterans' department at the government level is the recommended practice.

The needs of veterans and service members will always be changing, and an analysis of previous needs assessments done at the city or state levels would give researchers an idea of the services, programs, and policies to be included in order to better support those who have served our country. Currently, the City of Austin is in the process of conducting a needs assessment for those within the community regarding the creation of a Veteran's Resource Center. Another recommended research would be to evaluate how beneficial these resource centers are, the statistics of veterans utilizing them, the organizations present at each center, the budget, and the prisons overseeing the program, in terms of whether it is a non-profit or a city employee.

Conclusion

Every city will have its ideas and regulations on what is best suited for service members, but hundreds of service members are leaving service every day, and we as a community must be able to meet their needs. As a staff member of the City of Austin's veterans' program, I can relate, in certain circumstances, to what the needs of the community of Austin is and how vast the services and information required by transitioning veterans are.

A veterans' program should support the local community, but it is also imperative to support the current city employees who are veterans or still active in the Guard or Reserves. It gives the employees knowledge about the presence of the program and a sense of appreciation that such services exist for them, to honor their contributions to the country.

Establishing training and volunteer opportunities shall provide most veterans a sense of camaraderie that they miss and accord them a chance to understand and know each other.

It can be concluded that this study is not complete and more can be done officially at the national, state, and city levels. Although there are approximately 35,000 cities in the U.S., this study could identify only 30 cities, plus the 34 cities in Massachusetts, that were found to be providing a municipal veterans' program. Although many cities have websites that provide information regarding veterans, personal contact may reveal details that websites fail to offer. Undertaking a study to see how effective the current municipal veteran programs are and what the staff recommendations are would improve and establish a comprehensive guide of positive and negative experiences and lessons to be learned, which can thereafter be emulated by other cities.

The ability to provide assistance and serve my fellow veterans has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. Each veteran I have met from the time I have been working with veteran services has provided an outlook regarding personal experiences. I have met World War II veterans who made a difference to how our country was established and functions today; without their service, we could be speaking a different language in the country. I have met Korea War veterans who felt forgotten after serving in a cold war for three years, when they were made to return to the U.S. once the armistice was signed. I have met many Vietnam War veterans who described the horrors of what they had experienced in Vietnam but stated that their experience of

coming home had been worse, because their country failed to appreciate and respect them. The value of service is dependent on the people who make a difference and the influences they have on their local communities. The services we can offer to our military service members can make a huge difference, between thanking them and saving them.

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