



RECOMMENDATIONS ON DATA ABOUT FEDERALLY EMPLOYED MILITARY AND VETERAN SPOUSES, CAREGIVERS, AND SURVIVORS

A Report by the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EQUITABLE DATA
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
of the
NATIONAL SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

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The [Executive Order on Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors](#) (EO 14100) established the Subcommittee on Equitable Data Fast Track Action Committee (FTAC) on Data about Military-Connected Federal Employees. The FTAC was tasked with developing recommendations “on ways in which agencies can expand federal datasets to track [federal employment] outcomes for military and veteran spouses, military caregivers, and survivors,” and is composed primarily of military-connected federal data and human resources professionals.

About this Document

This report summarizes the recommendations developed by the FTAC on Data about Military-Connected Federal Employees. It describes the current research and data landscape, learnings from public engagement, and specific recommendations on improving data relevant to critical elements of policy for military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors.

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Table of Contents

- Introduction 2
- Background..... 2
 - Military-Connected Populations 2
 - Impacts of and Barriers to Employment 3
- Stakeholder Engagement..... 5
 - Findings Across All Groups 6
 - Unique Findings about Specific Groups: 6
- Learning Agenda to Advance Military Readiness and Military Family Economic Security..... 7
 - Foundational Questions: 7
 - Policy- and Program-Specific Questions: 8
- Current Data Landscape..... 9
 - Administrative Datasets 9
 - Surveys 10
 - Data Gaps 10
- Recommendations 11
- Conclusions..... 12
- APPENDIX 13
 - Policies to enable federal employment of the military-connected population 13
 - Policies and programs that impact retention of military-connected populations 13

Introduction

President Biden, through his Executive Order on Advancing Economic Security for Military and Veteran Spouses, Military Caregivers, and Survivors (EO 14100), called for specific focus on military-connected populations in the federal workforce due to the unique barriers this community faces in achieving economic security. The Executive Order called for the federal government to become the “employer of choice” for the military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors, and tasked the Subcommittee on Equitable Data to recommend ways “agencies can expand federal datasets to track outcomes” toward this goal.

The Subcommittee on Equitable Data Fast Track Action Committee (FTAC) on Data about Military-Connected Federally Employed Employees was established to identify gaps and opportunities in the data about this population in order to inform policies and programs with the goal of improving military family economic well-being and military readiness.

This report describes the current research and data landscape, findings from public engagement, and specific recommendations on improving data relevant to critical elements of policy for military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors.

Background

Data on military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors who are currently employed by the federal government or seeking employment are incomplete; data that do exist illustrate key challenges these populations face as they seek economic security. There has been long-standing attention across the Department of Defense (DOD) and the federal government as a whole regarding opportunities for employment among military spouses, in particular, and the barriers they face to obtain and maintain employment.¹

Military-Connected Populations

Military spouses face barriers to meaningful employment due to their mobile military lifestyle, including frequent relocations and extended periods of family separation for training and deployments. In the 2022 DOD Demographics Report, active-duty military spouses numbered nearly 580,000 and Reserve and National Guard spouses numbered approximately 340,000.² While the DOD typically recruits service members between the ages of 17 and 24, the average age of an active-duty military spouse is 32, and 78% of military spouses are older than 26. In 2022, 90% of all active duty, Reserve, and National Guard military spouses were female.

Data about the number and characteristics of caregivers and survivors are more difficult to determine. A 2014 report estimated 5.5 million military caregivers in the United States, with 1.1 million (19.6%)

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2024). Military spouse employment: Part-time workforce characteristics and perspectives; US Government Accountability Office. (2013). Military spouse employment programs: DOD can improve guidance and performance monitoring (GAO-13-60); US Government Accountability Office. (2021). Military Spouse Employment: DOD should continue assessing state licensing practices and increase awareness of resources (GAO-21-193); US Government Accountability Office. (2024). Military spouse employment: Part-time workforce characteristics and perspectives (GAO-24-106263).

² Department of Defense. (2022). 2022 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community. <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2022-demographics-report.pdf>

caring for post-9/11 veterans.³ Data about surviving families of military-connected deaths are more difficult to estimate because a service member's death can leave behind not only a spouse, but also parents, children, and other next of kin.

Impacts of and Barriers to Employment

Employment can be foundational for quality of life and has been associated with better mental health among military spouses.⁴ Also, in the current economic context, both service members and their spouses must often work to support their families. Family financial stability has been associated with military satisfaction, retention, and deployment readiness for service members.⁵ From the perspective of military spouses, employment is a definitive top concern.⁶ Representative government surveys suggest that the overall unemployment rate among military spouses has been just above 20% since 2015.⁷

Underemployment further exacerbates issues among this population in the workforce, with the majority of military spouses facing some form of underemployment and about one in three working part-time.⁸ Research shows that female military spouses with full-time jobs earned 25% less than their civilian counterparts.⁹ No similar analyses of unemployment or earnings for veteran spouses, caregivers, or surviving spouses exists. While these groups can experience similar barriers to employment that military spouses face, they also have unique experiences that may further complicate employment.

For military spouses, multiple aspects of military life make it difficult to find and maintain employment. For example, frequent moves to new duty stations, which often cross state lines and happen on average every two to three years, exacerbate an already tenuous employment situation for

³ Ramchand, Rajeev, Terri Tanielian, Michael P. Fisher, Christine Anne Vaughan, Thomas E. Trail, Caroline Batka, Phoenix Voorhies, Michael W. Robbins, Eric Robinson, and Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, *Hidden Heroes: America's Military Caregivers*, RAND Corporation, RR-499-TEDF, 2014. As of June 19, 2024: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html

⁴ Richardson, S. M., Pflieger, J. C., Woodall, K. A., Stander, V. A., & Riviere, L. A. (2020). A model of deployment readiness among military spouses: The role of mental health and deployment-related personal growth. *Military Behavioral Health*, 8, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2020.1825240>

⁵ Office of People Analytics. (2023). *2021 Active Duty Spouse Survey (ADSS) (2023-045)*; Street, T., Lewin, A., Woodall, K., Cruz-Cano, R., Thoma, M., & Stander, V. A. (2022). Gender differences in marital and military predictors of service member career satisfaction. *Family Relations*, 71, 1515-1537.

<https://doi.org/http://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12697>; Werber Castaneda, L., Harrell, M. C., Varda, D. M., Hall, K. C., Beckett, M. K., & Stern, S. (2008). *Deployment experiences of Guard and Reserve families: Implications for support and retention*. RAND CORP, Santa Monica, CA. [Monograph]; Woodall, K., Esquivel, A., Powell, T., Riviere, L., Amoroso, P., & Stander, V. A. (2023). Influence of family factors on service members' decisions to leave the military. *Family Relations*, 72(3), 1138-1157. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12757>

⁶ Blue Star Families. (2024). *Military Family Lifestyle Survey: 2022 Comprehensive Report*.

<https://safe.menlosecurity.com/doc/docview/viewer/docN63BA7722D2061a3896032cecae8f0369617a4c9c21a71b29b52788fd273eaf11c993cfb82e7c>

⁷ Office of People Analytics. (2023). *2021 Active Duty Spouse Survey (ADSS) (2023-045)*.

⁸ Institute for Veterans and Military Families. (2014). *Military Spouse Employment Report*.

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/military-spouse-employment-survey/>; US Government Accountability Office. (2024). *Military spouse employment: Part-time workforce characteristics and perspectives (GAO-24-106263)*

⁹ Kniskern, M. K., & Segal, D. R. (2010). *Mean Wage Differences between Civilian and Military Wives*. College Park, MD: Center for Research on Military Organization, University of Maryland, College Park

military spouses.¹⁰ Frequent mobility disrupts career continuity, increases the challenge of maintaining state-specific credentialing and licensure, and makes maintaining support such as necessary childcare difficult. Lack of childcare, particularly, drives unemployment for this population. Per the 2021 Active-Duty Spouse Survey, caring for children and children not being in daycare or school was one of the main reasons spouses were not working at the time of the survey.¹¹

Job availability is another primary concern. Well over half of all military spouses live in areas with below-average availability of work. Research from Deloitte indicates that of the military spouses who live on or near the largest bases, 44% live in labor markets with negative availability of jobs—that is, there are fewer jobs available than there are jobseekers.¹²

Also, in both unofficial and official ways, the DOD relies on military spouses' ability to reduce work-family conflict for military personnel during permanent changes of duty station, during assignments with extended or irregular work hours, and periods of mobilization.¹³ Among spouses, this further increases the challenge of maintaining their own employment.¹⁴

It is important to note that these disruptions to military spouses' careers often create lasting and compounding effects that linger even after their service member transitions out of the military and they become "veteran spouses." For example, their resumes may include volunteer work, gaps in employment, and a non-linear career progression.

Spouses and family members who survive a service member's service-related death and those caring for a wounded/ill/injured service member face additional disruption to employment. Spouses may struggle with the sudden loss of their service members' military income, making their employment more critical. The emotional impact of bereavement on surviving spouses likely increases the difficulty of this economic transition.¹⁵

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- ¹⁰ Blue Star Families. (2024). Military Family Lifestyle Survey: 2022 Comprehensive Report. <https://safe.menlosecurity.com/doc/docview/viewer/docN63BA7722D2061a3896032cecae8f0369617a4c9c21a71b29b52788fd273eaf11c993cfb82e7c>; Castaneda, L. W., & Harrell, M. C. (2008). Military spouse employment: A grounded theory approach to experiences and perceptions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 34(3), 389-412; Hawkins, S. A., Condon, A., Hawkins, J. N., Liu, K., Ramirez, Y. M., Nihill, M. M., & Tolins, J. (2018). What we know about military family readiness: Evidence from 2006-2017 [External Technical Report]; Institute for Veterans and Military Families. (2014). Military Spouse Employment Report. <https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/article/military-spouse-employment-survey/>
- ¹¹ Office of People Analytics. (2023). *2021 Active Duty Spouse Survey (ADSS) (2023-045)*.
- ¹² Williams, et al., (2020). Military spouse unemployment: Exploring solutions to a local problem of national importance. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/public-sector/military-spouse-unemployment.html>. Deloitte Insights
- ¹³ Segal, M. W. (1986). The military and the family as greedy institutions. *Armed Forces and Society*, 13(1), 9-38; Zack, J. (2021). The Navy has a problem with unpaid labor. *Navy Times*, 1. <https://www.navytimes.com/opinion/commentary/2021/07/01/the-navy-has-a-problem-with-unpaid-labor/>
- ¹⁴ US Government Accountability Office. (2013). Military spouse employment programs: DOD can improve guidance and performance monitoring (GAO-13-60).
- ¹⁵ Cozza, S. J., Fisher, J. E., Zhou, J., Harrington-LaMorie, J., Flair, L. L., Fullerton, C. S., & Ursano, R. J. (2017). Bereaved military dependent spouses and children: Those left behind in a decade of war (2001-2011). *Military Medicine*, 182(3/4), 1684-1690. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-16-00101>; Kaplow, J. B., Layne, C. M., Saltzman, W. R., Cozza, S. J., & Pynoos, R. S. (2013). Using multidimensional grief theory to explore the effects of deployment, reintegration, and death on military youth and families. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 16, 322-340.

Family members who provide care to qualifying veterans can apply for limited financial benefits through the Veterans Affairs (VA) Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.¹⁶ However, most caregiving is unpaid labor, leading to considerable financial strain on families. In one estimation, 10-12% of military caregivers provide full-time (40 or more hours per week) care,¹⁷ leaving little time for spouses to balance a career and provide financially for their families. Although research suggests most caregivers are in the labor force, they may miss more work days, take leave without pay, and work reduced work schedules.¹⁸ Ultimately, disruption of employment is one of the most impactful factors influencing the perceived overall burden of caregiving.¹⁹

In response to these concerns, the DOD and the federal government have developed a variety of policies and programs to assist military spouses in obtaining and maintaining employment (See Appendix for more details).

Stakeholder Engagement

To understand which data elements about federal employment of military spouses, caregivers, and survivors are most relevant for designing policies and programs that make the federal government their employer of choice, this FTAC held listening sessions with more than 75 military and veteran spouses, survivors, caregivers, and researchers.

From these sessions, the FTAC identified four high-level themes:

1. While there are many similarities across military-connected jobseekers and federal employees, each of these sub-populations (reserve- and active-duty spouses, veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors) have different characteristics and face specific and unique challenges.
2. Currently, policies meant to help military-connected jobseekers find or retain federal employment often add administrative burden; data could help design federal policies, programs, and user experiences to relieve that burden.
3. There is a broad perception that the “deck is stacked against” the military-connected population in the federal hiring and retention processes. Further research is needed to understand the basis of this perception and to reform federal policies and programs accordingly.
4. Better data are needed to inform evidence-based policymaking to improve the military-connected population’s chances of being hired, increase their likelihood of maintaining continuous employment, or help them attain adequate flexibility in the federal workplace compared with the opportunities available to them outside of the federal government. Furthermore, data regarding military spouse federal employment necessary for this type of research are not readily accessible to researchers inside of government or in academia.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2024). *Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC)*. Retrieved June 20 from https://www.caregiver.va.gov/support/support_benefits.asp

¹⁷ Ramchand, R., Tanielian, T., Fisher, M. P., Vaughan, C. A., Trail, T. E., Epley, C., Voorhies, P., Robbins, M. W., Robinson, E., & Ghosh-Dastidar, B. (2014). *Hidden heroes: America's military caregivers*.

¹⁸ Ramchand, R., Tanielian, T., Fisher, M. P., Vaughan, C. A., Trail, T. E., Epley, C., Voorhies, P., Robbins, M. W., Robinson, E., & Ghosh-Dastidar, B. (2014). *Hidden heroes: America's military caregivers*; Robinson, K. M. (1997). Family caregiving: Who provides the care, and at what cost. *Nursing Economic\$, 15*(5), 243-247.

¹⁹ Brickell, T. A., French, L. M., Gartner, R. L., Driscoll, A. E., Wright, M. M., & Lippa, S. M. (2019). Factors related to perceived burden among caregivers of service members/veterans following TBI. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 64*(3), 307-319. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rep0000272>

Findings Across All Groups

The following sentiments were expressed across groups of military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors:

Information and assistance about the federal application process and programs designed to help military-connected federal jobseekers are confusing and inconsistent. Participants in the listening sessions noted that the information about programs and policies relevant to military-connected federal jobseekers is difficult to understand. Though government and nonprofit programs exist to provide assistance to military-connected jobseekers, the relevance and accuracy for federal employment varies depending on factors such as geographic location and quality of the assistance program.

As is the case with most federal applicants, USAJobs is the de facto front door for military-connected jobseekers to learn about hiring authorities for which they may be eligible. Many jobseekers (especially caregivers and survivors who are not closely connected to DOD resources) also described using USAJobs as their primary source of information on relevant benefits and hiring authorities specific to their situation.

Federal job seeking creates an ongoing administrative burden for this community. Military-connected applicants report that they spend more time with each application due to additional documentation required when applying through special hiring authorities or with preference. Some participants expressed that they were so discouraged with the processes and systems set up to help them, that they gave up on applying for federal jobs altogether.

There is a perception that despite federal policies, the screening processes and attitudes of hiring managers are barriers to hiring military-connected applicants. Participants described feeling as though hiring managers didn't understand their situations or passed them over when they heard they were military-connected. This sentiment was even stronger among applicants further along in their careers and among active-duty spouses and caregivers. Many participants noted that their resumes, which often reflect disruptions due to their military-connectedness, failed to pass the initial screening process for jobs for which they appeared to be qualified.

Current federal special hiring authorities exclude many military-connected jobseekers. A key topic in the listening sessions with veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors was that many of them are not eligible for special hiring authorities. For example, the derived veteran's preference criteria exclude Gold Star children, and they also exclude spouses caregiving for veterans with a disability rating of less than 100%. Additionally, because military-connected jobseekers are often in geographic areas with many veterans, they reported that they are often unsuccessfully competing with veterans for the same positions.

Flexibility is paramount. Military-connected populations often face competing priorities, including family or caregiving responsibilities, volunteer labor expected due to their role as military spouses, and frequent location changes. Flexibility in hours and location was highlighted as essential to attracting and retaining top talent from this group.

Unique Findings about Specific Groups:

While most of the takeaways applied to military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors, each group had specific concerns or challenges that have implications for what data will be policy relevant for these sub-populations.

Military spouses in the listening sessions spoke of the pressures and expectations of active-duty military life that conflict with their careers, including frequent moves, limited options for employment, under-employment, and volunteer duties. Many also noted that they apply for numerous federal jobs over the course of their careers as they change locations and as their military and family obligations evolve. They are, in essence, “super-users” of the federal hiring process.

Veteran spouses do not have the support or opportunities that they did in active-duty but often still have a resume that reflects under-employment or many job changes.

Caregivers are often a disabled veteran’s spouse, but they can also be a child, parent, or next of kin, and therefore may not all be familiar with veteran resources and federal hiring authorities. Caregivers underscored the need for guaranteed flexibility, including part-time work, and a change in workplace culture so that caring for a disabled veteran is viewed as worthy of accommodation and flexibility.

Survivors include spouses, children, parents, and next of kin, many of whom may not be familiar with veteran resources and federal hiring authorities. Additionally, survivors may be seeking federal employment years after the service member’s death, meaning that any supportive resources provided at the time may no longer be remembered or relevant. Survivors highlighted that paperwork for derived preference could itself be re-traumatizing. One surviving spouse reported that she was required to upload a form detailing the circumstances of her service member’s combat-related death every time she applied for a federal job. Children of fallen service members in the federal workforce reported an enhanced, almost sacred, duty to serve their country, but throughout the federal application process, the only place for them to mention their status as a survivor is in the job interview.

Learning Agenda to Advance Military Readiness and Military Family Economic Security

This section outlines a learning agenda with priority questions needed to address an overarching question: What data do the federal government need to design more effective and equitable policies and programs for the military-connected populations applying for and working in the federal government?

The FTAC broke out guiding questions for the learning agenda into two components:

- Foundational questions that are critical to understanding issues related to federal employment of military-connected populations, and
- Policy- or program-specific questions that delve into unmet needs, insufficiencies, or disproportionate burdens for these populations.

Foundational Questions:

1. What are the different employment needs and demographic characteristics of the subgroups of military spouses, veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors? What are the implications of these differences for federal employment?
2. How does military spouse federal employment affect military family economic well-being, and what is the ultimate impact on military readiness?
 - a. How does family economic well-being of federally-employed military spouses compare with military spouse peers who are employed outside the federal government or not employed?

3. How many military spouses, veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors are employed by federal agencies over time, disaggregated by agency, demographics, (General Schedule) GS grade level, and service member rank?
 - a. Are military-connected populations working for the federal government at rates commensurate with the general population?
 - b. What is the distribution of the military-connected population disaggregated by agency, demographics, and service member rank? What sub-populations are underrepresented?
 - c. Are retention rates of military-connected federal employees similar to the general federal workforce?
4. What are the career trajectories of federal military-connected employees compared with their non-military-connected peers?
 - a. At what GS grade levels are military-connected employees entering federal service? What GS grade levels do they advance to?
 - b. Are the federal jobs taken by or offered to military-connected applicants commensurate with their experience and qualifications or in their discipline?
5. How are positive impacts of federal employment distributed when disaggregated across agencies, demographics, GS grade levels, and service member rank?
 - a. What are the different impacts of federal employment on the military-connected subpopulations (military spouses, veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors)?
6. What workplace factors impact retention of military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors (e.g., other military-connected or veteran colleagues in the office)?
7. Across agencies, does eligibility screening accurately evaluate the knowledge, skills, and abilities of military-connected applicants, which often have non-linear career paths?
8. Across agencies, do characteristics of demographics, professional field, or military-connected status appear to be negatively impacting this population's selection for federal roles?
9. For key roles that should be a good fit for military spouses and caregivers (e.g., ones with geographic and temporal flexibility):
 - a. What proportion of those roles are filled by military spouses and caregivers?
 - b. Where are military-connected applicants most likely to drop off in the hiring process?

Policy- and Program-Specific Questions:

10. What gaps exist in current policies to support the hiring and retention of military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors (e.g., reserve and veteran spouses, children of fallen service members, caregivers of a service member with less than 100% disability)?
 - a. How large are those sub-populations currently excluded from federal policies?
 - b. What is the impact of their exclusion from supportive policies on their family economic well-being?
11. Are federally-sponsored training programs, including those provided at bases for spouses, adequately reaching and preparing military-connected applicants for the federal hiring process, including different hiring processes and requirements across agencies?
12. How are post-pandemic return-to-office and remote work policies impacting the military-connected (especially caregivers and spouses) federal workforce and applicants?
 - a. What proportion of telework and remote work requests from military-connected federal employees are accommodated?

13. When disaggregated by agency, GS level, demographics, and service-member rank, what is the distribution of participation in the various military-connected hiring authorities? What groups are underrepresented?
14. Which military-connected hiring authorities are under-utilized (based on the expected proportion for a given sub-population), in what agencies, and why?
15. What are the effects of new policies or changes to existing ones on the number of military spouses hired and their career trajectories? Policy changes to evaluate include but are not limited to:
 - a. The 2018 change to the Military Spouse Noncompetitive Appointment Authority that allows spouses to use it any time, not just during Permanent Change of Station (PCS).
 - b. The requirement of EO 14100 for all eligible federal application solicitations to be listed under the Military Spouse Noncompetitive Appointment Authority .
16. Are improvements to the Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas (DETO) process for military spouses increasing and diversifying the military spouses participating in the program?
 - a. How many military-connected DETO employees does each federal agency have by year and by country?
 - b. By agency, GS level, and service member rank: How many military spouses apply for DETO in total vs. how many receive the flexibility?
 - c. When disaggregated by agency, GS level, demographics, and service-member rank, is participation in DETO equitably distributed? What sub-populations are currently underrepresented?
17. Are Direct-Hire Authorities, pooled hiring efforts, and other hiring flexibilities resulting in more or fewer military-connected applicants and employees for the roles they cover?
 - a. What percentage of Direct-Hire Authority jobs are filled by military-connected populations compared to the rest of federal jobs?
 - b. Are military-connected applicants represented at the expected rate for pooled hiring efforts throughout the hiring lifecycle?
18. In what ways are federal policies designed to help the military-connected population also increasing their administrative burdens?

Current Data Landscape

Data for military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors are housed in a diffuse network of databases and surveys across government; there is no centralized, definitive source for these groups as a whole. These existing datasets provide important information, and can be categorized into 1) administrative databases and 2) surveys. The FTAC inventoried datasets across the government and identified the following eight high-value administrative and survey datasets.

Administrative Datasets

- **Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS):** The DEERS database contains information for each uniformed service member (active duty, retired, or a member of a Reserve Component), and their eligible family members. It is administered by the DOD Defense Manpower Data Center.
- **Enterprise Human Resources Integration- Data Warehouse (EHRI-DW):** This database is managed by OPM and currently collects and integrates data for 2 million executive branch employees on a bi-weekly basis, with significant amounts of those data released quarterly. It is a combination of human resources, payroll and training data.

- **IRS Individual Returns Transaction File (IRTF):** The IRTF is the transaction file of all tax returns for the last 50 years. This dataset contains most (but not all) fields from IRS forms 1040; W2s and 1099s are separate (including secondary filers and dependents).
- **Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC):** PCAFC, run by the Department of Veterans Affairs, offers enhanced clinical support for family caregivers of eligible Veterans. This includes a monthly stipend paid directly to the primary caregiver. The database of caregivers eligible for and receiving PCAFC benefits is a key identifier for the caregiving population.

Surveys

- **Millennium Cohort Family Study (MCFS):**²⁰ Administered by the DOD, MCFS is one of three components of the Millennium Cohort Program of Research which also comprises a cohort study of over 260,000 military personnel and veterans, as well as a study of military-affiliated adolescents. MCFS is the largest longitudinal military health survey of spouses and is currently the only ongoing DOD study of the health and relationship well-being of military families. Participants in the MCFS include over 28,000 current and former military spouses representing all service branches and components. Approximately every three years, participants complete surveys regarding their health, relationship well-being, military life experiences, employment, education, financial well-being, and other factors. Because the influence of military life can be long-lasting, spouses are followed even if their service member partner separates from service or their marital relationship changes.
- **American Community Survey (ACS):**²¹ ACS is a large, annual household survey at small levels of geography operated by the Census Bureau. This survey collects data on housing, economics, and other demographic characteristics of households, including their military status, from a random selection of 3.5 million addresses a year.
- **Census Military Panel:**²² The Census Military Panel is a national survey panel that collects data from active-duty (E1-E4) service members and their non-military spouses intended to inform policy related to military families' lives. This survey is a collaboration between the DOD and the Census Bureau.
- **Active Duty and Reserve Spouse Surveys:**²³ The DOD Office of People Analytics surveys active duty and reserve spouses approximately every two to three years. It asks questions on employment, financial conditions, the impact of deployment and PCS moves, as well as the well-being of children.

Data Gaps

Despite the need for data to inform federal policies to support military readiness and family economic well-being as detailed in the Learning Agenda above, significant data gaps exist, including:

- identification of federal employees who are veteran spouses, survivors, and caregivers, as well as reserve and active-duty military spouses who are not employed under a spousal hiring authority,

²⁰ <https://www.familycohort.org/>

²¹ <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

²² <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/military-panel.html>

²³ <https://www.opa.mil/research-analysis/opa-surveys/active-duty-and-reserve-component-spouse-surveys>

- data siloed within agencies, which severely limits the utility of those data,
- information on federal employees requesting workplace flexibilities or accommodations related to their military-connectedness and the outcomes of those requests, and
- perspectives of military-connected federal employees from onboarding and exit surveys.

Recommendations

The primary goal of improved data access relative to military-connected populations is to enable federal agencies and qualified researchers to address the questions in the Learning Agenda above, and share those findings with policymakers and public stakeholders in order to improve policymaking, implementation, and performance.

To achieve this goal, **the over-arching recommendation of this report is to increase data access across federal agencies to enable identification of military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors in federal datasets.**

Additionally, although beyond the scope of this report, better access to data about military-connectedness across federal agencies can reduce the administrative burden of the federal hiring experience and also reduce barriers to federal employees using supportive policies and programs.

General Recommendations

Identify a point person in each agency. In order to advance policies and programs to support the military-connected workforce and facilitate data access agreements between agencies to advance the Learning Agenda, agencies should identify a point person for military-connected populations, similar to the person Chief Financial Officer (CFO Act) agencies are already required to have for veterans and persons with disabilities (EO 13518).²⁴

Collect data for continual improvement. To continually assess agencies' success in making their sector of the federal government an employer of choice for the military-connected population, agencies and their components should:

- conduct onboarding and exit surveys for military-connected federal employees, and
- collect and regularly analyze data on employee requests for workplace accommodations and flexibilities related to employee military-connectedness and the outcomes of those requests.

Centralize data where feasible. OPM may be well-positioned to act as a central, secure, source for authoritative data on members of military-connected populations who are seeking federal employment or are current or former federal employees.

Avoid adding new questions for forms and surveys. Though it may be expedient to add questions about military-connectedness to existing employee forms or surveys, doing so increases administrative burden, reduces comparability, and can result in poor data quality, limiting the utility of these data for addressing the Learning Agenda questions. Therefore, in general, the FTAC does not recommend the creation of new fields in forms such as the SF-50 or using data from systems such as the milConnect that allow individuals to change their data at will.

Establish data access agreements and platforms between agencies. The FTAC recommends establishing interagency data access agreements and platforms that enable linking of authoritative data regarding individuals' identities as military or veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors with

²⁴ <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-veterans-employment-initiative>

other datasets, such as federal employment or tax records, with necessary privacy and security protections.

Conclusions

In summary, most of the data needed to inform federal policies and programs to make the federal government the employer of choice for military and veteran spouses, caregivers, and survivors already exists across data silos within the federal government. Agencies can begin collecting quantitative and qualitative data about the experiences of military-connected jobseekers and federal employees, as well as administrative records on requests for military-connected workplace flexibilities and accommodations. Increasing data access across agencies will unlock the value of federal data to inform policies and programs to improve military family economic well-being and military readiness.

APPENDIX

Policies to enable federal employment of the military-connected population

The following policies are of particular relevance to military-connected populations who wish to or currently work for the federal government and also represent opportunities to expand on data collection for evaluation and evidence-building. More details can be found in the *Guide to Recruiting and Hiring Military Spouses: Toolkit for Federal Hiring Managers and Supervisors*.²⁵

- **Military Spouse Non-Competitive Appointment Authority**²⁶—Established under 5 U.S. Code 3330d, this hiring authority enables a hiring manager to non-competitively appoint an active-duty military spouse, spouse of a service member who incurred a 100% disability due to their active-duty service, or spouses of a service members killed while on active duty to any position in the competitive service for which he or she is qualified.
- **Derived Veteran Preference**²⁷—This policy enables a spouse, widow/widower, or parent of a veteran who meets eligibility criteria to claim veterans' preference when the veteran is unable to use it.
- **DOD Military Spouse Preference Program (Priority Placement Program)**²⁸—This DOD-only program gives preferences to accompanied spouses of an active-duty military member with PCS orders for certain positions within the DOD.

Agencies can, of course, use other hiring authorities to hire the military-connected population, including Direct Hire Authorities, Schedule A,²⁹ the Pathways Program³⁰ (including internships and federal fellowships), part-time roles, and job sharing.

Policies and programs that impact retention of military-connected populations:

The following policies are of particular relevance to current federal employees who are also military-connected. Each of these programs also represents opportunities for agencies to expand on data collection for evaluation and evidence-building.

- **Domestic Employees Teleworking Overseas (DETO)**³¹— These agreements allow federal employees to telework from select overseas locations. This policy is imperative for military spouses who are federally employed with their service member stationed overseas.
- **Telework and remote work**³² – These agreements allow federal employees to work from an approved worksite other than the agency worksite, either periodically or all of the time, respectively.

²⁵ https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Military-Spouse-Hiring-Toolkit_PDF.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.opm.gov/fedshirevets/hiring-officials/strategic-recruitment-and-hiring/military-spouses-family-members/>

²⁷ <https://www.opm.gov/fedshirevets/veteran-job-seekers/veteran-family-members/>

²⁸ <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/education-employment/seco/understanding-military-spouse-preference/>

²⁹ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/hiring/>

³⁰ <https://help.usajobs.gov/working-in-government/unique-hiring-paths/students>

³¹ <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/benefits/domestic-employees-teleworking-overseas-program/>

³² <https://www.opm.gov/telework/documents-for-telework/2021-guide-to-telework-and-remote-work.pdf>

- **Alternative/flexible work schedules and comp time**³³ – Alternative work schedules can enable employees to have work schedules that help the employee balance work and family or personal responsibilities, including volunteer work in the role of a military spouse and caregiving for a disabled veteran.
- **Leave without pay (LWOP)**³⁴ – Leave without pay is a temporary non-pay status and absence from duty that, in most cases, is granted at the employee's request. It is an entitlement when an employee uses the Family and Medical Leave Act,³⁵ and in other instances is a matter of supervisory discretion and agency internal policies.
- **Administrative leave for PCS**³⁶ – Federal civilian employees accompanying a military spouse during a geographic relocation occurring as directed by a service member's orders may be provided up to 5 days of administrative leave.
- **Other forms of workplace retention**³⁷ – Other forms of workplace retention include a “compassionate transfer” arrangement where agencies establish procedures for facilitating the transfer of employees from one agency to another, for example, to support an active-duty spouse subject to relocation or to enable a caregiver proximity to medical resources.

³³ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/work-schedules/fact-sheets/alternative-flexible-work-schedules/>

³⁴ <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/leave-administration/fact-sheets/leave-without-pay/>

³⁵ https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/FMLA_Military_Guide_ENGLISH.pdf

³⁶ <https://chcoc.gov/content/guidance-support-executive-order-14100%E2%80%94advancing-economic-security-military-and-veteran>

³⁷ <https://chcoc.gov/content/guidance-support-executive-order-14100%E2%80%94advancing-economic-security-military-and-veteran>