

Unsung Heroes

A new report last November showed that veterans are more ‘civically healthy’ than non-veterans in and around their communities

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If one were to look at communities across the country, the overwhelming image that presents itself is that veterans outnumber non-military civilians in voting booths and volunteering missions.

The notion that veterans interact and insert themselves into community volunteer opportunities more than non-military civilians despite little recognition for their involvement gained merit with a new civic health survey published last November.

“There’s a narrative out there, where veterans hear that they’re broken or that they need help,” said Mary Beth Bruggeman, president of The Mission Continues, one of the many veteran-based nonprofits behind the survey. “Organizations like ours exist to remind [veterans] that while they may need some help, in fact, the community needs [their] help.”

The report, which surveyed more than 60,000 U.S. households, accentuated prior findings by civic health studies that showed veterans engage at a higher rate across an array of community activities and volunteer opportunities throughout the country.

Some of the data gathered from the survey showed that veterans, on average, accrue 95 hours of volunteer work in a year, which is 21 hours more than non-veterans. The survey also showed that veterans are more likely to register as voters than their counterparts by a margin of 75 percent to 70 percent.

Across the U.S., 37 percent of all veterans belong to a group or organization striving to help better its community, while only 27 percent of non-veterans partake in similar opportunities, according to the study.

The report notes: “In almost all measures, veterans, old and young, were more civically healthy than non-veterans.”

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Compiled with extensive research from the National Conference on Citizenship in concert with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the report also states that “the civilian population has not always recognized the veterans’ population at large as an asset to communities and too often focus on the challenges that some veterans face.”

Set to denounce a narrative that all veterans carry physical and psychological burdens that impair their ability to continue serving, the report stresses that “they are not the only narratives” for veterans in post-military life.

The civic health report’s conclusion recommends that civic leaders not only help veterans, but “recruit, empower and leverage” them into community improvement efforts, where their skills and leadership can flourish.

“Challenge veterans to lead at work and in the community,” the report states. “These are the men and women who volunteered to fight our nation’s longest war. Recognize their desire and skills to serve and actively recruit, and engage them in making an impact in communities.”

This article is featured in the April 2022 issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Ismael Rodriguez Jr.](#), senior writer for VFW magazine.