

The Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University conducts research on issues that affect military and veteran families and works to shape policies, programs and practices that improve their well-being. Founded in 2000, MFRI envisions a diverse support community that understands the most pressing needs of military and veteran families. To achieve this, MFRI collaborates to create meaningful solutions for them. This nationally-recognized organization is located at Purdue University's College of Health and Human Sciences, in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

# MEASURING COMMUNITIES

## Picture this

Imagine yourself as a county commissioner who has been working to help veterans in your area apply for and receive the VA benefits to which they are entitled. While you know your county has been busy over the last three years increasing the support your veterans receive, you want to know if there are similar trends over the same time period in other counties near you. What if you are a community mobilization group trying to understand the needs of military-connected families in your area? How can you find this information? Measuring Communities is designed to help you. Using its online interface, you can compare data about your geographic area with that of others and learn about the strengths and weakness of the support systems serving service members, veterans and their families in your locale. Through the web-based data, you can evaluate your strategic plans for improving your community with real information while learning from others who engaging in similar activities. You can identify and address regional challenges and emerging issues.

## Mapping progress for military families

Measuring Communities is a social indicators project aimed at shaping community efforts to support military and veteran families. The approach uses the Community Blueprint as a model, and identifies key factors needed in a community to provide support for military-connected families. Diverse, reliable and nationally representative datasets help to provide military-specific information about communities' strengths and gaps in 10 domains: medical care, financial, behavioral health, K-12 education, housing, legal, post-secondary education, employment, community and demographics.

### Measuring Communities Domains



Medical Care



Financial



Behavioral Health



K-12 Education



Housing



Legal



Post-Secondary Education



Employment



Community



Demographics



The end result is an interactive tool that provides data for any given geographic region (by state, by city, by county, etc.). Users can generate maps, tables and graphs that allow them to better understand the data, and even compare indicators. For example, users can plot the military population of a region and the availability of health care providers in the same area to quickly determine strengths and weaknesses in that area. With easily printed report templates, users will be able to produce a summary of their community, with an eye towards tailoring specific, customizable data in the future.



## Measuring success

The ultimate goal of Measuring Communities is to encourage community action, helping communities track their progress and sustain attention to military issues. Specific objectives include:

- developing a system of indicators that address military friendliness in communities;
- compiling information across agencies and make it available in a usable way to local communities; and
- propelling a dialogue about what indicators should be measured and given attention.

Measuring Communities is designed for use by a variety of individuals including local, regional and state decision makers, employers, elected officials and community organizations who work with service members and veterans. Measuring Communities was created by the Military Family Research Institute in conjunction with the Center for Regional Development, both at Purdue University. The prototype website focused on Indiana but has already expanded to other states through partnerships with land grant universities across the nation, including UCLA, Michigan State University, Kansas State University and University of Kentucky.

The Measuring Communities initiative was strategically created to allow for partnerships and collaborative opportunities with individuals, organizations and institutions from different professional sectors (or areas of influence or interest). If you are interested in learning more about how you can further engage with and support this project, please contact Kathy Broniarczyk at (765) 496-6013 or [kbroniar@purdue.edu](mailto:kbroniar@purdue.edu).

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