



Photo by Senior Airman Angela Jackson

HOW WE CAN SUPPORT OUR MILITARY FAMILIES

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-BASED
PROGRAMS THAT ENHANCE MILITARY
QUALITY OF LIFE

CREATING GREAT PLACES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES BEGINS IN COMMUNITIES

Today the role of defense communities has only grown more significant as installations have evolved from closed enclaves in past decades to integrated entities in a broader community ecosystem. About 70 percent of military families now live off-base, placing the burden for providing public services such as education, workforce development, spouse employment opportunities, family support services, housing opportunities and other quality of life programs largely on local communities.

Over the past decade, DOD and the military services have steadily increased their expectations that communities and states will continue to provide and improve these types of services. The Defense State Liaison Office now produces annual “report cards” highlighting which states have or have not implemented DOD-sponsored legislation. The report focuses on a wide range of quality-of-life issues, including spouse employment, military child education, exceptional family member support, domestic abuse prevention and discrimination protections. The Air Force now produces a similar scorecard which ranks communities on their level of support for military child education and spouse employment tying these to future basing decisions. The other military services are currently developing their own reporting frameworks. With quality of life connected to military retention, recruitment and

future basing decisions, communities are now often being asked to provide more than they are capable of. In many cases, states and communities bear the entire burden of financing local quality of life efforts. Dedicating these resources can be to the detriment of other populations of need. While communities aim to be the best possible places for military families to live, there is a limit to what they can afford.

A recent research report co-developed by ADC, the *Military Family Quality of Life Indicative Study*, paints a challenging picture for our military families with significant challenges related to finances, mental health and basic needs like food, housing, childcare, education and respite care. The study concludes that individual needs are incredibly personalized and that large-scale efforts to impact these issues may not be effective as smaller-scale programs with accurate location-specific insights.

DOD’s embrace of intergovernmental support agreements (IGSAs) and the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) are examples of the idea that installations and communities are becoming far more intertwined and reliant upon one another and that military-community partnership programs can be highly effective. But while these programs provide for infrastructure and public works related services, there is no such program within DOD that helps support or integrate community-funded quality-of-life efforts. A similar support model, focused on quality-of-life programs at the state and local level, can enhance their impact and quality of life in the communities our military families call home.



HOW TO DESIGN A DEFENSE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAM

Building on the successful models used to connect resources between DOD and communities, a defense community support program could be launched with new authority from Congress and fund community-led military support programs that focus on critical issues like childcare, education, military spouse and veteran skills training and employment, food insecurity, housing, and health care.

This new authority could be used to fund a competitive grant program administered by DOD's primary liaison with communities and states – the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation (OLDCC). The program would be open to states, counties, municipalities and regional entities. Funds would cover operations expenses such as personnel, equipment, organizational development, licensing, regulatory fees, research, outreach, training, program development, and educational and marketing materials. This program would not support physical infrastructure or facility maintenance.

Working with partners in the Military services, OLDCCC would evaluate candidate programs on multiple criteria with a primary focus on quality of life. In judging quality of life, the agency would consider:

- a program's local impact in supporting DOD and the military services' stated quality of life priorities – including the availability and quality of childcare, job-skills training, education, spouse employment, housing and health care
- overall value to the greater community or region
- a region's outstanding need relative to available resources
- extent to which a project leverages a mix of public and private funding sources

A local cost share should be required. This requirement could be met through a combination of public and private funding, including from other federal agencies. Rural communities with populations under 50,000 could have the cost share requirement waived if matching funds were unavailable or limited and if the proposed project were determined by the Secretary of Defense to be of critical interest to the military.



HOW A DEFENSE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAM COULD IMPACT ON-THE-GROUND SUPPORT

The following examples are initiatives happening in defense communities now and how additional support will help them grow.

Growing the STEM Workforce Pipeline

Patuxent River, Maryland
[Naval Air Station Patuxent River](#)

Launched in 2021, the **Southern Maryland 2030** initiative partners with St. Mary's County Public Schools, local defense contractors and Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division to **foster a STEM career pipeline**. State and local funding fuel this program, providing paid apprenticeships and internships for high school and college students, with **109 apprenticeships funded to date**.

The **student demand for this program far exceeds the current funding** and personnel capacity of the initiative. A DOD grant under the proposed program would be used to **expand the apprenticeship and internship opportunities** and support additional STEM camps, aviation and simulator experiences.

Aligning Mission and Workforce

Warner Robins, Georgia
[Robins Air Force Base](#)

To meet workforce demands, the Development Authority of Houston County, Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex, 21st Century Partnership and Houston County School District launched **Project Synergy**. It offers a **collaborative workspace** and educational setting in a new **off-base, high-tech facility**, supporting Robins AFB's software missions and **fostering workforce growth**.

Expanding Project Synergy through a DOD grant would **boost STEM programming**, student throughput and **workforce development for military and civilian sectors**. This expansion aligns with its goal of enhancing quality of life, education and career opportunities. It would reinforce the vital role of military and DOD civilian families while **elevating regional educational systems**.

Preparing Service Members for Their Futures

Workforce Solutions for Hawaii
Camp For Smith Shafter, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Marine Corps Base Hawaii

Workforce Solutions addresses employment challenges for military spouses and transitioning soldiers. It aims to **prepare them for employment, supporting workforce needs, talent development and regional growth**. Services include training, childcare and counseling, facilitating individual economic opportunity and regional economic development.

Continuing and expanding these programs through a DOD grant would **expand employment opportunities** in many different industry requirements in Hawaii.

Providing Special Education Opportunities

Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs
Hill Air Force Base

The Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs established a **community-led Exceptional Military Family Support Team** aiding a public school district outside Hill Air Force Base. With 750-800 Exceptional Military Family Program (EFMP) families at Hill Air Force Base, the district faces an **18% special education rate**. The new team provides **wrap-around support** for this student population, complementing the single DOD-funded Military Family Life Counselor.

With limited state funding, the school district was able to hire two personnel to be part of the Military Support Team to help **supplement DOD's EFMP effort** in Utah. But with the need still far outweighing the available resources, a grant under this proposed program would demonstrate to the state that this is a valuable project and allow them to **increase resources and personnel** dedicated to this effort.

Connecting Military Spouses with Quality Jobs

Montgomery, Alabama
Maxwell Air Force Base

The Montgomery Chamber's **Military Spouse Employment Program** links military spouses with Chamber member employers dedicated to supporting the military community. Employers have identified **suitable positions and are eager to hire**. Spouses can instantly connect by entering the program's name and "Montgomery" on Indeed.com, streamlining the hiring process and **offering quality job opportunities**.

A Defense Community Support Program grant would enable the Chamber to **hire a dedicated program administrator**, and it would provide the resources needed to expand the Chamber's support to other military spouse issues.

Increasing Collaboration

Harrison County, Mississippi
Keesler Air Force Base

The creation of the Gulf Coast Military Affairs Council **would allow greater military-installation collaboration** by providing a community umbrella organization that can coordinate partnership efforts at the local level.

A grant would **help cover organizational startup costs** including the hiring of a full-time staff and related materials and equipment.

Fostering Community

Wichita Falls, Texas
Sheppard Air Force Base

The Defense Community Military Support Program could enhance **Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce** programming for military families, such as the **Hidden Gems** workshops. These events **connect active-duty members, spouses and children with local businesses and opportunities**, fostering networking, community and resilience. Future workshops will include child-focused activities, like a STEAM studio visit.

A grant from the proposed program would allow them to **offer programming more frequently**, not just quarterly, and to more participants. These events are in popular demand, often selling out in a few hours, but due to budgeting, they cannot offer more tickets to events. This grant would allow us to **dream bigger and impact more members of our local military community**.

Creating a Sense of Home

Colorado Springs, Colorado
Fort Carson Army Base, Peterson
Space Force Base, Schriever
Space Force Base, United States
Air Force Academy, Buckley
Space Force Base

Home Front Military Network's navigation and outreach support aids service members, veterans and families, **preventing crises and fostering community integration**. They address **challenges like lack of family support, service tempo strains and unawareness of resources**. Through outreach events and a comprehensive website, they connect individuals with services, ensuring **holistic support for family stability and well-being**.

Securing a grant would fund a community outreach role and **expand our network of care service directory** to assist military families near Buckley SFB and statewide Reservists and National Guard members. Enhanced case management would connect them to vital resources, **supporting financial stability, health, and family well-being** amid rising demand since 2020.

Prioritizing Quality Childcare

Monterey, California
Presidio of Monterey

The **city of Monterey** and the **U.S. Army at Presidio** maintain a child development center near the base, offering **quality childcare** for military personnel, DOD civilians, and faculty. Highly qualified staff ensure excellent care, **easing the burden** for families and providing peace of mind with convenient, top-notch childcare facilities nearby.

A DOD grant could help recruit childcare providers by **offering rental assistance** and making living expenses more manageable.

Expanding the Military Spouse Initiative

Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Naval Base Kitsap, Fairchild Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island

Washington State's Military Family Initiative will expand the existing Military Spouse Initiative headed up by the Military Spouse Liaison to support the 94,163 DoD Total Force spouses and children in Washington State. **Focusing on research, policy advocacy, and collaboration, it engages military installations, state agencies, and communities.** The initiative promotes quality of life and advocates for resources while addressing key policy issues for military families.

With a matching grant, Washington State would be able to **expand its quality-of-life Military Spouse Initiative to focus on the entire military family** through expanded staffing for the program.



Photo by Sgt. Clara Harty

Creating Innovation to Fulfill Childcare Needs

Hampton Roads, Virginia

Langley Air Force Base, Naval Station
Oceana, Fort Eustis, Naval Support Activity
Norfolk, Naval Air Base Little Creek

A year-long pilot in Norfolk **introduced a search tool connecting them to fee assistance programs and care options.** A case management system and a pioneering nanny program addressed gaps, supporting 794 families and enhancing economic vitality.

Despite its success, Operation Childcare's future hinges on securing additional financial support. The program aided military families and boosted the local economy and integration. **With matching funds, this collaborative initiative can sustain and expand,** ensuring ongoing support for military families navigating challenges while serving their country.

Connecting Families to Childcare

State of Indiana

Grissom Air Reserve Base, Naval
Surface Warfare Center Crane Division

The Chances and Services for Youth (CASYS) is a **state-led effort to establish a childcare program that can serve the families of the 181st Intelligence Wing and the surrounding community.**

A grant under this program would **help the program expand staffing, classroom materials and playground equipment.**

Promoting Resources for Families and New Parents

Albuquerque, New Mexico Kirtland
Air Force Base

The Kirtland Partnership Committee has made efforts to support Kirtland Air Force Base by hosting a childcare resource fair in partnership with trusted local providers and the Central New Mexico Community College. Their **goal is to recruit more providers to meet the growing demand** for childcare at Kirtland and to offer resources and support to new parents.

A program such as the Defense Community Military Support Program would greatly **benefit their efforts by providing funds for projects like their resource fair and childcare recruitment efforts** allowing them to further support the families of those serving at Kirtland Air Force Base.

Enhancing Education through Partnerships

Albuquerque, New Mexico
Kirtland Air Force Base

The Kirtland Partnership Committee works closely with the Air Force Education and Training Command to offer quality educational opportunities to military families and civilians alike. In line with this, KPC has also **established a committee specifically focused on researching and responding to the educational needs** of the Kirtland AFB community. This committee actively works to identify and address any educational resource gaps and advocate for legislative changes to support military education.

The Defense Community Military Support Program would **provide additional funding for projects and initiatives surrounding educational programs**, particularly for children of military families.

Building Tomorrow's Cyber Leaders

Greater Augusta, Georgia
Installation: Fort Eisenhower

The project is a K-12 Cyber Workforce Development effort spearheaded by the Alliance for Fort Eisenhower Alliance for Cyber Education team. The team promotes and assists CyberPatriot teams in the region's **middle and high schools during the school calendar year** and conducts 20 summer CyberPatriot camps from 2024 through 2030.

A grant would **pay for the salary of one full-time cyber education coordinator, curriculum, training and additional camp supplies** for the twenty summer CyberPatriot camps.

Bridging Education and Workforce Needs

Dayton, Ohio
Installation: Wright Patterson
Air Force Base

The Strategic Ohio Council for Higher Education, with Ohio colleges, career technical centers and high schools **plans to establish "Project Student Engagement" to address workforce needs** at Wright Patterson AFB. It **offers work-based learning in STEM fields, fostering technical skills and professional development** for students to support base missions and regional workforce growth.

A DOD grant could **expand Project Student Engagement, boosting STEM workforce development and internships**. This enhances quality of life for military families, fostering education, career development, and community integration. The project's expansion aligns with its goals, benefiting economic growth and job creation while bolstering Ohio's educational system.

Empowering Military Families and Fueling Regional Growth

Workforce Solutions of Central Texas
Installation: Fort Cavazos

Workforce Solutions of Central El Paso created a program to address Fort Cavazos' employment challenges for military spouses and transitioning soldiers. It **aims to prepare them for employment, supporting workforce needs, talent development and regional growth**. Services include training, childcare and counseling, facilitating individual economic opportunity and regional economic development. A DOD grant would help offer various services like training and counseling.

Continuing this program through a **DOD grant would expand employment opportunities**, particularly in the Central Texas computer chip manufacturing industry.

State Military and Veteran Family Program Manager

Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs
Hill Air Force Base

Utah seeks to hire a Military and Veteran Family Program Manager to enhance coordination between state, community, and DOD programs. This **addresses the challenge of military families' limited awareness of available benefits**. The role aims to improve resource sharing and coordination across government and community levels, aiding in better support provision.

With a matching grant, the **State of Utah would be incentivized to move forward with this initiative and expand the scope of the quality of life challenges** this new position could support.

Increasing Opportunities for New Home Buyers

Utah Department of Veterans and Military Affairs
Hill Air Force Base

Through a new program, the State of Utah **offers a special grant for military connected first-time home buyers** which helps offset up-front housing costs. To date, Utah has provided nearly \$2 million in funding to 800 grant applicants.

The State money allocated to this program each year is unable to cover the number of military families who apply for this grant. **Additional funds would allow the program to better meet the demand** and expand the benefit further.

Supporting Mental Health for Transitioning Families

State of Indiana

Grissom Air Reserve Base, Naval Surface Warfare Center Crane Division

The **INvets Mental Health Support Project** is a state-led effort designed to be a **full-service transition model for both transitioning military and their families**. The program helps transitioning service members find their next career in Indiana by helping them pick the appropriate community near the workplace that fits their family's needs. The program also helps transitioning veterans and families find ways to get involved in the community and **provides free mental health support**.

A matching grant would enable INvets to expand services for veterans by growing the capacity and capability of the INvets core team allowing them to provide a holistic well-being approach to the recruiting and transition process for veterans relocating or settling in the state of Indiana after transition. This support provides **mental health support for arguably the most stressful time in a veteran's career**, when they are facing the loss of community, career and home while trying to transition to an entirely new area.

Promoting Emotional Safety for Military Families

Beale Military Liaison Council / Yuba County, California

Beale Air Force Base

Operation EQ is a proposed **community-led program to improve quality of life through implementation of emotional intelligence and psychological safety training** focusing on mental awareness and resiliency, social belonging, inclusion, safety and security. The current infrastructure provides sustained training program through First-Term Airmen Centers and Family Support Centers at a cost of approximately \$125,000 per year.

Funding would support emotional intelligence (EQ) and psychological safety (PS) training, **integrating AI for a comprehensive well-being and leadership program**. It would follow a simplified approach of measure, learn and apply, offering assessments, workshops and coaching.