

3rd Annual Military Thriving Change Forum

Breakout Session Roll-Up: Building Military Thriving Communities

Executive Summary

Across both the Entrepreneurship and State & Regional breakout sessions, a shared conclusion consistently emerged: The ability to create Military Thriving cultures and communities is not due to a lack of effort, intent, or program availability. It is constrained by system design and integration.

Across the country, a dense landscape of programs, services, and initiatives exists to support veterans, military spouses, and transitioning service members. Yet these assets too often function as disconnected components rather than a coherent ecosystem. The result is fragmentation and inconsistency of experience.

Participants collectively reframed the core challenge as one of ecosystem architecture: how to move from parallel systems of good intent to integrated systems with shared goals and objectives as well as agreed and measurable outcomes.

Across both sessions, five foundational dimensions defined the conversation:

- Access to opportunities that are not routinely discussed in transition. System Coordination to enable a fully functioning and integrated ecosystem.
- Economic Mobility as central to a Multi-Pathway Design
- Community Connection as a core component of the designed and integrated infrastructure
- Data and Accountability as feedback loops go measured systems.

Together, these reflect a Military Thriving ecosystem that reduces friction and enables military-connected individuals and families to move seamlessly across opportunity landscapes throughout their transition journey, both in and out of uniform.

Key Finding 1: The Constraint is Navigation, Not Availability

Participants consistently identified a structural gap between the existence of resources and the ability to effectively access them.

System Friction Points

Across entrepreneurship, transition, and family systems, recurring breakdowns included:

- Disconnected entry points across programs and jurisdictions
- Inconsistent pathways across states, sectors, and organizations
- Fragmented visibility into funding, employment, and support resources
- Credentialing, licensing, and mobility barriers across geography
- Disruption introduced by PCS cycles and career transitions
- Lack of real-time guidance through complex and myriad systems.

ZeroMils Interpretation

The ecosystem is producing resources faster than it is producing clarity. Without navigation infrastructure, opportunity remains distributed but not accessible. Military Thriving requires reducing system friction, not increasing volume.

Key Finding 2: Fragmentation is an Ecosystem Design Failure

Participants consistently described fragmentation as a structural limitation on impact. Fragmentation manifests itself through:

- Parallel programming without system integration
- Misaligned incentives across institutions and sectors
- Lack of shared data architecture or common definitions of success
- Redundant efforts that do not accumulate into collective impact
- Limited mechanisms for cross-sector coordination and learning

Key Stakeholders and Necessary Actors in Ecosystem Identified

- Public agencies and local transition systems
- Veteran service organizations
- Educational institutions tied to workforce systems
- Employers and industry partners
- Economic development and chamber networks

- Entrepreneurship and innovation partners
- Community-based organizations

Key Finding 3: Economic Mobility Requires a Network of Pathways

Participants emphasized that Military Thriving must be defined by mobility across different opportunities versus progression through a single track.

Interconnected Mobility Pathways

Employment Pathways

- Skills-aligned and purpose-driven employment
- Apprenticeship and experiential learning systems
- Transition infrastructure that reduces re-entry friction
- Long-term career progression and adaptability

Entrepreneurship Pathways

- Lifecycle access to capital (not just startup entry points)
- Business formation, scaling, and sustainability support
- Integration into procurement and supply ecosystems
- Strengthening veteran- and military spouse-owned enterprises

Military Spouse Economic Systems

- True license and credential portability across states
- Continuity of employment and business activity during mobility cycles
- Recognition of nonlinear and distributed career trajectories
- Policy alignment with mobile family structures

Key Finding 4: Belonging is Structural Infrastructure, Not an Afterthought

Participants consistently reinforced that Military Thriving depends on sustained relationship infrastructure and community connection not just economic outcomes in transition. Key elements include

- Durable peer and professional networks
- Mentorship grounded in lived experience and continuity

- Community integration beyond transition milestones
- Local civic, economic, and social participation pathways
- Identity-affirming networks that sustain purpose over time

The repeated articulation and emphasis on “finding my tribe” reflects the truth that connection is not an outcome—it is one of the enabling conditions, necessary to thrive.

Key Finding 5: Sustainable Systems Require Shared Accountability Loops

Participants identified that long-term improvement depends on moving from myopic and tactical program-level interests to ecosystem-level accountability and measurement.

Required System Enablers

- Interstate, cross state, alignment on licensing and credential mobility
- Policy coherence for military spouse economic participation; transition as a family issue.
- Shared data infrastructure across sectors and jurisdictions
- Clear governance models for ecosystem coordination
- Stronger public-private operating partnerships
- Integrated transition and support architectures

Areas for Ecosystem Activation

Five priority domains emerged as leverage points for continued ecosystem development:

- Navigation and coordination infrastructure
- Capital access across the full economic lifecycle
- Mentorship and relational network systems
- Military spouse economic mobility architecture
- Shared data, measurement, and accountability systems

Indicators of a Healthy Military Thriving Ecosystem

Participants identified a shared set of signals for evaluating ecosystem performance:

Economic Mobility Signals

- Employment quality and progression outcomes. Not just job placement — Retention, Retention, Retention
- Time-to-stability in career or business pathways
- Business creation, growth, and sustainability rates
- Integration into procurement and supply networks

Community Resilience Signals

- Quality of life and stability indicators
- Strength of social connectedness and continuity
- Civic participation and local integration
- Retention of military-connected families in communities

Ecosystem Coherence Signals

- Cross-sector alignment and collaboration density
 - Resource accessibility and navigation efficiency
 - Data interoperability across systems
 - Evidence of coordinated regional action
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Closing Observations

Across both breakout sessions, a unified systems-level conclusion emerged:

Military Thriving is not an outcome produced by individual programs, organizations, or policies. It is an emergent property of a well-designed, highly collaborative ecosystem.

It emerges when systems are intentionally connected, when resources are made navigable, and when institutions are aligned around shared definitions of success and measure agreed outcomes.

The highest-leverage opportunity is not the creation of more resources—it is the engineering of coherence across the resources that already exist.