

Sierra Club Outdoors - Returning Veterans Outdoor Career Survey

SUMMARY AND REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*The data emerging from the Survey responses described herein support the feasibility of programming developed to facilitate Veterans' access to preparation for and employment in Outdoor Professions. Focused on Veterans in the Chicago area, the anchoring question for this process was, **What is Veterans' interest in outdoor careers?***

Results indicated participants' significant interest in careers associated with being outdoors. These interests aligned with expressed curiosity and motivation for careers associated with skills gained in military service. Most important were meaningful work, a sense of mission/being of service, and sense of belonging/relationship. Also significant were explicit descriptions of the barriers to life balance and satisfying work upon return from service.

The findings of this study indicate Veterans' strong consensus on interest in and desire for outdoor careers, lending strong evidence of feasibility with regard to developing programs explicitly to support both experience with and preparation for outdoor professions. An additional unexpected outcome of this study reveals the assessment itself as a career supportive intervention in that the survey exposes respondents to alternatives in outdoor professions.

INTRODUCTION

The Sierra Club Outdoors (SCO) is committed to systematic development of a set of programs to connect Veterans with outdoor activity. One aspect of this work is specific focus on supporting Veterans' exploration of career alternatives, preparation and engagement. This report contains data and analyses reflecting both the feasibility of Veteran-focused outdoor career initiatives and the best directions for program development.

In partnership with the McCormick Foundation of Chicago, SCO has placed initial focus on the Veterans of the Chicago area. The *Returning Veterans Outdoor Career Survey* was administered to a Core Group of Chicago Veterans over two evenings, April 28, 29. Subsequent surveys were completed via internet between May 4 and May 15.

PARTICIPANTS

A Core Group of 12 Chicago-based Veterans volunteered to attend one of two evening sessions in which they completed the survey and participated in a facilitated focus-discussion. An additional 28 respondents completed surveys via internet.

Demographics: Of the 40 respondents, 7 were female, 32 were male. One person did not indicate gender. Reported ethnicity: 6 Black, 5 Hispanic, 1 Asian, 24 White, and 4 not reporting. Military Branch: 1 Air Force, 21 Army, 11 Marines, 7 Navy. Deployment OEF/OIF: 31 yes, 7 no, 2 not reporting.

INSTRUMENTS

Both the content and purpose *SCO Returning Veterans Outdoor Career Survey* (Appendix A) were grounded in the interests, concerns and priorities of OEF and OIF Veterans. The assessment suite included a demographic page, a Likert-based questionnaire (Part 1), a series of Open-ended questions (Part 3) for written response, and a Dialogue (Part 2) among the 12 members of the Core Group. The written portions were completed by all 39 participants. The 12 members of the Core Group engaged in a facilitated Dialogue between the Likert and Open-ended portions of the survey. Each Veteran read and signed a document describing the survey and related feasibility study, thereby indicating their informed consent to participate.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As indicated in the numeric and visual summaries of these data, Veterans across genders, ethnicities and military branches indicate interest in careers linked with the outdoors.

CREDIBILITY OF DATA

Themes from Dialogue data were collected by four note-takers. Notes were analyzed for reliability and validity in comparison with each other set and, additionally, in comparison with content of Open-ended responses and thematic congruence with Likert scale. These analyses indicated psychometric strength in reliability and validity, and in their parallel qualitative metrics, dependability and credibility.

A theme analysis of the Likert Scale itself indicated strong evidence of construct validity in that the themes of Meaningful Work (3 of 15), interest in Outdoor Professions (3 of 15), Mission/Purpose (2 of 15), and Personal Health/Self Care (3 of 15) were strongly evident in item content. An additional primary question carried the theme of Camaraderie/Chain of Command, and another carried the theme of Bias against Returning Veterans.

EMERGENT THEMES

The Dialogue occurred between the core group's completion of the Likert and Open-ended portions of the survey. In this way, comments during dialogue were mediated by all participants having focused on the prompts in the Likert survey. In turn, comments were mediated by the exchange among participants.

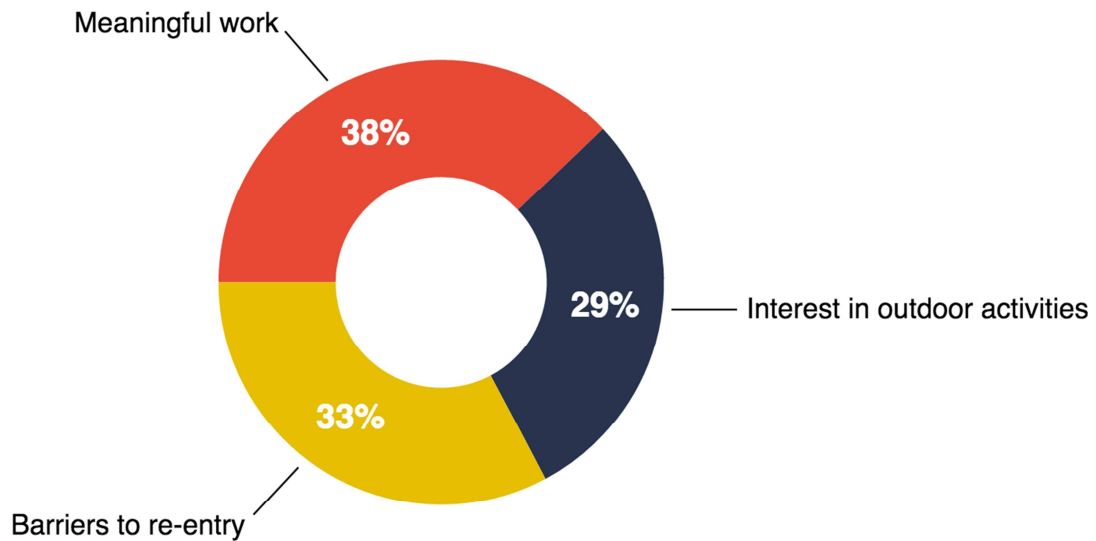
Data from the Dialogue were collected via verbatim notes collected by four recorders. These notes were analyzed for emergent themes, coded and compared for continuity. The dependability of these data was evident in the appearance of themes and subthemes across note-takers. Primary themes and sub-themes were evident across note-takers. Several relevant but less frequent sub-themes were noted with mention by three of four note-takers.

Given the order of survey components, the data from the Dialogue among the 12 Chicago-based Veteran volunteers served to ground the Likert and Open-ended data. The themes evident from this Dialogue and validated with written responses to the Open-ended questions are summarized visually and elaborated with direct quotes in Appendix B.

Analysis of the Dialogue revealed three (3) primary themes emerged:

1. **Meaningful work,**
2. **Explicit interest in/stated match with outdoor professions,**
3. **Barriers to satisfying re-entry.**

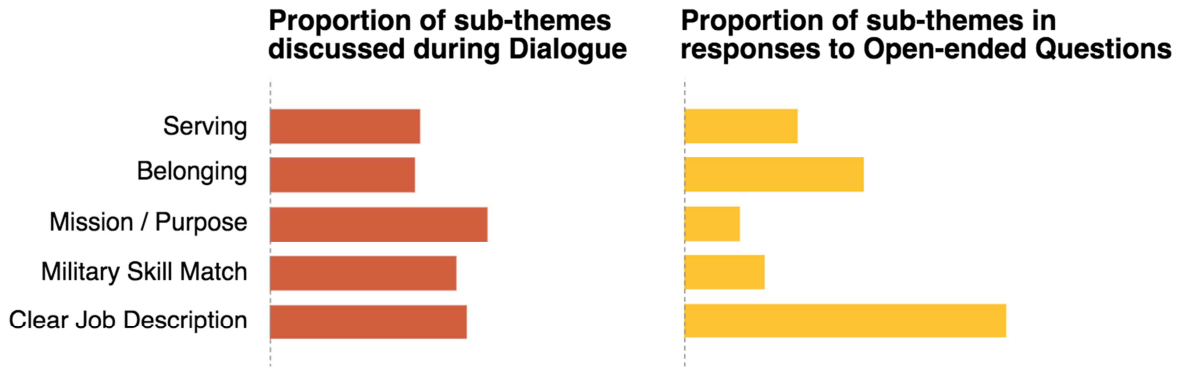
The first primary theme, **Meaningful work**, was refined with sub themes. Both primary and sub themes were echoed in the Open-ended responses.



Meaningful work (22 mentions noted in Dialogue portion; 435 comments in Open-ended portion) was elaborated in sub themes:

- To serve
- To belong
- Sense of mission/purpose
- Work that matches military skills
- Clear job description/chain of command

Within these sub themes, the importance of belonging within strong and reliable relationships was most often mentioned (39% of all responses). Each sub theme was significantly represented.



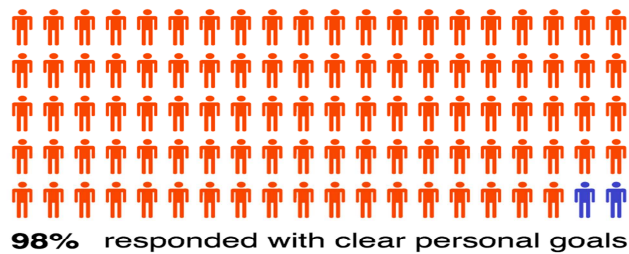
Explicit interest in outdoor professions (17 mentions noted in Dialogue portion; 70 comments in Open-ended portion) was evident throughout the Dialogue, including repeated emphasis of Veterans’ surprise and reassurance at learning of outdoor careers.

Barriers to re-entry were elaborated in the Dialogue portion of the Survey (19 mentions), but far less evident than themes of **Meaningful work** in Open-ended portion (2 comments)

Finally, two additional sub themes emerged with the Open-ended responses.

- **Self care and health** (38 comments in Open-ended portion – each with seriated lists of self-care and health-supportive commitments),
- **Personal goals** (98% of respondents responding with clear goal statements).

Taken together, these two sub themes indicate a robust presence of strengths and strength-based motives among respondents.



NUMERIC DATA

Imprints. Over 3000 Veterans viewed the announcement of the survey via outlets as varied as posted flyers, facebook, blogs and virtual bulletin boards on Veteran-focused websites.

Statistical Summary – Likert Scale. The following table contains summary statistics for Likert questions specifically addressing the feasibility of programming in support of Veterans’ interested in Outdoor Careers. Summaries across the entire sample (n=40) were aggregated by gender, ethnicity, military branch, and OEF/OIF deployment.

**Aggregate
Data/Selected
Questions**

		I am happy with my current employment situation	I am interested in a profession that is associated directly with the outdoors.	My work is balanced with other aspects of my life	I am hopeful about my future employment opportunities.	A clear chain of command is important to me at work.	I want my work to align with my own personal mission or sense of purpose.	When I think of all the questions I've been answering, I am comfortable with who I am now.	I am satisfied with my life since being back from deployment.
Aggregate (40)	Mean	2.87	1.82	3.71	2.31	2.13	1.45	2.32	2.90
	SD	1.95	1.23	1.75	1.56	1.30	1.03	1.58	1.80
Female (7)	Mean	2.71	3.29	2.43	2.29	2.43	2.29	2.14	2.43
	SD	2.215	1.496	1.134	1.799	2.149	2.138	1.773	1.272
Male (33)	Mean	2.91	1.48	4.00	2.31	2.06	1.26	2.35	3.00
	SD	1.924	.890	1.751	1.533	1.063	.445	1.561	1.901
Asian (1)	Mean	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
	SD	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black (6)	Mean	3.00	2.50	3.50	2.67	2.33	1.67	2.33	2.17
	SD	2.098	1.049	1.378	1.862	1.506	.516	.816	.753
Hispanic (5)	Mean	4.00	1.50	5.20	3.80	2.00	1.00	4.00	5.40
	SD	2.550	1.000	1.095	2.280	1.414	0.000	2.550	1.817
White (24)	Mean	2.88	1.63	3.75	2.04	2.17	1.54	2.08	2.75
	SD	1.849	1.245	1.751	1.268	1.308	1.250	1.381	1.700
Air Force (1)	Mean	4.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00
	SD	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Army (21)	Mean	3.10	1.95	3.57	2.29	2.38	1.62	2.24	2.67
	SD	2.047	1.396	1.748	1.488	1.499	1.322	1.411	1.494
Marine (11)	Mean	2.45	1.56	4.20	2.70	1.70	1.10	2.80	4.00
	SD	2.115	.882	1.989	2.003	1.059	.316	2.201	2.309
Navy (7)	Mean	2.29	1.43	3.50	1.57	2.00	1.33	1.83	2.14
	SD	1.704	.787	1.643	.787	.894	.516	.983	1.464
OIF/OEF: no (7)	Mean	2.29	2.29	3.43	3.00	3.00	2.14	2.57	2.29
	SD	1.113	1.799	1.397	2.160	2.236	2.193	1.618	1.380
OIF/OEF: yes (31)	Mean	3.00	1.76	3.62	2.23	1.86	1.31	2.31	3.03
	SD	2.145	1.091	1.801	1.406	.915	.471	1.628	1.938

NOTE: 7-point Likert Scale with 1 indicating strong agreement, 7 indicating strong disagreement.

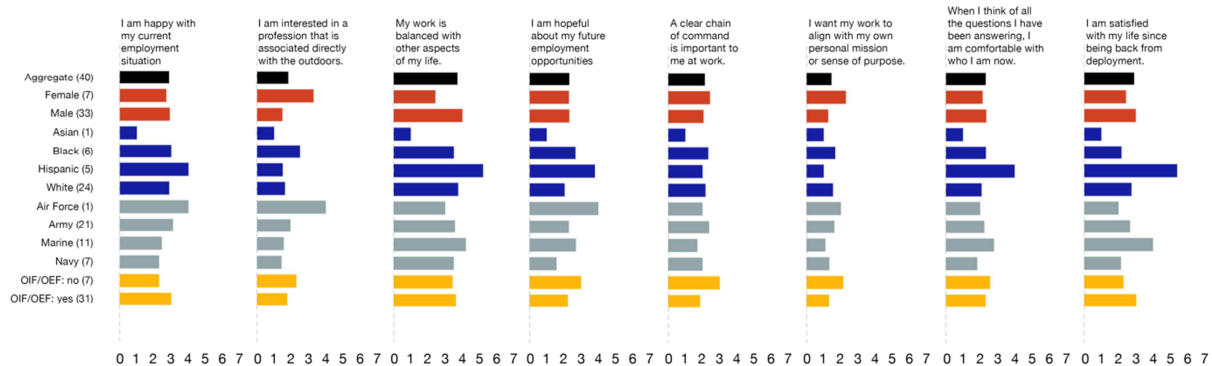
While there was significant variation in reported satisfaction with current employment across all groups, on average, this group of Veterans indicated more satisfaction than dissatisfaction (2.87). Hispanics (4.0) and OEF/OIF (3.0) respondents indicated the greatest job dissatisfaction. However, in both of these groups, there was significant variation in individual responses, as indicated by standard deviation (sd) values.

With fairly low variation, respondents indicated less satisfaction with life's balance (3.71). Most dissatisfied with the balance of work with other aspects of life were Hispanics (5.2), Marines (4.2), and Males (4.0).

Related were reports of satisfaction with life since deployment. Again Hispanic (5.4) and OEF/OIF (3.03) respondents indicated least satisfaction. On this item, Males also showed less life satisfaction since being deployed (3.0). The variation across OEF/OIF and Male respondents was large – indicating some of these respondents were quite satisfied and others quite dissatisfied. By comparison, Hispanic respondents were more uniform in their reported dissatisfaction with life since deployment.

With regard to Outdoor Careers, responding Veterans indicated significant interest (1.82). While there was little variation across respondents, there were trends indicating most interest in Males (1.48), Hispanics (1.5), Whites (1.63), and OEF/OIF Veterans (1.76).

Finally, and a strong correlate with interest in Outdoor Careers, were Veterans’ consistent and strong reports of the importance of mission and purpose (1.45). As elaborated by the qualitative data reported above, the desire among Veterans is great for work with meaning that represents service in the form of “giving back.” While all respondents indicated significant agreement with the importance of mission, in the current sample, the most fervent devotion to mission in the current sample was evident in Hispanics (1.0), Marines (1.1), Males (1.26), OEF/OIF Veterans (1.31), Navy (1.33), Whites (1.54), Army (1.62) and Blacks (1.67).



The above discussed items showed the most immediate information with regard to the feasibility of programming to support returning Veterans in seeking Outdoor Careers. Additional review of the table and the graphics may yield additional insights into the experiences and interests of these Veterans.

NEXT STEPS

Three next steps are supported by the data of this survey or Veterans.

1. A demonstration project designed to pilot a program or programs for supporting Veterans in Outdoor Career exposure, preparation and employment. At the discretion of funders and applicants, initial focus for such a project may be placed on OEF/OIF Veterans.
2. Streamlining and distribution of the core features of the *Survey* (see Appendix A) for use in career counseling with Veterans. While the data support the benefit to be gained across Veteran groups, the current investigation demonstrated its particular application with OEF/OIF Veterans.
3. Communication of findings among Veteran service organizations (governmental and non-governmental). This communication may be linked to actions described in #1 and #2, above.

APPENDIX A

Sierra Club Outdoors - Returning Veterans Outdoor Career Survey

Demographic Information

1. Military Service Branch (circle)
 - a. Army
 - b. Navy
 - c. Air Force
 - d. Marines
 - e. Coast Guard
 - f. Army National Guard
 - g. Air Force National Guard
 - h. Reservist
2. Please list the title of your job (for example, if you were an 11B in the US Army, write: Infantry NOT 11B)
3. What was the highest rank you achieved?
4. Where did you deploy? (country & base – or ship)
5. Please write a few sentences about your work while on deployment.
6. Length of time in the Military.
7. Date of separation.
8. Age -
9. Gender identity (optional) -
10. Ethnicity (describe) -
11. Education (circle)
High School - Some College - College Degree [Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate] - Tech Training
12. Employment (describe)

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PART 1 Likert Scale

Please respond to each of the following by circling the number that reflects how well the statement reflects who you are and what you want.

1. I am happy with my current employment situation.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree

2. Job satisfaction is important to me.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree

3. I'm open to a career I'd never thought of before.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree

4. I rather spend spare time outside than inside.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree

5. I'm interested in a profession that is associated directly with the outdoors.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree

6. I'm likely to spend spare time in:

a. My neighborhood.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

b. Agricultural land.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

c. An area park.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

d. A state park.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

e. A national park.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

f. A wilderness area.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

[Please rate the following according to your work interest (1-high interest/7-low interest).]

ii. Fisheries

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

iii. Land management (wilderness or range)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

f. Outdoor industry (corporate)

i. Brand development

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

ii. Sales

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

iii. Design

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

g. Environmental law

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

[Please rate the following according to your work interest (1-high interest/7-low interest).]

h. Nature writing/journalism

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

i. Environmental advocacy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

j. Wilderness therapy

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

k. Emergency medical service – Search & Rescue

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

14. Please rate each of the following according to how important they are to you in your career (1-vitally important/7-unimportant).

a. Camaraderie.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

b. Clear chain of command.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

[Please rate each of the following according to how important they are to you in your career (1-vitally important/7-unimportant).]

c. Congruence with my personal mission/sense of purpose.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

d. Physicality – using my body.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

15. When I think of all the questions I've been answering, this is how comfortable I am with who I am now.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly						Strongly
Agree						Disagree

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PART 2 Participant Dialogue

Administrative Guide

- Participants will have bar of color on their “nametag” signifying the discussion group they will join with facilitators who are holding up rectangular cards (e.g., 8X5.5) of that color.
- Project Leaders will facilitate transition into groups.
- Dialogue facilitators will take it from there with opening:
 - First question: *Now that you’ve responded to the questions so far, what are your thoughts?*
 - Follow the conversation
- Project Leaders will signify 5 and 2 minutes before the close of dialogue groups.
- At close, ask participants to return to their seats and respond to the open-ended questionnaire.

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PART 3 Open-Response Questions

Please write a response to each of the questions below.

1. How do you relax?
2. How do you take care of yourself so that your life goes in a satisfying direction?
3. What skills do you bring from your experience that are valuable?
4. When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
5. If you could do what you love for a job now, what would it look like?
6. How do people interact with you now compared with the time before you deployed. With each thing you list, how does that treatment make you feel?
7. What are a few of the most important features of your relationships with
 - a. Family?
 - b. Close friends?
 - c. Community?
 - d. Health care providers?
 - e. Employer?
8. Think of peers who are really satisfied with their work.
 - a. How do you know they are satisfied?
 - b. What do you see in your life when you were satisfied with your work?
9. Describe
 - a. Your 6-month plan.
 - b. Your 5-year plan.
10. Anything else to add?

APPENDIX B

Sierra Club Outdoors - Returning Veterans Outdoor Career Survey

Quotes from Qualitative Data

OUTDOOR CAREERS

"I am most happy when I am surrounded by people that respect the earth, respect each other, and are excited to share that with others." Core Group Dialogue

"I like the idea of working outdoors. I think there's a bias for outdoor jobs for many people who were infantry, but I'd say that at least 80% of all service members want to help other people out and get outside." Black male, Army

MEANINGFUL WORK – Service

"Veterans help people. We'll be there for them. At least 90% will be on board with that. We go out of our way to help somebody." White male, Army

"I am a stronger and more sensitive person now. I'm more inclined to look at things from other people's perspectives." Core Group Dialogue

MEANINGFUL WORK – Mission/Purpose

"Passion, Teamwork, Confidence, Drive, Goal focused." Core Group Dialogue

"Veterans don't know what to do without an MOS. The MOS is part of their identity." Hispanic male, Marines

MEANINGFUL WORK – Listen to Veterans

"Most Veterans don't believe jobs can be made Veteran compatible." White male, Army

"The healing power of our nation's lands is the most underutilized form of therapy for returning veterans."

MEANINGFUL WORK – Diversity

“Leadership, training, discipline, preparedness, communication (oral and written), organizing. So many that are now instinct.” Core Group Dialogue

“In the Marines, you get all ages, all colors, and it’s all good. But in the civilian world, it’s all local people and they’re all the same. It’s not bad, they’re just doing what they do—but I’m not comfortable with all the sameness.” Black female, Marine

MEANINGFUL WORK – Military Preparation

“Civilians can’t command or give an order and get upset when you’re clear and concise. Why do people get upset when you give a time, objective, and standard? You’re in a climate controlled environment, no one is shooting at you, and the floor is flat—what’s your problem?” Hispanic male, Marines

“When you’re in the military you have to make about 3,000 decisions a day, but in the civilian world that’s exponentially bigger, but a lot of veterans don’t believe they have to be a civilian—so they just keep going without building the capacity for making the decisions.” Black female, Army

BARRIERS

“Some people treat Soldiers like broken toys, like we are all somehow damaged as a result of our experiences.” Core Group Dialogue

“Being a female veteran many view you and the job you had in the military with their own biases and interpretations and they are always incorrect. This bothers me a little but I’m strong so I let it roll off my back right away.” Core Group Dialogue