

**SERVICE
WOMEN'S
ACTION
NETWORK**



YOUR VOICE, **AMPLIFIED**

FIRST ANNUAL PLANNING SUMMIT
HISTORIC CHANGES, SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

JANUARY 2017

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The Service Women’s Action Network thanks BP for providing leadership and support for the Summit.





Dear Friends and Colleagues,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and fellows, I am pleased to share the final report of the Service Women's Action Network's *First Annual Planning Summit—Historic Changes, Significant Challenges*. We were very excited to bring together such an impressive group of service women and other professionals for two days to identify the ongoing challenges that service women and women veterans face, determine how to tackle those challenges and ensure that the right resources are being deployed to address those needs.

The Summit was the culmination of our newly-launched Service Women's Institute—a national, year-long program designed to achieve two goals:

1. Provide a diverse group of military women the knowledge and tools they need to reach their personal and professional goals; and
2. Educate the public and policy makers on the issues addressed through SWAN's education and outreach efforts.

Over the past year we have tackled issues such as combat integration, the continuum of harm, selective service and gender bias. The goal of this Summit was to come away with a focused strategy that SWAN and its coalition partners can use to address the unique needs of service women and women veterans. This report is the first step toward achieving that goal.

Since its founding in 2009, the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) has been the only organization that advocates for and supports the needs of both service women and women veterans, regardless of rank, military branch or years of experience. With over 40,000 nonprofits in America working to serve the needs of military personnel, this is an important distinction. Moreover, while service members and veterans have benefited from innumerable support programs, the majority of the programs are still designed, by default, to meet the needs of men. SWAN's mission is to become the nation's largest, most influential and effective network of service women and women veterans, acting as their champion, advocate, primary information resource and provider of women-specific services.

We are the voice of service women past, present, and future. We are committed to ensuring military women receive the opportunities, protections, and respect they deserve. We will ensure that all service women have access to the information, tools and support they need to reach their personal and professional goals during and after their years of service.

Thank you for taking the time to review this report. We look forward to your insights.

Sincerely,

Judy Patterson
CEO
SWAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2016 Service Women's Institute was a national year-long program comprised of a series of activities and events that addressed some of the most significant needs and priorities of service women and women veterans. The culminating event of the program was our first ever annual planning summit, held in November. The Summit brought together forty service women and women veterans from all branches of the service and from all over the U.S. to discuss the priorities and needs of service women, past and present, and to develop SWAN's priorities for 2017. The agenda was designed to foster debate about their priorities and needs and to brain storm and prioritize actionable steps for SWAN to take to address those needs in 2017.

The 2016 Service Women's Institute

In 2016, the Service Women's Institute focused on three principle areas: educating the public and policy makers, service women's health and wellness needs and professional development. Throughout the year SWAN hosted expert panels to educate both the public and policy makers on Selective Service, Combat Integration, and the Continuum of Harm (a model that links low-level harassing behavior to assault). To address mental health needs, SWAN coordinated with two private retreat programs to offer and fill five service women only retreats. SWAN hosted four professional development seminars on mentoring, getting hired, building your brand and non-profit fundraising. The culminating event was the Planning Summit. In total, the Institute engaged more than 330 service women, policymakers and experts throughout the year. See Appendix 1 for Institute details.

Annual Planning Summit

To prepare for the Planning Summit, SWAN conducted a community needs assessment via an online survey. The SWAN survey was designed to answer one primary question. What do service women, present and past, care about? The survey was designed around four key topics: the Needs and Priorities of Active Duty Service Women, the Needs and Priorities of Women Veterans, Public Perception and Building Community. The survey garnered almost 1,300 participants. The results were used as a starting point for the annual Planning Summit. The following is a short synopsis of some key Planning Summit takeaways that will be used to focus SWAN's work in 2017.

Needs and Challenges for Service Women Past and Present

The discussions about the needs and priorities of service women and women veterans resulted in overall agreement on two recommendations. First and foremost, attendees agreed SWAN should advocate on behalf of the community. To do so, attendees determined that SWAN should continue to focus on coalition building to ensure service women's needs are represented across the spectrum of existing Military and Veteran's Service Organizations (MSOs and VSOs). Second, the attendees determined that SWAN should reach a broader audience of service women by hosting both regional and national events. The active duty service women also recommended SWAN send out specific calls to action and more guidance on how to be involved in SWAN's efforts, while the veterans suggested SWAN build a resource portal to make it easier to navigate resources and programs.

97% of respondents said that there should be an organization dedicated to the issues facing service women and women veterans.

Public Perception

Changing the narrative to better educate the public and policymakers about service women and women veterans was a broad topic of discussion that resulted in four recommendations. First, SWAN should bolster internal awareness and connections with SWAN members and potential SWAN members. Second, SWAN should continue its advocacy work with Congress and the Executive Branch. Since its founding, SWAN has educated members of Congress and the military on topics vital to the interests of service women. The group believes that education and advocacy should continue to be a top priority. Third, SWAN should work with the media to correct myths about service women. Finally, the group agreed SWAN should begin highlighting the accomplishments and historical legacy of women in service, perhaps in partnership with organizations such as the Library of Congress or the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.

When asked what an organization dedicated to the needs of service women should provide, the overwhelming response was “advocacy” followed by “resources” and “community”.

Building Community

The community working group discussed how to create community and how to build SWAN’s membership. The group developed four recommendations. First, the group advised SWAN to better develop its brand so that members understand the full breadth of SWAN’s mission. Second, the group stated that SWAN should provide members a visual representation of their belonging, such as a membership card or pin. Third, the group recommended that SWAN develop an awards program for service women, women veterans and their supporters. Lastly, the group determined that a having celebrity sponsor could lend some star power to galvanize the community.

The Way Ahead

Using the feedback and advice gathered from SWAN members and other stakeholders who participated in our survey and planning summit, in 2017 SWAN will focus on the following activities:

- Building coalitions and partnerships with other organizations
- Reaching a broader audience
- Develop a resource portal
- Work with media to correct myths about service women
- Provide calls to action, with more guidance on how to get involved
- Educate policy makers on the unique challenges that service women and women veterans face

Following is a detailed view of the 2016 Service Women’s Institute, the community needs assessment and the Planning Summit recommendations that SWAN will use to shape our work in 2017 and beyond.

THE 2016 SERVICE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

The 2016 Service Women's Institute focused on three principle areas; educating the public and policy makes, service women's health and wellness needs, and professional development. During the year more than 330 service women, women veterans, policy makers, research organizations, congressional staffers and academic experts participated in one or more Institute events.

The three education topics in 2016 were Military Selective Service, Operationalizing Combat Integration and The Continuum of Harm. The Institute hosted the Selective Service event at the Reserve Officer's Association on Capitol Hill. Congressional staffers were the target audience but members of the public and other policy makers were also invited. The purpose of this event was to educate the public and policy makers on issues associated with women's status within the Military Selective Service system. This topic was selected because the reason used by the courts to justify women's exclusion from Military Selective Service, namely that they could not serve in combat positions, no longer applied. Presentations were provided by the Government Accountability Office, the National Women's Law Center and SWAN. SWAN followed up with several articles and op-eds on this topic and members participated in media interviews. SWAN's position is that women should be treated exactly the same as men with regard to any requirement to register for Military Selective Service.

The Institute hosted a half-day conference titled Operationalizing Combat Integration that featured an analysis of the Military Services' integration implementation plans and a discussion of best practices for integrating combat units. The conference featured multiple panel discussions with academic experts, organizational change practitioners, and military professionals who provided advice on how to successfully implement this change. This conference was intended to educate past and present service members, the media, policymakers, and DOD civilians and military leaders responsible for implementing this change.

“There's a real need for an organization that is specifically for women in service and also women veterans because as much as the traditional VSOs talk about wanting women to feel included, the simple fact is that there are far too many of us who don't feel welcome.”

— Army Sergeant-Veteran

“I do think there is a need for an organization dedicated to service women and women veterans. More from the stand point of resources. A lot of women are getting out of the military or are in today who need a place to go... a way to find answers to questions they might have. I think that SWAN fits that bill.”

— Air Force Officer-Retired

In April the Institute hosted a half-day conference that examined *The Continuum of Harm*, a model which connects a broad range of deeply-rooted beliefs, attitudes and low level behaviors that lead to sexual violence. During this event, organizational and individual approaches to tackling these challenges were examined. Discussants included psychologists, practitioners, researchers and DOD officials who are working to end military sexual violence. This event was intended to educate policy makers by increasing their awareness of the various forms of interpersonal violence and expand the discussion beyond how to report and respond after a violent event has occurred to one that tackles prevention. This event was recorded by C-SPAN and can be viewed at: www.c-span.org/video/?408634-1/discussion-military-sexual-assault.

>>THE 2016 SERVICE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

To address mental health needs, the Institute partnered with two veteran service organizations (Boulder Crest and Huts for Vets) to provide service women-only mental wellness retreats. Huts for Vets is a guided wilderness hiking experience intended to help veterans connect with nature and with each other to foster post-traumatic growth. Boulder Crest which provides a six-day intensive combat stress recovery program, hosted three service women-only retreats. *The Atlantic* magazine filmed a short documentary of one of the Boulder Crest/SWAN retreats that can be viewed here: www.theatlantic.com/video/index/423600/women-in-combat/

Finally, SWAN hosted professional development seminars on mentoring, getting hired, building your brand and non-profit fundraising. Both the mentoring and building your brand seminars were conducted at the Pentagon and were co-hosted by the Women's Mentorship Network. Service women-only hiring seminars were joint ventures with Vet Tech Trek and Northern Virginia Veterans Working. Finally, this year SWAN experimented with hosting its first webinar on non-profit fundraising for other organizations hoping to provide services to service women.

See Appendix 1 for Institute details on where events were conducted and how many people attended each event.

“We're talking about a system that is 85% male dominated. So I think it is very important to have a group that advocates for women in the military and women veterans because we need a collective voice to take on the hard challenges that service women face.”

— Navy Captain-Retired

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Survey Background and Results

The SWAN survey was designed to answer one primary question: What do service women, present and past, care about, what they need and how SWAN can assist in meeting those needs. See Appendix 2 for survey questions and Appendix 3 for a more complete summary of the data. Recognizing that service women and women veterans may not share the same needs and priorities, the first half of the survey was designed to separate respondents into these two groups so that their needs and priorities could be identified independent of the other group. The two groups answered questions about their personal priorities, the challenges they perceived for their community, what an ideal community for service women would prioritize and the public perception of their community. Below is a snapshot of the findings.

		#1	#2	#3
Active Duty	Personal Challenges	Job and assignment opportunities 40.80%	Gender bias 36.20%	Family policies 33.91%
	Community Challenges	Gender Bias 50%	Family policies 47.70%	Sexual harassment/ assault 39.66%
Veterans	Personal Challenges	Mental health issues 34.46%	Financial stability 32.64%	Connecting to a community of fellow women veterans 31.61%
	Community Challenges	Access to women-specific healthcare 39.12%	Mental health issues 37.05%	Navigating the VA claims system 33.03%

Top Challenges for Individuals and the Community

Active duty service women named job and assignment opportunities, gender bias and family policies as top individual challenges. Family concerns came up again as a leading factor for when women decide to leave service. After disaggregating the data into subpopulations, a couple of notable outliers appeared. For example, 47% of Navy respondents included uniform and equipment as a top challenge and enlisted women included access to women-specific healthcare as a top challenge. Additionally, 32% of non-white women included mentorship as a top three challenge.

Among veterans, the top three individual challenges were fairly consistent across subgroups, with every group identifying mental health as a top challenge. Army respondents and officers listed respect and recognition from civilians, fellow military members or both as one of their top challenges.

Among both groups, the contrast between individual priorities and group priorities is important. For example, active duty women individually feel that job assignments are a challenge, but it dropped off as a community challenge. Gender bias and family policies remained consistent.

Top Challenges for Individuals and the Community continued

Among veterans, a sense of community and financial stability were consistently included in the top three challenges, while the community challenges centered on other issues.

Interestingly, of the VA benefits being utilized by respondents, career training (9%), financial assistance (3%), and housing assistance (5%) were the bottom three.

There are consistent themes in these top challenges. Veteran responses place primary emphasis on mental health and financial stability, while active duty members put an emphasis on job opportunities and gender bias. Active duty respondents raised gender bias as a top concern while veterans indicated a lack of recognition and respect was a major concern. The priorities are different, but they speak to the impact of shared experiences at different points in life. Although it requires further study, it is possible that gender bias experienced on active duty feeds the mental health challenges of women veterans. Likewise, a lack of job assignment opportunities and family considerations that cause women to leave service may show up in the veteran population as financial stability concerns.

“I would absolutely recommend that young women join the service. I think it gives you opportunities and skills and leadership and education not only in the service but also beyond to take with you in your life after you leave the service.”

— Coast Guard Officer-Retired

Community

In the survey and during the focus group discussions about creating community, 95% of service women and 97% women veterans agreed that there is a critical need for an organization like SWAN. When asked what such an organization should provide its members, both active duty and veterans believed that the top priority is advocacy, followed by resources. Although providing community ranked number 4 as a community-wide need, “connecting to a community of women veterans” was ranked in the top 3 as a personal need for women veterans. Therefore, SWAN sees creating community as a top priority. This seemingly contradictory information could mean that respondents want a community that organizes around tangible impact and prefer to connect over advocacy rather than brunch.

While 31% of women veterans said that they were not a member of a VSO because it “doesn’t feel like a community I am a part of or welcome in,” another 38% said they saw “no reason not to join.” Indeed, consistent with SWAN’s coalition building values, the majority of women veterans said that “feeling welcome at other VSOs” was the best way to create a sense of community. In other words, service women and women veterans want to be included in the broader service member/veteran support organizations and aren’t necessarily seeking a women-specific community. This should serve as a call to action for not just SWAN but the VSO community as a whole.

Public Perception

Across all groups, active duty and veteran, officer and enlisted, minority and not, there were three shared priorities for re-shaping the public perception of service women. Survey respondents agreed that the public needs to know more about their leadership and contributions, the challenges they face, and their stories and experiences.

SURVEY & SUMMIT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION



Survey Discussion

In the plenary discussion of the survey results, many were dismayed but not surprised at the prevalence of write-in survey stories related to Military Sexual Trauma (MST). The candor and rawness of those stories was marked. SWAN Summit participants commented that in a space designed by women for women's voices to be heard, it was not surprising these stories would come forth in an anonymous online survey.

The distinction between issues considered a personal priority versus those considered a community priority were an interesting contrast that warranted further consideration. Among active service women, gender bias was second (35%) in personal priorities but considered a top community priority (48%). One participant observed that gender bias may be affecting job opportunities, which was named the top personal challenge (43%). Among veterans, the top three community challenges were all health-related, either mental health or access to women's health care services. This contrasted with their reported personal challenges which included financial stability and the desire for community.

The group discussed the relevance of the disparity between personal challenges versus the perceived challenges of their community to determine why they were different. The general consensus was that women might be influenced by media or they may believe that their personal challenges are not the same as those experienced by the larger community. The group determined that SWAN should use the data reported as personal challenges to focus its' work.

All summit participants agreed the survey validated the need for SWAN to serve as an advocate for service women. It was clear there are service women-specific needs that are unaddressed by existing Veteran Service Organizations.

The two days were divided into four focus groups. On day one, the two groups were divided into a group of currently serving women and women veterans. The groups discussed their respective

Survey Discussion continued

population's unique needs and challenges. On day two, one group discussed the public perception of service women while the other discussed how SWAN can build a sense of community.

Each focus group began by brainstorming ideas to assist SWAN in developing plans and programs to meet the challenges presented by their particular group. All focus groups applied a set of criteria to select and prioritize recommendations for SWAN. The set of criteria generated in the veterans' focus group was then used in the Public Perception and Community Building Groups. It was:

1. Does it have national impact?
2. Is it attainable with SWAN resources, or resources SWAN could realistically obtain?
3. Does it address a nexus of issues and solutions?
4. Does SWAN add something that isn't already being provided by another organization?

Criteria used by the active duty focus group was:

1. Does it lend credibility to a growing, young organization?
2. Does it grow the SWAN volunteer base?
3. Does it increase resources for SWAN members?

Overall, the groups gravitated towards the pervasive gender bias present in policies currently in place for active service women and women veterans. In the veteran's group, discussion included mental health issues, which were two of the top three challenges reported by survey respondents. Both groups expressed a desire for increased visibility by the public, which aligned with the 78% of survey respondents who felt, for example, that Hollywood rarely or never portrays women in the service. Promotion of stories and increased awareness of leadership accomplishments ranked high on both focus groups' lists. Perhaps the strongest theme across the two groups was a desire to find coalition building opportunities between SWAN and existing VSOs. Both groups agreed that SWAN could provide value by ensuring existing programs at other VSOs were being as inclusive as possible. The priority was placed on trainings for leaders, advocacy opportunities and community building with existing infrastructure to avoid duplication of efforts or starting from scratch.

Active Duty Service Women Focus Group

For the active duty service women, the conversation focused heavily on current family policies as 48% of survey respondents listed family as their top reason for leaving the service. Conversation topics included:

- The complications around career decisions when your spouse is in the service,
- Pregnancy policies only being focused on women as opposed to both parents, and
- Pressure to leave the service to have children.

The discussion included an in-depth discussion about gender bias. The women felt that they face deeply-ingrained gender bias, which is reflected in personnel policies. Inflexible policies that are male-centric in their approach make it difficult to retain and promote active duty women. Because

Active Duty Service Women Focus Group continued

of this, the group chose to focus on gender bias, leadership accountability and the potential repeal of the combat exclusion policy.

All of these issues touched on the retention of talented women on active duty. Since most active duty women are not able to lobby while in uniform, the solutions the group developed involved other forms of education and advocacy. They included:

- **Forums, conversations, and/or trainings** facilitated by SWAN.
- **Coalition building** with existing VSOs and congressional advocates to focus on legislative change to military policy.
- **Guided calls to action** from SWAN to its membership.

Women Veteran Focus Group

The women veteran focus group also discussed the prevalence of gender bias in their community to a similar degree but in different areas, specifically in terms of value of service. For example, throughout the discussion on mental health the challenge of being correctly designated in bureaucratic paperwork frequently came up. This can lead to limited access to VA resources that are available for combat veterans or survivors of MST.

The women veteran group developed a number of recommendations for how SWAN could address their needs. Interestingly, the veterans group independently came up with two of the solutions discussed by active service women. The recommendations include:

- SWAN acting as the umbrella group with partners and stakeholders to **build coalitions** to help advocate for legislation,
- **Virtual town halls** to raise awareness about certain issues, and
- Development of a **resource portal** to increase access and clarify requirements for VSO, MSO and VA services and benefits.

Educating the Public and Policy Makers Focus Group

The goals for educating the public and policy makers were twofold: First, what needed to be done to change the public narrative about service women and women veterans. Second, how should SWAN approach the task?

The focus on public perception was included as a focus group because 75% of all survey respondents said their service was not recognized in the general public. Two-thirds of respondents believe that female service women are not adequately included in media coverage of defense and military issues. Over 80% felt that Hollywood did not realistically portray women in military-themed films.

When asked what topics were most important in the public conversation about women in the military, the top two priorities from survey respondents were their leadership and contributions

Educating the Public and Policy Makers Focus Group continued

followed by their stories and experiences. The third priority expressed by survey respondents was ensuring the public was aware of the unique challenges service women face.

The focus group's discussion was far ranging. Notable points raised by the group included:

- **Portraying the diversity of experiences:** Women in the military have taken many varied roles. Experiences changed based on when one served, in which branch and with what MOS. Any public perception campaign needs to consider this challenge.
- **Publicly identifying as a veteran:** Some participants discussed their reluctance to identify as a veteran because their service was not the combat-deployment that the general public believes worthy of celebrating.
- **Operational and budgetary value:** Many participants agreed that it was important to fight the perception of the inclusion of women in the military as a form of "social engineering." Advocacy efforts need to focus on the operational contributions and budgetary rationale for a more inclusive military.
- **Mythbusting:** Participants named some of the myths and prejudices they have been subjected to as service women and veterans. Myths included standards being lowered to allow women to serve, the changing roles of women being a form of social experimentation at the expense of national security, all military service involves combat, military service and motherhood are incompatible or all women are victims of MST. Though this list is not comprehensive, the group did agree that a public campaign on myth busting would be worthwhile.

In terms of next steps, the focus group developed four proposals for SWAN. The solutions were selected because they enhanced a sense of community, increased public and policymakers' awareness, would address diverse experiences and were realistic within the scope of SWAN's resources. They included:

- **Bolstering internal awareness** and connections with SWAN members and potential SWAN members. Participants believed that continuing to build community internally will strengthen SWAN's ability to change the public narrative. A larger membership lends credibility, provides more resources for advocacy efforts and grows one of SWAN's many audiences.
- Continuing to **advocate with Congress and the Executive Branch**. SWAN has already been active in pushing policy along many channels, and the group believes this strength should continue and expand. Participants voiced concerns about the incoming administration and the possibility that recent wins may be undone without constant vigilance.
- Focus with media to **puncture myths about service women**. The group ended with a quick brainstorm of those myths. The goal is to work with mainstream media, as well as consider short videos on social media and other platforms.
- **Highlighting the history of women in service**, perhaps in partnership with existing organizations like the Library of Congress or the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.

Creating Community Focus Group

The fourth focus group focused on how SWAN could create a sense of community for service women and women veterans. Within short order, the group pinpointed a central point of concern, which is that the desire to create a sense of female community must be balanced with a desire for inclusion in the male-dominated military and veteran communities. Many women in this group talked about trying to avoid the stigma of female community building while on active duty due to concerns that this might damage their careers.

The group discussed this tension at length and eventually developed a central theme of focus to pull more women into existing community infrastructures. The group concluded that while creating a female-specific network would be important, the path to success for women in the military would require establishing a balanced approach to focus with men, since they comprise the majority of the military and veteran communities. This was supported by the survey results which showed that while 71% of respondents said they were not a part of an existing VSO and didn't necessarily feel welcome, 39% said there was no reason not to join one.

Considering these factors, the group decided to weigh recommendations against the following criteria:

- Does it have national level impact?
- Is it attainable with SWAN's current resources and capacity?
- Does it address a nexus of issues?
- Does SWAN add something to the community that isn't already being provided by another organization?

The group discussed identity and the value behind their community for most of the session and arrived at four recommendations that SWAN could act on in the coming year.

- **Brand development:** Group members concurred that it is critical that members understand that SWAN's mission extends beyond MST.
- **Brand awareness:** Many existing VSOs have ways for members to identify themselves to other veterans: pins, hats, jackets etc. Discussion group members agreed that having a visible representation of SWAN membership would be a good start to fostering a sense of community.
- **Awards Program:** SWAN-specific awards for women veterans and service women and their champions would allow for members to participate in the nomination and selection process. Such a program would also serve as an opportunity to promote the stories of leadership and accomplishment of women in the service.
- **Celebrity sponsorship:** Having a voice with star power behind it can galvanize a grassroots community and help members know that their service is important.

CONCLUSION & THE WAY AHEAD

SWAN was founded to focus on the needs of service women past, present, and future. The survey and summit participation of women spanning generations of military service and all ranks and branches clearly established the intersectionality of challenges faced by military women in and out of the service. Both the survey and summit highlight the need for an organization like SWAN that can champion the needs of service women and women veterans, regardless of their rank or experience.

The inaugural survey validated many of SWAN's assumptions about the unique needs of military women and the obstacles they face. Yet, like any good intellectual inquiry, it prompted discussion about topics that should be explored in future surveys. For example, SWAN plans to dive deeper into the financial stability issues to identify whether new programs are needed to support veterans or to increase awareness of existing programs. Additionally, getting more participation from minorities to provide more insight into their needs and experiences.

Using the feedback and advice gathered from SWAN members and other stake holders who participated in our survey, in 2017 SWAN will focus on the following activities:

- Building coalitions and partnerships with other organizations to address some of the needs identified in the survey. For example, SWAN will continue to expand our partnerships with organizations that provide mental health to women veterans.
- We will expand our member relations campaign and outreach by hosting events in other regions and states and by conducting virtual events that service women and women veterans from any state can participate in. This will allow us to reach a broader audience and provide opportunities for participation from a range of individuals and organizations.
- We will continue our efforts to develop a resource portal where service women and women veterans can go to get information specific to their needs.
- SWAN will expand our media engagements to feature service women from a range of backgrounds and experiences to help correct commonly held myths.
- We will lead clearly defined "Calls to Action" that will provide guidance on how to get involved with advocacy, research and education.
- SWAN will continue to educate and engage with policymakers on the unique challenges that service women and women veterans face within their communities.

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2016 SERVICE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE PROGRAM

The Service Women's Institute is a national, year-long program for a diverse group of military women designed to provide the knowledge and tools they need to reach their personal and professional goals and to increase their participation at the top levels of local and national organizations. The Institute is comprised of a series of modules in the areas of health and wellness, personal and professional growth and education on service women's and veteran women's issues. Each seminar combines an educational, networking and skill development component. The program for 2016 was as follows:

Module 1:	Health & Wellness
Topic:	Post-deployment Reintegration Retreat
Date:	7-13 December 2015
Training:	Reintegration Tools (6 participants for week-long course)
Module 2:	Education
Topic:	Combat Integration
Date:	4 February 2016
Training:	Change Management (80+ participants for half-day conference)
Module 3:	Health & Wellness
Topic:	Post-deployment Reintegration Retreat
Date:	11-17 March 2016
Training:	Reintegration Tools (6 participants for week-long course)
Module 4:	Education
Topic:	Revisiting Selective Service
Date:	17 March 2016
Training:	The Legislative Process (30+ participants for breakfast discussion)
Module 5:	Education
Topic:	The Continuum of Harm in the US Armed Forces
Date:	25 April 2016
Training:	Understanding the DOD Process (50+ participants for half-day conference)
Module 6:	Professional Development
Topic:	Building Your Brand/Creating Your Network
Date:	20 May 2016
Training:	Personal and Professional Development (30 participants at the Pentagon for 2-hour training)
Module 7:	Professional Development
Topic:	Fundraising for Nonprofits (Webinar)
Date:	21 July 2016
Training:	Developing a Fundraising Strategy

2016 SERVICE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE PROGRAM continued

Module 8:	Health and Wellness
Topic:	Post-deployment Reintegration Retreat
Date:	14-18 July 2016
Training:	Reintegration Tools (10 participants for 5-day hike)
Module 9:	Health and Wellness
Topic:	Post-deployment Reintegration Retreat
Date:	18-22 August 2016
Training:	Reintegration Tools (10 participants for 5-day hike)
Module 10:	Education
Topic:	<i>Because of Sex</i> Book Discussion
Date:	15 September 2016
Training:	Legal Precedents that Shaped the Workplace for Women (36 participants)
Module 11:	Professional Growth
Topic:	"ATHENA RISING: How and Why Men Should Mentor Women"
Date:	17 October 2016
Training:	Mentorship (20 participants in the Pentagon)
Module 12:	Professional Growth
Topic:	Service Women's Transition Seminar
Date:	19, 26 October 2016
Training:	Transitioning to the Civilian Workplace (6 participants)
Module 13:	2017 Planning Summit
Topic:	Historic Changes, Significant Challenges
Date:	14-15 November 2016
Training:	Strategic Planning (40 participants)
Module 14:	Health & Wellness
Topic:	Post-deployment Reintegration Retreat
Date:	2-8 December 2016
Training:	Reintegration Tools (6 participants for week-long course)

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT/SURVEY QUESTIONS

Who We Are: A member-driven community advocating for the individual and collective needs of service women past, present and future.

What We're Building: SWAN is hosting its first annual planning summit to identify the most pressing issues service women and women veterans face — and the resources we need to tackle those challenges. Your answers will help shape the summit and SWAN's work as the leading voice for service women in the years ahead.

All responses are confidential. Data is anonymous and aggregated for analysis and reporting. The survey takes 15-20 minutes to complete.

1. Hi! Thanks for agreeing to answer a few questions. Are you already familiar with the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN)? Yes No

Demographic Data

2. In what country do you currently reside? United States Other (please specify)
3. What city do you currently live in?
4. In what state or U.S. territory do you live?
5. In what year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)
6. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
 Employed, working full-time Employed, working part-time
 Not employed, looking for work Not employed, NOT looking for work
 Retired Disabled, not able to work
7. Are you currently enrolled as a student? Yes No
8. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received? Less than high school degree High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 Some college but no degree Associate degree Bachelor degree Graduate degree
9. Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one.) American Indian or Alaskan Native Asian / Pacific Islander Black or African American Hispanic or Latino
 White / Caucasian Multiracial Multiple ethnicity / Other (please specify)
10. What is your current occupation (i.e. job title)?
11. I'm currently based in the: Private Sector Nonprofit Sector U.S. Government
 U.S. Military N/A
12. Is there anything else about your identity that you would like us to know?
13. Are you a SWAN member? Yes No I'm not sure
14. Do you identify as a future service women (ie. ROTC, Service Academy, delayed entry), currently serving servicewoman or a woman veteran? Yes No

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT/SURVEY QUESTIONS continued

Military Service

15. Which branch of the military will or did you last serve in? Air Force Army
 Coast Guard Marine Corps Navy
16. What is your current Military Status? Active Duty Reserve Duty Guard Member
 IRR ROTC/Cadet/Midshipman Retired Veteran Delayed Entry

Service women: Priorities & Needs

17. What is your current rank?
18. When have you served? WWII/Korean War Vietnam War Cold War
 Persian Gulf War Post-9/11
19. What are the top 3 challenges *you will personally face* in the near future?
 Sexual harassment and/or assault Promotion practices and policies
 Respect and recognition by the public Uniform and equipment needs for women
 Respect and recognition within DOD Gender bias Access to women-specific medical care Being mentored by male and/or female leaders
 Policies related to family life and needs Retention practices and policies
 Job and assignment opportunities None of these apply to me
 Other (please specify)
20. What are the top 3 challenges *service women face as a group* in the near future?
 Sexual harassment and assault Promotion practices and policies
 Respect and recognition by the public Uniform and equipment needs for women
 Respect and recognition within DOD Gender bias Accessing women-specific medical care Gaining mentorship by male and female leaders
 Policies related to family life and needs Retention practices and policies
 Job and assignment opportunities None of these apply
21. The {{ Q15 }} has adequate policies and programs pertaining to service women.
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
22. The feedback that my fellow service women and I provide to DOD is being adequately used to inform practices and policies.
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
23. The {{ Q15 }} is doing a good job of making women feel included and valued as members of the team.
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
24. What are the one or two most important factors in deciding to remain in the {{ Q15 }}?
 Mentorship by leaders Deployment opportunities Being part of a team
 Financial considerations Health care Job security
 Commitment to mission Other (please specify)

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT/SURVEY QUESTIONS continued

25. The {{ Q15 }} is doing a good job representing women in their advertising and marketing materials. Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree
 Strongly Agree Other (please specify)
26. What is the most important factor in deciding when it's time to leave the {{ Q15 }}?
27. What else should we have asked regarding your priorities and needs as a servicewoman?
28. What was your last rank held?
29. When did you serve?
 WWII/Korean War Vietnam War Cold War Persian Gulf War Post-9/11
30. Why did you leave the service?
31. Would you recommend a career in the {{ Q15 }} to other qualified women? Yes No
Other (please specify)
32. Where do you get your health care?
 Private Tricare VA None of these Other (please specify)
33. Which benefits do you currently have or have used in the past? Career training
 Education benefits VA mortgage Pension for service-related disabilities VA health care
 Housing assistance Financial assistance None of these Other (please specify)
34. What are the top 3 challenges you will personally face in the near future?
 Homelessness or housing stability Developing leadership skills for the workplace
 Respect and recognition of your service among civilians Access to women-specific health care
 Attention given by the VA to unique needs Financial stability
 Accessing state or VA career training programs Navigating the VA claims system
 Recognition and respect for your service among fellow veterans and/or the military
 Mental health issues Identifying career goals Connecting to a community of fellow women veterans
 None of these apply to me Discharge upgrade process
 Other (please specify)
35. What are the top 3 challenges women veterans face as a group in the near future?
 Homelessness or housing stability Developing leadership skills for the workplace
 Respect and recognition of your service among civilians Access to women-specific health care
 Attention given by the VA to unique needs Financial stability
 Access to state or VA career training programs Navigating the VA claims system
 Recognition and respect for your service among fellow veterans and/or the military
 Mental health issues Identifying career goals Connecting to a community of fellow women veterans
 Discharge upgrade process None of these apply to me
36. The {{ Q15 }} provided useful transition services.
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
37. The {{ Q15 }} does a good job representing women in their advertising and marketing materials. Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
38. What else should we have asked regarding your priorities and needs as a woman veteran?

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT/SURVEY QUESTIONS continued

Community

39. I don't feel like I have a true community of fellow service women or women veterans.
 Strongly Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Strongly Agree
40. Should there be an organization dedicated to the issues facing service women and women veterans? Yes No
41. What should an organization like that provide? Rank in order of priority
 Service women-specific resources Advocacy on behalf of service women and women veterans Women veteran-specific resources A sense of community
42. What would best help create a sense of community among your fellow service women and women veterans? Attending conferences and seminars for service women and women veterans Participating in mentorship (as either mentor/mentee)
 Engaging together online Connecting professionally Getting together socially
 Feeling welcome in existing service member and veteran groups Being part of a professional organization
43. What kinds of events or updates do you think are most helpful?
 Regular updates about resources and opportunities Service women and women veteran sub-group meet-ups within other organizations Advocacy events and opportunities Retreats Regular updates about fellow service women and women veterans I'm connected to Conferences focused on service women and women veterans Local meet-ups of a service women and/or women veterans national organization Connecting online with other service women and women veterans
44. Are you a Veteran Service Organization (VSO) member?
 Yes No Other (please specify)
45. Are there any reasons you wouldn't join an existing Veterans Service Organization (VSO)? Most don't have a mission that interests me Doesn't feel like a community
 I'm really a part of and/or welcome in I don't live near a VSO chapter There isn't enough focus on the issues most relevant to me I see no reason not to join

Women Veterans: VSO members

46. Which VSO(s) do you belong to?

Women Veterans: Non-VSO members

47. Is there any particular reason why you're not a VSO member? I haven't heard about VSO membership opportunities Not inclusive — doesn't feel like a community I belong in
 Not relevant to my priorities No particular reason No VSO has reached out to me that feels like the right fit Other veterans from my time Other (please specify)

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT/SURVEY QUESTIONS continued

Public Perceptions of Service women and Women Veterans

48. Based on your experience, how well recognized and valued are service women and women veterans among the general public? Not at all Adequate Very well
49. Do you believe that educating the public about service women and women veterans would improve how they are viewed and treated? Not at all I'm not sure Absolutely
50. What are the top 3 things the public doesn't know and needs to know about service women and women veterans? They don't all suffer from PTSD The challenges they face
 How many women serve Which jobs they hold Their stories and experiences
 They aren't all victims of sexual assault Their leadership and contributions
 Who they are How to show interest in and appreciation for their service
 Other (please specify)
51. How do you think the public could become better educated about service women and women veterans? (Please rank the following.) Social media campaigns
 Military marketing and communications Pop culture/entertainment
 TV ads/public service announcements Media reporting
52. How accurate and balanced is media reporting on service women and women veterans?
 Totally incorrect and imbalanced It's ok Very accurate and balanced
53. How often does the media report on service women and women veterans?
 Never Sometimes Regularly
54. How accurate and balanced is the entertainment industry on service women and women veterans? Totally incorrect and imbalanced It's ok Very accurate and balanced
55. How often does the entertainment industry portray service women and women veterans when depicting war or veteran issues? Never Sometimes Regularly
56. Who is responsible for improving awareness of service women and women veterans?
 The military Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) The VA The media
 Foundations and nonprofits serving the military community Other (please specify)

Next Steps: Let's Follow Up

57. I'm interested in: Connecting via social media Receiving email updates
 Joining SWAN None of the above

APPENDIX 3

OUR SURVEY

Survey goal: to identify the self-reported needs and priorities of service women and women veterans.

Survey Platform: Survey Monkey

Distribution: Survey was launched on 1 October. It was broadly distributed via numerous outlets. The survey closed on 30 November 2016.

Participation: 1,293 participants; 1,010 service women and women veterans participated in the survey, 817 were veterans, 226 were retirees, 180 were active/guard/reserve. They represented all services.

National in scope: all 50 states represented

Rank and service distribution: Wide range among both enlisted and officer ranks across all services.

Survey participants self identified as: 75% Caucasian, 9% multi-racial/multi-ethnic, 8% African American, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian/Native American

Majority of service women and women veteran respondents (59.8%) have a bachelors degree or higher.

FINDINGS

Needs & Priorities of Service Women

Top 3 Challenges

Participants were asked to identify the top 3 challenges they personally face and that they face as a community.

Personal Challenges

Job & Assignment Opportunities (40%)
Gender Bias (36%)
Family Policies & Practices (34%)

Community Challenges

Gender Bias (50%)
Family Policies & Practices (47%)
Sexual Harassment & Assault (40%)

Most Important Factor re Staying in Service

* What are the one or two most important factors in deciding to remain in your Service?

Being part of a team	38%
Job security	38%
Financial considerations	36%
Commitment to mission	34%

Most Important Factor re Leaving Service

What is the most important factor in deciding when it's time to leave my service?

Family Considerations	48%
Lack of promotion and job opportunities	21%
Lack of community/inclusion	11%

FINDINGS continued

Needs & Priorities of Women Veterans

Top 3 Challenges

Participants were asked to identify the top 3 challenges they personally face and that they face as a community.

**Over 50% said they use VA health care

Personal Challenges

- Mental Health (34%)
- Financial stability (32%)
- Connecting to a community of fellow women veterans (31%)

Community Challenges

- Access to women-specific health care (39%)
- Mental Health (37%)
- Navigating VA claims system (33%)

Why Women Leave

Participants were asked: Why did you leave the service? Of the 167 respondents that said "Other," the number one reason cited was MST, followed by sexual assault and discharge.

I retired	22%
Other	21%
Family Considerations	19%
Medical Considerations	16%

Educating the Public and Policy Makers

3 Things You Need to Know

Service women and women veterans most want the public to know about:

- Their leadership and contributions
- Their stories and experience
- The challenges they face

Does recognition matter?

Who is responsible for improving awareness of service women and women veterans?

The Military	69%
Veteran Service Organizations	58%
Foundations and non-profits	53%
The media	48%
The VA	47%

... Not so fast, Hollywood.

When asked whether the entertainment industry's portrayal of service women and women veterans is accurate and balanced, 82% of service women and women veterans answered "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree."

When asked how often the industry even portrays service women and women veterans when depicting war or veteran issues, 78% of service women and women veterans answered, "Rarely" or "Never."

FINDINGS continued

Creating Community

97% of respondents said that there should be an organization dedicated to the issues facing service women and women veterans.

Advocacy & Resources

When asked, what should such an organization provide, the overwhelming response was “advocacy” followed by resources and community.

Advocacy on behalf of service women and women veterans

Women veteran-specific resources

Service women-specific resources

A sense of community

Inclusion

What would best help create a sense of community among your fellow service women and women veterans?

Feeling welcome in the existing organizations 26%

Attending conferences and seminars for service women 20%

Mentorship and connecting professionally 20%

Attn: SECDEF and VA Secretary

A message to the DoD and the VA from service women and women veterans

Gender bias was consistently cited as a significant problem facing service women and women veterans.

Written comments indicate that sexual assault and MST remain a major concern.

When asked if their service provided useful transition services, 52% of women veterans answered, “No.”

When asked if their service is recognized and valued among the general public, 74% of both groups say “No.”

When asked who is responsible for improving awareness of service women and women veterans, the No.1 choice among both groups is the military.

Only 24% of both groups think the military does a good or very good job representing service women in their marketing materials.

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

80% of women veterans said they would recommend a career in the service to other qualified women

97% said that there should be an organization dedicated to the issues facing service women and women veterans

71% said they are not a member of a veteran service organization (30% said they don't feel welcome in existing organizations)



She's a veteran.
And she's
still a leader.

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