



State of Illinois  
Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Illinois Department of Military Affairs

# Illinois Joining Forces Fiscal Year 2013 Summary



## From the Leadership at IJF



Friends,

We are pleased to present the fiscal year 2013 Annual Summary of Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), a public-private collaborative organization designed to assist service members, veterans and their families (SMVF) in navigating the “sea of goodwill” so they can empower themselves to thrive.

This summary outlines the history of IJF’s inception and growth, as well as the events and action-steps taken to increase IJF’s effectiveness in serving the SMVF population in the state of Illinois. It is our hope that through this summary, you will learn how IJF has become a force-multiplier for veteran-serving organizations and about the issue areas where you can assist if you decide to become a member of or support IJF.

Thank you for being a part of the Illinois state-wide effort to support and serve Illinois’ service members, veterans, and their families.

Semper Fidelis,

Rodrigo Garcia

**Board Chairman**

**Illinois Joining Forces**

&

**Acting Director**

**Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs**



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# Executive Summary

We are pleased to present the fiscal year 2013 Annual Summary of Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), a public-private collaborative organization designed to assist service members, veterans and their families (SMVF) in navigating the “sea of goodwill” so they can empower themselves to thrive.

Illinois boasts a large military and veteran population and is home to numerous Department of Defense military facilities, including Naval Station Great Lakes, Scott Air Force Base, and the Rock Island Depot. There are also a multitude of Illinois National Guard posts peppered throughout the state which employ many active and reserve Army and Air Guard personnel.

The State of Illinois works diligently to assist, empower, and honor our state’s military heroes, their families, and their survivors. Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs (IDVA) empowers our veterans and their families to thrive by assisting them in obtaining the benefits to which they are entitled. However, there are limitations to the benefits that can be extended to families or even some veterans or military personnel that don’t meet certain statutory qualifications or requirements in order to receive benefits. Alternatively, some traditional benefits for which they may qualify, might not be the right answer to their particular issue or need.

That is where the community of Illinois organizations, dedicated to serving our SMVF population, become very valuable partners in delivering the full spectrum of assistance to those who serve as well as for their families. No one organization can do it all. But veterans shouldn’t have to wander from office to office—or website to website—to figure out who does what, and who can best meet their needs. The goal for IJF was to create a “no-wrong door” responsive system of support, where organizations linked together to share information, host events, and provide military cultural competence training to community members and service providers, thereby “Bridging the Gaps.”

This year’s summary includes a description of the inception of IJF, outlines the impact of IJF in Illinois, as well as sets forth IJF’s priorities for the next Fiscal Year 2014.





This summary covers 7 months and 21 days during Fiscal Year 2013 (July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013) with IJF events beginning in November, 2012.



## The Beginning and Launch of IJF



On November 9, 2012, just days before Veterans Day, Governor Pat Quinn was joined by Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Director Erica Borggren, Maj. Gen. Dennis L. Celletti, acting Adjutant General of the Illinois National Guard, and more than 250 veterans service leaders at the Union League Club to launch Illinois Joining Forces (IJF), a new statewide public-private partnership and website that will improve support for service-members, Veterans, and their families. IJF was modeled after the national Joining Forces initiative spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama and Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden and seeks to increase collaboration and communication among non-profits and public agencies serving Veterans at the local, state and federal levels.

Through IJF, participating organizations agreed to work together to address gaps in services in job training and placement, healthcare, education and housing, actively refer veterans and service members in need of assistance, and offer better navigation of available resources and service to the public.

**"As a member of Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee, Army OneSource Behavioral Health Alliance, and the SAMHSA Academy, I saw a need for an overarching organization to bring all of these groups together under a single umbrella to create a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of service members, veterans and their families. Illinois Joining Forces was that needed forum for all of us to work together."**

*- Tom Miller, Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health, IJF Behavioral Health Working Group Chair*



IJF, a collaborative established by an inter-governmental agency agreement between the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA) and the Illinois Department of Military Affairs (IDMA), is a statewide, public-private network of veteran- and military-serving organizations working together to improve services to Illinois' military and veteran communities. IJF's initial mission was to map Illinois' "Sea of Goodwill" and chart the plethora of resources and services available and committed to servicing Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF). IJF's goal is to increase awareness and connectivity among its' member organizations so that they and those we serve, can better navigate the system of support.

IJF member organizations sign a Memorandum of Understanding with IDVA and IDMA, agreeing to collaborate in-person via up-to three (3) of nine (9) Working Groups and assist our target service population. Working groups meet at least quarterly, and many have monthly calls and events. Through this collaboration, the experts in each Working Group, can create efficiencies, synergy and resourcing for new programming, identify service gaps, and work together to create not only a more approachable network

of support, but an enhanced and informed collection of service providers that can expand their impact.



In addition to the in-person collaboration, IJF has a website that creates a mechanism and forum for organizations to collaborate online. The IJF website is a web-based platform that brings government agencies, veteran service organizations, and service providers from across Illinois together in an unparalleled attempt to better communicate and coordinate services. It also provides service members, veterans, and their families, direct access to the organizations that might have the resources they need to successfully navigate civilian life. The website content is member-driven, with IJF member organizations regularly updating their event postings, program details, service descriptions, hours of operation, and locations.



IJF was led by the former IDVA Director, Erica Borggren, whom also served as the Chair of the IJF Executive Committee (EC). The EC leadership also included Brigadier General Richard Hayes, a senior-ranking officer in a leadership role with IDMA, and the Chairs of the nine (9) Working Groups. The operational tempo was to conduct a monthly EC meeting via teleconference, and each quarter, hold one of the EC meetings in-person in the Chicago and Springfield offices of IDVA. In addition to the EC meetings, IJF was staffed and supported administratively by an IDVA Senior Program Manager, 2 AmeriCorps Members - one located in Chicago and one in Springfield - and 2 IDMA National Guard Officers.

## Answering the Call

With over 129 organizations responding during this initial start-up, IJF convened and formulated nine (9) working groups with a Chair of each Working Group serving on the Executive Committee. Those working groups are described as follows:

### Behavioral Health



- **Behavioral Health** - Led by Tom Miller of the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health, the Behavioral Health Working Group (BHWG) is a broad network of IJF member organizations working to fulfill a vision where Service Members, Veterans and their Families will be empowered through an alliance of partnerships, resources, increased access, and choice to enjoy satisfying and fulfilling lives in their communities.

The BHWG has identified priorities, and established subcommittees to focus on the following areas: Closing Services Gap and Suicide Prevention, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Training, and Needs Assessment.



## Benefits & Emergency Assistance

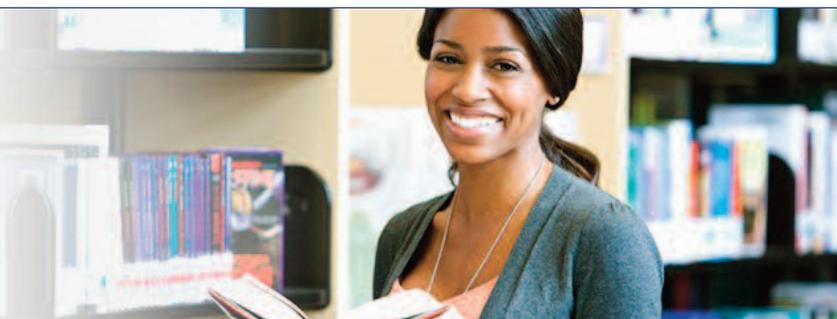


- **Benefits & Emergency Assistance** - Led by Steve Fixler from the Illinois Association of County Veterans Assistance Commissions, the shared mission of this working group is to ensure that veteran advocates understand civilian assistance programs and that civilian case managers and organizations understand veteran benefits. This group brings together leaders from public agencies and non-profit organizations to assist each other and service members, veterans and their families in understanding the full spectrum of - and intersection of - civilian and military/veteran benefit programs.

Types of programs this group will address include disability benefits, healthcare, nutrition, emergency assistance and others that Working Group members identify in the future; however, the work of this group will specifically exclude housing, employment and education programs.

**"It has been an honor to chair the Education Working Group for IJJF. My organization, CAEL, firmly believes that veterans should be able to access information, services and resources in a no-wrong door approach and that is the core vision for IJJF. Since the launch of IJJF, there has been a more coordinated and strategic approach to serving Illinois veterans. We at CAEL are proud to be working with others to improve services to student veterans through such activities as faculty and advisor training, career pathways for veterans, student leadership development, and promotion of recognition of military learning for college credit."**

*- Amy Sherman, Associate Vice-President for Policy and Strategic Alliances for the Council for Adult & Experiential Education (CAEL), IJJF Education Working Group Chair*



- **Education** - Led by Amy Sherman, Associate Vice-President for Policy and Strategic Alliances for the Council for Adult & Experiential Education, the diverse Education Working Group (EWG) includes educational institutions, state agencies, and non-profit organizations working to improve access to education benefits and facilitate a successful educational experience for service members, veterans and their families.

The current projects of the Education Working Group include: conducting statewide "train the trainer" sessions on Military/Veteran 101 training for college and university faculty; working with university and college officials to assist them in recognizing military learning for appropriate, full academic credit; conducting advisor training covering topics from career pathways to financial benefits; hosting a webinar series on topical issues concerning student veterans.



## Employment & Job Training



- **Employment & Job Training** - Led by Brandon Bodor, Executive Director of the Illinois Serve Commission, this working group is committed to connecting veterans to employers, and employers to veterans. The member organizations in the working group are leveraging each other, as well as their respective networks, across all sectors in Illinois. The ultimate goal is to create a state that systematically prepares veterans to enter the workforce and access quality jobs that allow them to leverage their skills, training, and experiences.

Members of the Employment and Job Training working group aligned into one of three Committees: 1) Employer Engagement; 2) Career Development; and 3) Veteran Engagement.

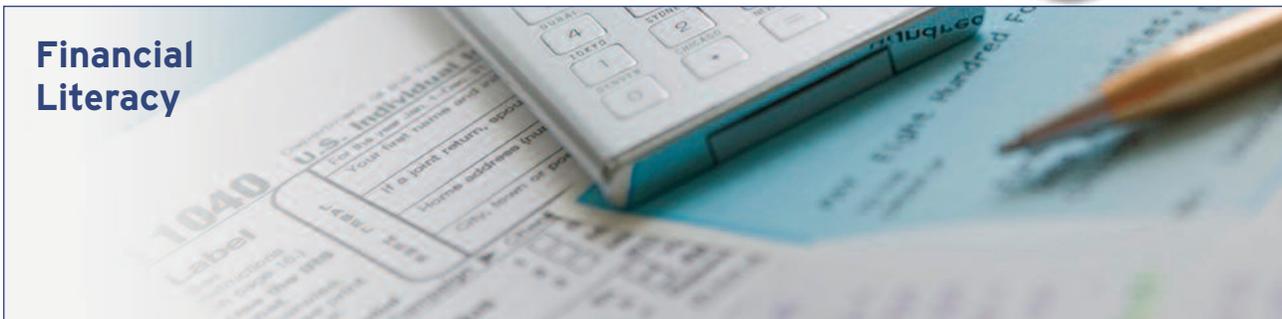
## Families & Children



- **Families & Children** - Led by Kelcey Liverpool, co-founder and CEO of Kids Rank, this working group is committed to collaboratively supporting families and children of our uniformed service members through raising awareness of and providing access to services that meet the unique needs of military families.

Through programming at local schools and libraries as well as through hosting resource fairs, this working group reaches and provides activities programming for many active duty military children in their Illinois communities as well as for veterans and their families.

## Financial Literacy



- **Financial Literacy** - Led by Akeela White, Assistant Attorney General of Illinois's Military and Veterans' Rights Bureau, this working group is committed to ensuring that all service members, veterans and their families are equipped with the knowledge and resources they need to manage their money, access loans and address other critical financial issues relevant to this community.

Current and future endeavors of the Financial Literacy Working Group include: establishing connectivity with the Emergency Assistance Working Group so that any service member, veteran, and their families who receives emergency financial assistance has also access to financial literacy assistance; developing training programs for student veterans on campus; creating financial literacy materials that can be distributed with VA disability award notices; and building a referral network of financial counselors willing to donate time to work with veterans.

## Homelessness and Housing



- **Homelessness & Housing** - Led by Katie Tuten, a Program Development and Project Manager of Catholic Charities, this working group brings together agencies and organizations who are working to ensure that every service member, veteran, and their families have access to shelters in emergencies and affordable housing in the long-term. Projects of this working group include: generating a resource listing of all the regional Continuums of Care, and connecting veteran housing providers with these communities; developing a unified screening process for veteran homeless providers; fostering a better understanding of how Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) grants are awarded and educating the Landlord Association on how to leverage the HUD-VASH program; and engaging with local housing authorities to encourage channeling of development funds toward affordable housing for veterans.



## Legal Support



- **Legal Support** - Led by Kevin Hull, Executive Director of the Westside Institute for Science and Education, this working group is committed to ensuring that veterans and service members have the support they need in civil legal matters and the criminal justice system. The Working Group intends to network together attorneys and legal organizations with expertise in representing military-connected clients to stand ready for referrals.

## Survivors



- **Survivors** - This working group was dedicated to serving the needs of the Illinois survivors of the military members, and those impacted by the loss of their loved ones. This included linking them with their statutory benefits under Illinois law as well as providing them with connections to grief counseling and community events intended to support them during their time of loss.

### **Together, the IJJF Working Groups created programming that:**

- Maintained and continued to build the no-wrong-door, web-based, online navigation platform to effect referrals for veterans, service-members or their families in need of services and to facilitate the transfer and sharing of information and knowledge among Illinois Joining Forces member organizations;
- Facilitated the transfer of information among Illinois Joining Forces member organizations;
- Educated Illinois Joining Forces members and other community providers regarding basic military and veteran culture, vernacular, and typical issues they face as a military servant, thus improving the collective empathy and capacity of the support system;
- Provided outreach directly to service members, veterans, and their families regarding the “no-wrong-door” system that Illinois Joining Forces set forth to provide; and



- Provided policy recommendations through Illinois Joining Forces member working groups to the Illinois Veterans' Advisory Council (IVAC) and the Illinois Discharged Servicemember Task Force (DSTF).



## Performance Measures and Impact - For IJJF Organizations

During the 7 months of IJJF's performance in FY2103, over 81 events were hosted by the various Working Groups as follows:

- Behavioral Health—hosted multiple trainings to enhance civilians' military cultural competence about the topics of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Military Sexual Trauma providing continuing education credits to mental-health professionals;
- Benefits - conducted monthly cross-training between civilian and veteran benefits and service providers;
- Education - gathered 50+ faculty from various Illinois community colleges and universities and trained them on military cultural competency and cultural sensitivities;
- Employment - hosted networking sessions for 120 employers, hundreds of student veterans at 4 events across Illinois; and held a statewide symposium with faculty and transfer specialists and officials from the American Council on Education (ACE) to de-mystify the articulation process;
- Families, Children & Survivors - created Community Action Teams in the Austin and Palatine Townships to help improve the lives of military and veteran families;
- Financial Literacy - conducted webinars to explain the financial resources available to the military;
- Homelessness & Housing - increased awareness and collaboration between service providers; landlord seminars clarifying the HUD-VASH requirements and regulations, voucher program, and the advantages of leasing to veterans; and
- Legal Support - provided webinars on legislation changes as they affect our military.

## Performance Measures and Impact - SMVF



During FY2013, 180 Referrals to assist SMVF were received via the IJF website. This does not include the extensive organic referrals that were made for SMVF through organizational connections not accounted for by a web-based referral.

## Funding & Support

- Launch funding was provided to The Impact Center for the benefit of IJF, by grants supplied from the McCormick Foundation in the amount of \$150,000; (\$50,000 for assessment and stakeholder engagement, and \$100,000 for stakeholder engagement and Launch Summit). The Tawani Foundation granted \$33,000 for website development. The Impact Center was selected to provide initial organizational support to IJF during its initial activities. Their engagement with IJF ended in December 2013.



- In-kind website hosting for the IJF website ([www.illinoisjoiningforces.org](http://www.illinoisjoiningforces.org)), valued at \$1,000 for setup and initial hosting, was provided by the Pritzker Military Library, a non-profit member of IJF. The website content is updated and maintained by the IJF Admin Team. Key updates included a new entry page, “push” features to automatically notify members of events, search capability, and new membership categories – “direct service providers” and “advocacy organizations.” IJF was also awarded an Illinois Veterans Cash Grant in the amount of \$49,000 to complete the initial build of the website and its functionality.



- For the Nov. 9, 2012 Launch Summit for IJF, the Union League Club of Chicago provided over \$10,000 worth of in-kind support for Summit venue fees and equipment. IDVA and IDMA provided additional in-kind support for launch activities; about \$4,000 from IDVA for Summit production with significant discounts from the production company hired by The Impact Center.



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- AmeriCorps Member Support - IDVA assigns two full-time AmeriCorps members to support IJJ activities. These members were secured through the points of Light Veteran Leader Corps (VLC) program, which obligates IDVA to contribute a total of \$6,286 total to support the two members for an 11-month term of service. Points of Light covers the remaining cost share (\$17,914) for a total of \$24,200.



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- In-kind/Staff Support - In addition to the program aspects outlined above IDVA and IDMA have dedicated significant in-kind/staff support to develop, launch, maintain and grow IJJ programming and products. This includes significant hours of personal involvement by the IDVA Director, Assistant Director, General Counsel, and an IJJ Coordinator as well as by the IDMA J-9 Leadership and Staff teams.



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- In-kind Time and Leadership of Working Group Chairs - The day-to-day work of IJJ Working Groups - from meetings to projects or policy meetings - is supported by significant volunteer time and leadership of the Working Group Chairs, each of whom is elected by his or her Working Group. These Chairs who represent their organization as part of IJJ, convene and lead their working groups, work as part of the Executive Committee, updated their working group landing page on the IJJ website, and much more.

With these generous contributions, IJJ was able to host its first annual Summit, bringing together all of its member organizations to report on their past year's successes, collaborate with other local organizations, and plan its' priorities for FY 2014. In addition, IJJ was able to procure the services of a web-development group who created the platform through which organizations could reach each other, publish their upcoming events, and share resources. The website also provided a SMVF-facing, searchable, web resource and directory for those in need of assistance.



## 2014 Strategic Priorities

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The IJF Executive Committee adopted the following priorities for FY2014.

### 1. **Strengthening Military/Veteran Cultural Competency in Illinois**

- Strengthening the cultural competency and awareness of existing and new IJF members
- Developing the military/veteran cultural competency of the provider community, and the public at large, through workshops and trainings.

[www.illinoisjoiningforces.org](http://www.illinoisjoiningforces.org)

### 2. **Increase public use of the IJF website through outreach and public relations**

- Increase IJF Member use of website features to build a more active and robust online database
  - o Provide additional in-person training and assistance for IJF members who need help using the website
  - o Enhance website onboarding for new members—including one-on-one technical assistance (by phone or in person), website orientation by mentor organization and/or IJF Admin Team member
  - o Implement internal IJF Member Activity Recognition to incentivize website participation and referral receipt and activity for SMVF
- Increase public use of the IJF website through outreach and public relations
  - o Utilize National Guard network
  - o Provide materials and support to IJF members for distribution and outreach
  - o Dedicated outreach to providers
  - o General public relations campaign, direct outreach to SMVF



In addition to the above priorities for 2014, the following items will be ongoing priorities for IJJ and will be spearheaded by the IJJ Executive Committee for FY2014:

- Recruit new IJJ members, specifically service providers in geographically diverse areas of the state
- Foster strong collaboration between Working Groups
- Identify opportunities to strengthen the IJJ organization.



## Conclusion

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This summary of activity was prepared and submitted by IJJ leadership in December 2014 with the intent to complete the record and provide historical information about the IJJ, its formation, contributing organizations, and accomplishments. Every effort has been made to provide accurate information, and we are grateful to all our members, organizations, agencies and to Governor Pat Quinn for his leadership and support. If there are areas not covered in this summary you feel should be appended, please submit them in writing to [info@illinoisjoiningforces.org](mailto:info@illinoisjoiningforces.org) for consideration.



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Printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois 11/14  
IOCI 15-424

