



ADVANCING NATIONAL SECURITY STARTS AT HOME

A Community-Informed Foundation for
ADC's Homefront Policy Agenda



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America's military readiness depends not only on installations and force structure, but on the strength and resilience of the communities that support them. As missions evolve and demands on installations increase, defense communities are being asked to do more, often with tools, authorities, and resources that have not kept pace.

This report captures insights from a national survey of defense community leaders conducted by the Association of Defense Communities (ADC). The findings inform ADC's National Security Starts at Home framework and provide a community-informed foundation for ADC's forthcoming Homefront Policy Agenda as the organization celebrates its 50th Anniversary.

Survey results show strong alignment across communities on both the importance of key challenges and the need for additional support. Infrastructure, workforce, mission protection, and quality of life all rank as critical readiness issues. Communities report that while they remain deeply committed national security partners, they are increasingly stretched by capacity constraints, funding gaps, and policy barriers.

Quality of life, especially housing affordability, emerged as a universal concern across geography and community type. Respondents consistently linked housing, childcare, healthcare, and education to morale and readiness.

"Quality of life directly affects readiness, retention, and family stability."

"Housing that service members can afford is the single biggest readiness issue we face."

Communities also highlighted growing strain on workforce and leadership capacity, citing workforce reductions, hiring freezes, and loss of institutional continuity as risks to long-term resilience.

While challenges are significant, communities emphasized that solutions already exist. Respondents shared examples of successful IGSA, workforce partnerships, energy resilience projects, and strong civil-military coordination. However, these efforts are often isolated and difficult to replicate.

"We have proven solutions but no clear path to scale them."

Taken together, the findings reinforce a central message: **Defense communities are indispensable partners in national security, but they cannot carry this responsibility alone.** Communities are asking for clearer policy direction, stronger tools, and sustained investment that treat them as trusted, long-term partners in mission success.

This report sets the foundation for ADC's Homefront Policy Agenda, which will translate these insights into concrete policy priorities, program recommendations, and advocacy actions.

I. Introduction: National Security Starts at Home

For more than 50 years, ADC has served as the national voice for the communities that support America’s military installations and missions. As the national security environment grows more complex—and as pressures on installations and surrounding communities intensify—it is increasingly clear that military readiness is shaped not only within the fence line, but by the strength and resilience of the communities beyond it.

ADC’s *National Security Starts at Home* framework, reflects this reality, recognizing that infrastructure, workforce, quality of life, and local capacity are essential components of readiness, resilience, and long-term mission assurance.

As ADC approaches its 50th Anniversary, this report represents the next phase of the *National Security Starts at Home* framework. ADC is refining and operationalizing its approach, building on lessons from the HOME campaign and insights gained through sustained engagement with communities, federal partners, and military stakeholders over the past year.

This effort is grounded in a simple premise: Defense communities are essential partners in national security, and their perspectives must shape the policies, investments, and systems that support military readiness in the years ahead.

II. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this report is to inform ADC’s emerging Homefront Policy Agenda by grounding it in the lived experience of defense communities across the country. Specifically, this effort seeks to:

- Identify the most pressing challenges facing defense communities today
- Understand where communities are succeeding and where gaps remain
- Assess the level of support communities need to meet mission demands

- Surface practical opportunities for policy, program, and partnership solutions

ADC conducted a national survey of defense community leaders, gathering both quantitative ratings and open-ended qualitative input.

Respondents were asked to assess:

- The importance of key issue areas to their community
- The degree of support needed to address those issues
- The usefulness of different types of support and policy tools
- Additional challenges and examples of what is working locally

The survey results provide a snapshot of current conditions across a diverse set of defense communities and serve as a foundation for deeper policy development.

III. Key Findings: What Defense Communities Are Telling Us

1. Core Challenges Are Widely Shared and Highly Important

Defense communities are united in their assessment that these challenges are not secondary or peripheral concerns; they are central to readiness, resilience, and mission success.

Across all major issue areas tested, respondents expressed strong alignment on importance, with average ratings consistently near the top of the scale.

Four issue areas had an average importance rating of roughly 4.5 out of 5:

- Ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with mission needs
- Building and sustaining the talent needed for national defense
- Protecting missions and installations from emerging threats

- Maintaining quality of life so service members can stay ready

Even the lowest-rated area, preparing for more frequent disasters and disruptions, received a strong average importance rating of approximately 4.0, signaling that it remains a significant concern across many communities.

2. Communities Are Committed but Increasingly Stretched

Communities remain committed partners, but growing mission demands are outpacing their capacity and available support.

Just as notable as the importance ratings is the consistent demand for additional support. In every category where “need for support” was measured, average ratings remained high, generally above 4.0 out of 5.

While communities are actively engaged and often innovative, existing tools, funding streams, and authorities are not keeping pace with current demands. Respondents emphasized that the gap is not one of awareness or willingness, but of capacity, coordination, and sustained investment.

“Communities are doing everything they can—but the tools are not keeping pace with mission demands.”

Idea for the Future:

- Develop a national program that provides funding to support community-led quality of life and mission support initiatives.

3. Quality of Life and Housing Are Central Readiness Issues

Quality of life—starting with housing—is foundational to readiness and cannot be separated from mission performance.

Open-ended responses reinforced the quantitative data and revealed strong cross-cutting themes. Chief among them is housing affordability and its impact on quality of life. This theme was consistent across urban and rural communities and across geographic regions.

Affordability challenges extend beyond housing to core family needs, including healthcare, education, and childcare. Respondents repeatedly cited:

- Rising rents and limited housing supply for service members and civilian employees
- Affordable and accessible childcare
- Healthcare access, including specialty care
- K–12 education challenges, special education continuity, and funding uncertainty

While many respondents acknowledged a broader shift toward lethality and readiness priorities, they emphasized that these quality-of-life challenges directly affect retention, morale, family stability, and readiness.

“Quality of life directly affects readiness, retention, and family stability.”

“Housing that service members can afford is the single biggest readiness issue we face.”

Ideas for the Future:

- Incentivize the construction of homes in defense communities that specifically align with BAH rates.
- Incentivize local and state policies that support military spouse employment, childcare and military child education.

4. Workforce and Leadership Capacity Are Under Strain

Workforce and leadership capacity are eroding at a time when mission demands on communities are increasing.

Communities expressed growing concern about their ability to sustain the talent and leadership required to support military missions. Respondents highlighted:

- Workforce reductions and hiring freezes affecting veterans and civilian defense workers
- Loss of institutional knowledge and leadership continuity
- Increased strain on installation staff and local partners

In regions with high concentrations of military and defense activity, these pressures were described as compounding risks to long-term resilience and mission execution.

Idea for the Future:

- Develop a national defense community leadership development program that provides training, facilitates connections with military partnership offices, and identifies defense community mentors from across the country.

5. Communities Want Practical, Action-Oriented Support

Communities are asking for execution support and trusted collaboration, not additional layers of guidance.

When asked about the types of support that would be most helpful, respondents consistently prioritized practical, implementation-focused assistance over broad guidance.

The highest-rated forms of support included:

- Strengthening established funding programs that support defense communities
- Addressing policy and regulatory barriers that limit local action
- Stronger partnerships among installations, communities, and the private sector
- Support to scale or replicate community-based solutions
- Investing in the people—workforce and leadership—who can solve these challenges

Open-ended responses further emphasized the need for:

- Improved communication with federal decision-makers
- Grant application and project management assistance
- Clearer guidance and training on IGSA and DCIP
- Templates, case studies, and “how-to” tools that move ideas into execution

“Communities are treated like contractors, not trusted partners.”

Idea for the Future:

- Develop a uniform framework and toolkit to provide standardized resources and procedures for military-community partnerships.

6. Proven Local Solutions Exist but Are Not Yet Scaled

The challenge facing defense communities is no longer innovation. It is scaling proven solutions through policy, partnership, and sustained investment.

Importantly, respondents did not frame their challenges as unsolvable. Many shared examples of effective local solutions, including:

- Successful use of intergovernmental support agreements
- Task forces addressing housing and quality-of-life challenges
- Workforce and education partnerships aligned with mission needs
- Energy resilience and infrastructure innovation
- Strong civil-military coordination models

However, these successes were often described as isolated, difficult to replicate, or dependent on individual relationships, underscoring the need for ADC to help bridge the gap between local innovation and national policy.

“We have proven solutions but no clear path to scale them.”

Idea for the Future:

- Create a national database that details partnership case studies from across the country, including IGSA, DCIP projects and other military, defense industry, and community partnerships.

IV. Implications for National Policy and Partnership

The survey results reinforce a central theme of the National Security Starts at Home framework.

Defense communities are indispensable partners in national security—but they cannot carry this responsibility alone.

Communities are aligned on the challenges, motivated to act, and eager to collaborate. What they are asking for now is clearer policy direction, stronger tools, and sustained investment that reflect the reality of today's security environment and recognize communities as long-term partners, not contractors.

These findings point directly toward the need for:

- Policies that recognize communities as trusted partners for the long term
- Investments that align infrastructure, workforce, and quality-of-life systems with mission needs
- Scalable models that allow proven local solutions to inform national practice

V. Looking Ahead: From Insight to Action

This report provides the foundation for ADC's forthcoming Homefront Policy Agenda. In the next phase, ADC—working with its Federal Outreach Advisory Council (FOAC), members, and partners—will translate these insights into:

- Concrete policy proposals
- Program and funding recommendations
- Clear priorities for advocacy and partnership

As ADC enters its 50th year, this work reinforces a core truth: America's military strength depends on the strength of the communities that stand behind it.

Timeline: Advancing the Homefront Policy Agenda

January-February

- Refine priority issue areas through engagement with FOAC, ADC leadership, and member communities.

March

- Develop and release policy concepts and recommendations.

April

- Begin engagement and outreach with ADC members and partners.
- ADC 50th Anniversary
- Launch the Homefront Policy Agenda and issue a national call to action.

VI. Community Case Studies

National security starts at home—and that mindset is already driving innovation and new ways of thinking in communities across the country. The following community case studies highlight what’s happening on the ground, as well as the opportunities and challenges ahead.



Defense Community Steps Up to Help Provide Housing

Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico

Widespread housing shortages for service members plague installations across the country. Working with community partners, Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico now has off-base dormitories for airmen, established through IGSA's. Cannon hosted a three-day event to bring in community leaders and developers to make them aware of the problem and soon created new housing for airmen through partnerships with apartments and the local Eastern New Mexico University. The community still faces challenges, as there is still not enough housing to support incoming service members, and there is no pathway available for renters to become homeowners.

Ms. Barbara Koscak, STARBASE founder, greets Chief Master Sgt. Jessica Baldwin, 27th Mission Support Group senior enlisted leader, during a tour of Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., Jan. 24, 2024.



Interagency Partnerships Protect Against Emerging Drone Threats

Greater Buckley Region, Colorado

In response to the emerging threat of drones, Buckley Space Force Base, Colorado is partnering with law enforcement. Collaborating with the local Aurora Police Department, the Denver FBI field office, and the city of Aurora, base leaders are now able to identify and neutralize drones. Defense communities throughout the country are struggling to keep up with the new technology, and places without the community collaboration infrastructure are left to solve the problem alone.

Col. David Gallagher, Aerospace Data Facility-Colorado commander, gives an ADF-C mission brief during the Community Conversations Reception at the Denver Country Club, January 7, 2026.



Partners Help Build the Talent Pipeline

New London, Connecticut

The defense manufacturing industry near Submarine Base New London has unique workforce needs. To help prepare the next generation of workers at General Dynamics Electric Boat and other employers, the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board established the Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. The partnership helps area students get specialized training so they're well-positioned for the skilled manufacturing careers that drive the regional economy. With many workers retiring soon and an expected growth in shipbuilding, the initiative is a big step, but many communities need additional workforce innovations to keep pace with demand.

The future USS Idaho (SSN 799) pulls into Submarine Base New London for the first time on Monday, December 15, 2025.



Utilizing Land on Installations as Community Centers

Prince George County, Virginia

Fort Lee, Virginia is partnering with its community to create the Defense Community Enclave, a community space that includes a military museum and park space. By utilizing enhanced use leases, the development takes advantage of underutilized land on the installation and brings in community, allowing them a closer look at the life of service members. This development takes advantage of the resources already available on the base and strengthens ties with businesses and families in the surrounding community, contributing to the economy. This partnership example could be adapted by installations and bring together defense communities across the country with the right guidance and resources.

Maj. Gen. Michelle Donahue, commanding general of U.S. Army Combined Arms Support Command and senior commander of Fort Lee, points out a structure on a three-dimensional map of the proposed Defense Community Enclave May 30, 2025.



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