

Impact & Transparency Brief
Year two · Published October 2026

Built in Chicago. Built by all of us.

How a veteran-founded nonprofit in its second year is building belonging for those who serve and the families beside them, and the campus it is building toward.

421
People in our community network

73
Military-connected people

26
Volunteers

229
Volunteer hours given

Built by service. Bound by purpose.

01 Why this matters

Coming home shouldn't mean coming home alone.

Veterans come home to cities, not bases. In Chicago they are spread thin, living among neighbors who have never served.

17.7

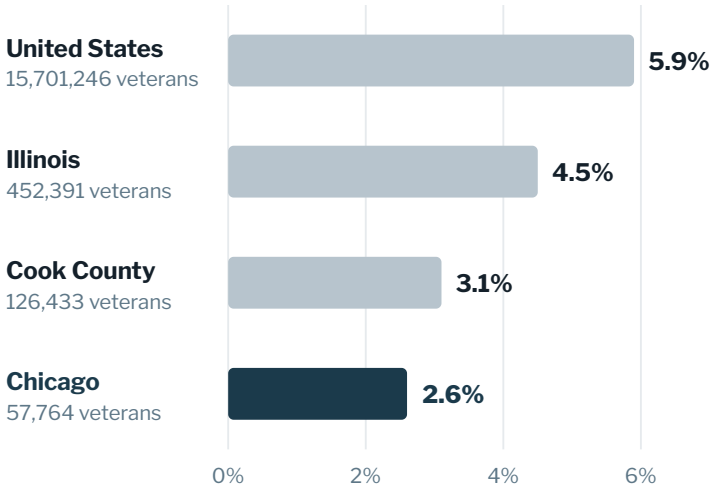
veterans died by suicide each day in 2024. That is 6,488 lives in a single year.

VA, 2026 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report

Public health research consistently counts social connection among the strongest protections a person can have. Connection is something a community can build. It is the thing we build.

Veterans as a share of adults

The closer you get to home, the fewer there are.



U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 1-year estimates. Veterans as a share of the civilian population 18 and over.

Fewer than 3 in 100 adult Chicagoans is a veteran.

Most of their neighbors have never served alongside one. That gap, between the people who served and the city around them, is exactly where we work.

02 Military families

Families serve too.

Spouses, children, parents and caregivers carry service with them. They move when orders come, hold home together through deployments and care for veterans long after. They are part of who we serve.

2.4M

family members of today's active-duty and Selected Reserve force, including 1.5 million children.

Department of Defense, 2023 Demographics Profile

20%

unemployment rate among active-duty military spouses in 2024.

Department of Defense, 2024 Active Duty Spouse Survey

81%

of active-duty spouses have relocated with military orders during their spouse's career.

Department of Defense, 2024 Active Duty Spouse Survey

14.3M

Americans are caring for a service member or veteran.

Half of those caring for someone 60 or younger say they have no one else to turn to.

RAND, America's Military and Veteran Caregivers, 2024

How we show up for families

V in S.E.R.V.E.: Value the family.

- **Families welcome at every event**
  Spouses, kids and parents have a place, including on our Hot Cocoa Run team.
- **Back to School Community Day**
  Backpacks, haircuts and vaccines for students and families in Back of the Yards.
- **Operation Anchor™**
  Our family and belonging pillar, built around the people who serve beside them.
- **Spouse and family groups on Ranks**
  A place for military spouses and families to meet, share and find resources.
- **Family space at the campus** Planned
  Family programming, spouse gatherings and child care during programs.
- **Access for spouses and dependents** Planned
  The same priority access and discounts as those who served.

03 Who we are

Strengthen the lives of those who serve by creating places where purpose, belonging and community endure.

Our mission

Our vision

A permanent Chicago home for those who serve.

Our promise

One day, no one who served will feel forgotten. We build the community that makes sure of it, through fitness, wellness, advocacy and leadership.



EDC leadership at a community gala

Why we started

Damian Garcia, an Army infantry veteran raised on Chicago's South Side, and Rogelio Villa, a Marine veteran, met at UIC in 2024. At Fort Drum, belonging was built in: the gym, the chow hall, the people who had your back. Coming home, it was gone. They spent a year volunteering side by side, then founded EDC in 2025 to rebuild that belonging here.

- Veteran-founded and veteran-led
- 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Chicago
- Candid Platinum Seal of Transparency, 2026
- Registered with SAM.gov

How we S.E.R.V.E.

Four pillars, like the four stars on Chicago's flag. One Foundation.

S

Show up

Operation Serve™

E

Explore together

Operation Adventure™

R

Reach forward

Operation Next Mission™

V

Value the family

Operation Anchor™

E

Elevate the community

One Foundation

04 The four pillars

The work, star by star.

Every program sits under one of four pillars, our four Operations. Serve has carried the most weight so far.







Operation Serve

Showing up for veterans and the neighborhoods around them

Back to School Community Day · Aug 29, 2026

344 backpacks to students

24 founding partners

15 ROTC cadet volunteers

Haircuts, vaccines and food for Back of the Yards families, hosted at a veteran-owned café.

May 2025
MURPH Challenge & Festival at UIC

Upcoming · Oct 2026
Pitch In at Humboldt Park, with Chicago Parks Foundation

Planned · date TBD
Adaptive Swings Project, with Travis Manion Foundation

Ongoing
Veteran-led projects, built around one veteran's idea at a time

Operation Adventure

Aug 2025
Paddle With Purpose
Chicago River, with Urban Kayaks

Upcoming · Nov 2026
Hot Cocoa Run team
45 race spots, sponsored by Wells Fargo

Planned · May 2027
The EDC Remembrance Muster
Our next flagship

Operation Anchor

2025 to 2026
Military appreciation nights
With Chicago Fire FC and the Chicago Stars

Every event
Families welcome
Spouses and kids have a place, including on our race team

Operation Next Mission

Proposed
Veteran workforce funding
Application pending with the State of Illinois

Planned · 2027
EDC Emerging Leaders™
First mentorship cohort in development

05 How we got here

From one workout to a full calendar.

2025

May 25 — **MURPH Challenge & Festival at UIC**
Our first event, Memorial Day weekend at Flames Field.

Aug 2 — **Paddle With Purpose**
On the Chicago River with Urban Kayaks.



Paddle With Purpose, Chicago River, 2025

2026

Aug 29 — **Back to School Community Day**
Backpacks, haircuts, vaccines and food for families in Back of the Yards.

Oct 24 — **Pitch In at Humboldt Park** Upcoming
Volunteering with Chicago Parks Foundation.

Nov 1 — **Hot Cocoa Run team** Upcoming
45 race spots, every fee covered by Wells Fargo.



Our team at Back to School, Back of the Yards, 2026

2027

May 29 — **The EDC Remembrance Muster** Planned
Our next flagship, on Memorial Day weekend.



Military appreciation night with Chicago Fire FC

Along the way

Events — **Military appreciation nights**
Joining partners for military appreciation nights with Chicago Fire FC and the Chicago Stars, plus a sponsor recognition night.

Every week — **Building the network**
Meeting the agencies, posts, schools and businesses across our growing network of organizations.

06 Year two at a glance

Small team. Real numbers.

The organization behind the programs, and the network we keep building between events.

421

Community network
Veterans, families, volunteers, partners and neighbors connected to EDC.

73

Military-connected
Veterans, service members and cadets, plus military spouses and families.

26

Volunteers
People who gave their time at our events and programs.

229

Volunteer hours
Every hour given free.

24

Founding partners
Led by Wells Fargo, Travis Manion Foundation and UIC Student Veteran Affairs.

108

Organizations in our network
Agencies, posts, schools and businesses we are building relationships with.

Between events, we keep building.

When we are not hosting, we are out meeting city agencies, veteran posts, schools, gyms, media, local businesses and other nonprofits. Every relationship is another door open for the people we serve.

These numbers will keep growing.
In our first year we did not always ask about military service when people signed up, so many early participants, including veterans, service members, spouses and dependents, have no service information on file yet. We are going back to collect it, and our military-connected numbers will keep updating as that information comes in and our community grows.

Reporting basis, October 14, 2026. Each person is counted once. Our community network includes everyone connected to EDC, not only people who received direct support. Military-connected counts do not include civilian supporters. Planned programs and the campus are goals, subject to funding and approvals.

07 Built by the whole city

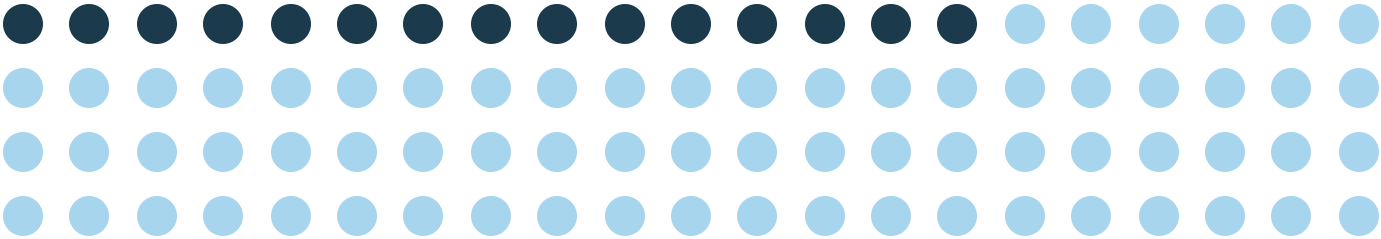
Reaching more of those who served, together.

Our goal is to connect with more veterans, service members and military families. Neighbors, volunteers and partners are how we get there.

Our community of 421, one dot for every 5 people

73 military-connected, including spouses and families

348 supporters, neighbors and allies



Our 24 founding partners

Lead sponsor	**Wells Fargo**
Lead partners	**Travis Manion Foundation** **UIC Student Veteran Affairs**
Coalition	**21 organizations**, including the American Legion, Chicago Fire FC, Chicago Public Library, CDPH, NAMI Chicago, Student Veterans of America and Urban Kayak Chicago.

Plus 84 more relationships in progress across our network of 108 organizations.

Figures as of October 14, 2026. Each dot is about five people.

01 Support multiplies reach.
Volunteers, cadets and partners make every event for veterans possible.

02 Every partner opens a door.
Each school, business and agency is another way to reach someone who served.

03 Belonging takes a whole city.
Veterans come home to blocks, jobs and schools. That is who needs to be in the room.

Operation Serve

It starts with a veteran.

We find a veteran already serving their community, then build a project around their idea.

Our first was Ignacio Gonzalez, Marine veteran and founder of Dreamcatcher Café in Back of the Yards. His idea became Back to School Community Day, with Ignacio back on mission for his own neighborhood.

08 The money

Funded by our community.

Our work so far has been funded by a corporate sponsor, individual donors and the people who show up to our events. Grant funding is our next step.

$5,100+

In sponsorships, donations, event tickets and merch since our first event in 2025

Where our support came from



- **Wells Fargo** — Lead sponsor.
- **Marc Malnati** — Individual donation.
- **Our community** — Event tickets, merch and individual gifts.



Thanking the sponsors and partners who make our work possible, at UIC

What we are fixing next
Strengthening how we track every dollar, with receipts for every expense and one set of figures shared across this brief, our website and our reports.

Reporting basis
Support received from sponsors, donors, ticket sales and merch through October 14, 2026, rounded. Unaudited. A full financial statement will follow the close of our fiscal year.

09 Our north star

One day, no one who served will feel forgotten.

Every program, partnership and dollar builds toward that day. Here is who it is for, and what it could look like as we grow.

Who we are building for

1.27M
active-duty service members
DoD, 2023

761K
National Guard and Reserve members
DoD, 2023

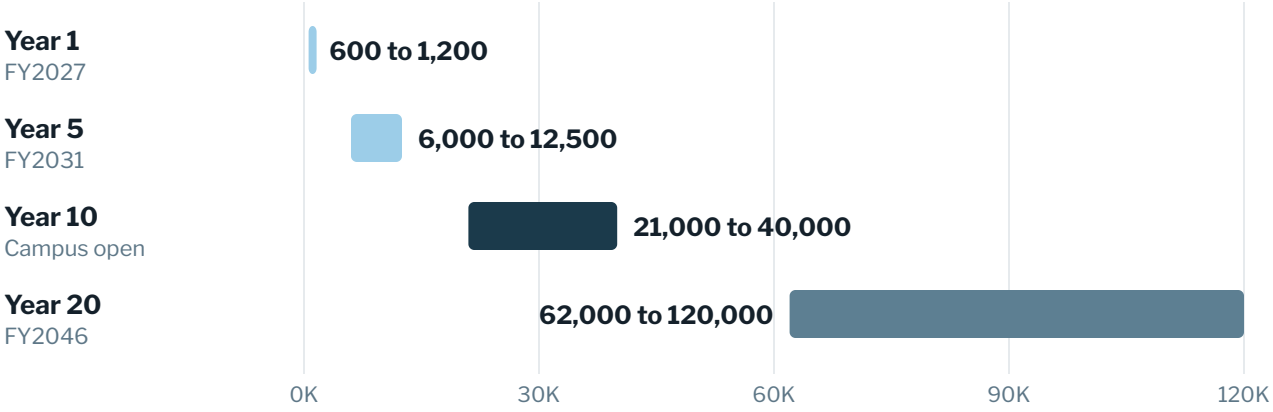
15.7M
veterans
U.S. Census Bureau, 2024

2.4M
military family members
DoD, 2023

Close to home: about 452,000 veterans across Illinois and 58,000 in Chicago, with Naval Station Great Lakes, the Navy's only boot camp, just north of the city.

What growth could look like

People we aim to serve each year, as ranges



Chicago

A campus that serves tens of thousands a year

One home for fitness, family, careers and service, with partners under one roof.

The Midwest

10 to 15 local Chapters

Neighborhood and campus Chapters led by those who served.

The nation

25 to 50 Chapters, more campuses

A national network, so belonging follows people wherever service takes them.

Growth figures are goals from our draft strategic plan, not commitments. Pace depends on funding, partners and community demand.

10 The long game

Everything you had on base, built for civilian life.



Concept render: Esprit de Corps Campus™

Today the military community is served in pieces. A benefits website here, a nonprofit event there, a job lead somewhere else, family support somewhere else again. The pieces are good. The connections between them are what break. Esprit de Corps Campus is our long-term goal to put them under one roof, in a place people return to at every stage of life after service.

Built around those who serve

Priority access and the deepest discounts for veterans, service members, Guard, Reserve, spouses and dependents, with an access fund so cost is never the reason someone stays home.

Partners under one roof

A dedicated office for a veteran service organization, plus space for legal, career, education, housing, mental health and family partners. We want to work beside the groups already helping our families, not replace them.

Open to the public

Veterans come home to neighborhoods, not veteran-only worlds. Public classes and events build those connections, and public memberships help fund access for the military community.

How we get there

Now
Events, partnerships and a track record across Chicago.

Next
Local Chapters, recurring programs and permanent staff.

A first space
An owned or leased pilot facility in the Chicago area.

The campus
A permanent Chicago home, as funding and partners allow.

Build it with us.

Veteran service organizations, providers, sponsors and neighbors: we want to hear from you.

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Scan to visit
espritdcf.org