



The Association of Defense Communities, along with their official sponsor, USAA, have named San Diego as a 2018 Great American Defense Community, highlighting Support The Enlisted Project (STEP) as an innovation program serving military families in crisis



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SAN DIEGO NAMED AMONG BEST PLACES FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND MILITARY FAMILIES

ASSOCIATION OF DEFENSE COMMUNITIES DESIGNATED SAN DIEGO A 2018 “GREAT AMERICAN DEFENSE COMMUNITY” *for their regional support of three innovative and unique programs: Support the Enlisted Project, Stand Down San Diego, Veteran Ventures*

San Diego – As a national leader in providing resources and support for service members, the City of San Diego is being recognized as one of the best places for improving the quality of life for members of the military and their families. Today, the Association of Defense Communities named the San Diego region to the 2018 class of Great American Defense Communities.

“San Diego’s history is intertwined with the military and we have a long tradition of supporting our active duty and veteran military members, their families, and the civilians who also serve on our bases,” said San Diego’s Mayor, Kevin L. Faulconer. **“This national recognition is a credit to the citizens of San Diego, businesses, nonprofit organizations and universities who all do their part to work with, care for, and support our military community.”**

Home to the world’s largest concentration of military, the San Diego region has been shaped by strong relationships with active duty service personnel, veterans and their families. More than 106,500 active duty Navy and Marines are stationed in San Diego. Additionally, more than 233,800 military veterans reside in the San Diego region.

San Diego was selected as a Great American Defense Community for the innovative, regional support of three major programs operated by local non-profits.

- **Support The Enlisted Project (STEP)** builds self-sufficiency with our young military and veteran families in financial crisis, through financial counseling, emergency grants and other support programs.
- **Stand Down San Diego** provides access to services for homeless veterans, including food.
- **Veteran Ventures** at University of California San Diego is a business accelerator program that supports veteran entrepreneurs.

“We are humbled and honored to represent our great city and the entire community that works together to serve our military and veteran families in San Diego,” said Tony Teravainen, Support The Enlisted Project (STEP) CEO and Co-Founder. **“We created STEP five years ago because we believed our young military families and transitioning veterans deserved better. Our unique and effective program has assisted thousands of families move from financial crisis, i.e. imminent loss of a basic need, to a life of financial self-sufficiency.”**

The Great American Defense Communities program recognizes overall support that communities and regions provide to service members and military families, including community building and integration, education and employment opportunities, and family support. USAA is the initiative’s official sponsor.

This year’s selected communities will be honored at the Defense Communities National Summit in Washington, D.C. in June 2018. For more information about the Great American Defense Communities program, visit <https://www.defensecommunities.org/2018-great-american-defense-communities-program-details/>.