

2016-2017 American Legion Auxiliary Programs Action Plan

Veteran Affairs & Rehabilitation

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program and the 2014-2019 Centennial Strategic Plan-Our work to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families provides our members opportunities to serve in volunteer leadership roles within their local Veterans Affairs hospital (Goal 3), which broadens our membership pool (Goal 1) among a target population and builds brand loyalty (Goal 5) with the veterans themselves.

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What is this program, and why do we have it?

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program promotes our mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families.

What can you do?

- 1. Provide opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans and their families as volunteers at VA health care facilities through the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS).**

Ideas:

Members

- Become a regular VAVS volunteer.
- Invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.
- Enter all of your VAVS hours into the VAVS tracking system. Note; VA Healthcare facilities volunteer hour tracking system is different from the tracking utilized for ALA hour bars. Please consult your department.

Department (and ALA VAVS Representatives and Deputy Representatives)

- Work with VAVS directors to create meaningful assignments for every volunteer.
- Work with VAVS directors to identify service projects suitable for Junior members and their friends and adults with time for occasional service only.
- Educate units and community partners about volunteer opportunities available at VA medical centers, state veterans homes, Fisher Houses, and other VA health care locations. Sponsor informational programs and recruitment tables at department meetings, post and unit functions and at community events. Utilize department websites, newsletters and other media.
- Contribute to the VAVS National Advisory Committee by enabling the American Legion Auxiliary national representative to best represent the interest of and exert influence on behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary. Develop a deeper connection with the VAVS national representative and deputy representative.
- Attend the 71st annual VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee Meeting and Conference. All VA facility representatives, deputies and volunteers are eligible to attend at their own expense.
- Share member volunteer concerns and suggestions with ALA National VAVS Representative Pat Kranzow.
- Inform your Auxiliary hospital VAVS representative of any concerns or suggestions.

(Note: Volunteers in veterans' state homes that have a Memorandum of Understanding with a VA health care system are eligible to be considered VAVS volunteers.)

- 2. There isn't a VA hospital close to your community? Find opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans in your area. These hours will count toward your Service to Veterans pin and hour bars.**

Service to Veterans

Service to Veterans recognizes volunteers who provide service to veterans, service members and their families outside a VAMC.

Volunteers conduct projects and work for military/veterans and/or families from their homes and in their communities.

Service to Veterans volunteers maintain their own recordkeeping and dollars spent. A new pin has been designed to reflect the work of those who volunteer in their communities and at home for veterans. Hour bars which attach to the pin, are also available to earn. More information may be in the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers available online for download at www.alaforveterans.org. To purchase a printed copy. Please visit www.emblem.legion.org.

Ideas:

Member

- Support veterans from the comfort of your community or home. Service to Veterans combines community volunteer opportunities and volunteering opportunities created in your home.
- Help a veteran use the Internet.
- Sew a quilt for the Quilts of Valor Foundation. For more information please visit www.qovf.org/.
- Supply postage for local veterans in rest homes or assisted living facilities.
- Organize a clothing drive.
- Organize transportation for veterans to assist them with essential errands.
- Find out what is needed and volunteer.
- Report your Service Veterans hours to your unit VA&R chairman.
- See Awards section of this Plan for information on Hour Bar Recognition.

Unit

- Become the catalyst to find needs and encourage members to help veterans in their community.
- Provide hospitality for a job fair for veterans.
- Coordinate with local quilt shops to help your unit sponsor a quilting event in support of Quilts of Valor.
- Contact members, including those who only occasionally attend meetings and events and invite them to participate for specific limited duration projects that would help area veterans.
- Compile and record hours provided by your members.
- Coordinate with your PR chairman to tell the community what work your unit members are doing for veterans.

Department

- Inform units about the new service category, Service to Veterans.

- Distribute information to units and members to help them understand the opportunities to volunteer through ALA's recently combined category, Service to Veterans, and how to report such service hours.
- Promote volunteer opportunities available in community settings or from home to unit and individual members. Sponsor informational programs and recruitment tables at department meetings, post and unit functions and at community events. Utilize department websites newsletters and other media.
- Encourage units and individual members to participate in the Quilts of Valor project through the Quilts of Valor Foundation: www.qovf.org.

3. Assist veterans in accessing VA benefits including, but not limited to, health care. This should include coordinating with the local American Legion Post Service Officer.

Ideas;

Members

- Coordinate with local American Legion posts to identify the local Service Officer or see list at www.legion.org/serviceofficers
- Help eligible veterans to use the VA health care system and its services.
- Encourage eligible veterans to use the VA health care system and its services, including hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, Vet Centers, etc.
- Participate in and encourage veterans and their family members to participate in town-hall meetings organized by The American Legion in advance of the Legion's System Worth Saving site visits to VA health care systems; www.legion.org/systemworthsaving.
- **Resource;**
VA Health Care Hotline for women veterans
1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636); explore va.gov/health-care.

4. Assist in activities that help homeless veterans

Ideas;

Members and Units

- Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your post and offer to assist that coordinator in responding to requests for assistance from homeless veterans or homeless veteran service providers.
- Crochet hats, scarves or mittens to be distributed to homeless veterans. Use information provided by your district chairman to contact the homeless veteran coordinator at the VA health care system nearest you to explore what the unit or you can do to help homeless veterans in your community.
- Participate in the VA Project CHALENG organized by the VA health care system nearest to you. (Project CHALENG for Veterans enhances the care

for homeless veterans provided by your local VA and its surrounding community service agencies).

- Contact your local post chairman and offer your assistance if requests for help come through the Legion's Family Support Network (FSN).
- Raise funds with your local American Legion posts to help veterans and their families through the Family Support Network for veterans at risk of losing their housing or homeless veterans transitioning to permanent housing.
 - Make payments of overdue rent, utility payments or deposits and security deposits.
- Host or volunteer at homeless veterans' stand down, events where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.
- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects in your community and identify the organization's volunteer and in-kind contribution needs, including:
 - Meal preparation and serving
 - Clothes collection and distribution
 - Assembly and delivery of hygiene kits, buddy baskets
 - Purchasing or securing household items or furniture
- Reach out to specific homeless veterans, such as residents of projects mentioned above to provide her/him practical, social and moral support.
- Compile "blessing bags" to be given to the local police department or other organizations that deal with the homeless veteran population.
- Create a "Tree of Warmth" by collecting scarves, mittens, hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent.
 - Include a sign that says "Please Take if Needed," or something similar.

Department

- Identify methods of helping homeless veterans in local communities by identifying VA homeless coordinators, state VA coordinators or attending Homeless Roundtables.
- Identify the American Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your community and prepare a resources bulletin for units.
- Contact the homeless veteran coordinator at the VA health care system located in your state to explore what the unit or individual member can do to help homeless veterans in their community. Distribute information to units and members within the department.
- Coordinate and encourage participation in the following programs;
 - VA Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) for Veterans, which enhances the care for homeless veterans, provided by the local VA and its surrounding community service agencies; www.va.gov/homeless/chaleng.asp.
 - Stand Downs
 - VA sponsored events.

5. Support rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts and hobbies.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)

NVCAF is the national, annual competition and festival that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. As the national presenting sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary should strive to increase monetary support by encouraging departments and units to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.

Ideas:

Members/Units

- Obtain and become familiar with the 2014 edition of ALA Guide for Volunteers.
- Help your unit and department earn recognition at National Convention through donations to support VA Creative Arts Festivals Volunteer individually, with a fellow member, or as a unit at a local Creative Arts Festival.
- Identify arts, crafts and hobby projects targeted to veterans (such as writing, oral history recording, visual and performing arts, quilting and gardening). A unit may organize a project of its own or introduce a unit to veteran arts, crafts and hobby projects already operational in the community. See Arts Deployed; Action Guide and Webinars to help you bring the arts to your community.
www.alaforveterans.org/Programs/Veterans-Affairs---Rehabilitation/
- Contribute donated supplies to help supplement visual veteran artists' needs for their projects. Contact your department chairman or your local VA hospital coordinator for a list of items.
- Donate, through departments, funds that help local veterans attend state and national Wheel Chair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, Para Olympics, etc.

Department

- Promote member awareness of the Auxiliary's vital role as the presenting sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF).
- Encourage units and individuals to support state VA Creative Arts Festivals through donations. Contributing departments will be recognized at National Convention. One method may include challenging units to earn a bronze, silver or gold award given by NVCAF in recognition for financial donations to the program. Departments, units or individuals can earn the Bronze award for donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival of \$1,000 to \$1,999; the Silver award for donating \$2,000 to \$4,999; or the Gold award for \$5,000 and above, ALA National Headquarters submits qualifying donations to NVCAF staff each July. Donations considered are those received in the national office from August 1 2016, to July 31, 2017.

- Recruit members to volunteer at local Veterans Creative Arts Festivals conducted by many VA health care systems across the country.
- Apply to the ALA Foundation for an ALA Local Veterans Creative Arts Festival/Creative Arts Workshop Grant to assist your local VA health care system in preparing for and/or conduction a local Creative Arts Festival.
- Advocate for art therapy, music therapy, drama and recreational therapy programs in VA heath care systems.
- Research other forms of rehabilitation for veterans such as the National Wheel Chair games. Distribute contact information to units.

1. Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.

**Ideas;
Members**

- Take part in a veteran job fair by organizing or working at an informational table. Other opportunities include helping implement a Legion-sponsored job fair and/or co-hosting a Legion Family information table at a U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation-sponsored job fair. Additionally, Auxiliary members may initiate and host a job fair for veterans in their community.
- Serve as a career e-mentor for women veterans
- Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, specifically if the house being built is supported by The American Legion.

Unit

- Host an informational table at a local job fair.
- Support the Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home.

Department

- Support veteran job fairs organized by The American Legion and/or the National Chamber Foundation. Encourage members to volunteer or host a job fair for veterans in their community.

ALA Resources

How to Organize a Job Fair for Veterans and/or Military and Veteran spouses.

Additional Resources

- www.uschamber.com/hiringourheros
- Serve as a career e-Mentor for women-Encourage Auxiliary members to serve as career mentors for female veterans via electronic communications. The e-mentoring network, operated by the Business and Professional Women's Foundation, Joining Forces and Mentoring Plus, virtually pairs

female veterans with career mentors and subject matter experts for guidance and support.

- www.ementorprogram.org/p/milspouse/
- Home Building-Support home building and renovation projects for veterans and their families by volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. Locate veteran-specific projects through The American Legion. For additional information, view www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf

2. Assist and support caregivers of veterans.

Ideas:

Members

- Familiarize yourself with the service of the VA caregiver support program.
- Familiarize yourself with the Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network.
- Become a veteran caregiver peer support trainer or volunteer.
- Become a Legacy Corps AmeriCorps member if the Legacy Corps project is offered in a state or locality near you.
- Volunteer as a VA Voluntary Service volunteer support caregiver if the VA health care system closest to you offers such volunteer opportunity.

Units

- Familiarize your unit and community with the services of the VA caregiver support program.
- Invite the VA caregiver support coordinator in the VA healthcare system closest to you to make a presentation to your unit, district or community-wide meeting.

Department

- Prepare information for units concerning the needs of caregiver support.
- Familiarize yourself with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation for caregivers.

ALA Resources

Legacy Corps Frequently Asked Questions

Additional Resources

VA Caregiver Support-www.caregiver.va.gov/

Elizabeth Dole Foundation-www.elizabethdolefoundation.org

Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network-

www.taps.org/MVCN/

GUIDELINES FOR ALL AWARDS

DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN AWARDS:

Please carefully read and follow the direction for all Department of Michigan awards. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you're in doubt about anything.

All entries are due to the Department Chairman no later than April 15, 2017 and accompanied by a GREEN SHEET.

The GREEN SHEET must indicate the award you are seeking. Please fill out completely.

Unit Chairman: All Annual Reports and entries for any of the awards MUST be sent to your District Chairman by March 15, 2017. Awards must first be judged on District level. The District Chairman will forward the winning entry from your District to the Department Chairman by April 15, 2017. LATE ENTRIES WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED.

District Chairman: All Annual Reports and entries for awards must be sent to the Department Chairman no later than April 15, 2017. The winning entry from District must have the GREEN SHEET attached and properly filled out. Remember only one entry per District for any award. You may send an entry for each of the awards but, only one entry per award.

NANSHEPARD PLAQUUE; A citation will be given to the Unit for the most referrals to The American Legion, personal contacts, and contributions to all Rehabilitation funds and the most Outstanding Activities during the year. Winner is chosen from the annual VA&R reports received from the Units and judged on the District level. All Unit entries must be sent to the District Chairman by March 15, 2017, your District Chairman must send the winning entry along with the GREEN SHEET attached and filled out properly to the Department Chairman by April 15, 2017. Any entry without a GREEN SHEET will be disqualified.

DOROTHY PEARL REHABILITATION PLAQUE; A citation will be given to the Unit reporting the greatest participation in the Department Rehabilitation program. Entries must be in narrative form and not to exceed 1,000 words. All reports and entries must be sent to your District Chairman by March 15, 2017. District Chairman must send the Annual Report and winning entry with GREEN SHEET attached to the Department Chairman by April 15, 2017. District entries that arrive without a GREEN SHEET will be disqualified. This award is for all Unit activity during the year.

JACKIE SKINNER HOMELESS VETERANS CITATION; A citation will be presented to the Unit reporting the greatest participation in Homeless Veteran initiatives. Entries must be in narrative form and not to exceed 1,000 words. All reports and entries must be sent to the District Chairman for judging by March 15, 2017. The District Chairman must send the winning District entry along with the GREEN SHEET attached

to the Department Chairman by April 15, 2017. Any entry without an Annual Report and a GREEN SHEET properly filled out will be disqualified. Narratives should describe Homeless Veterans activities only.

VA&R REPORTING AWARDS

VA&R Reporting

Mid Year Reports

Mid Year reports reflect the program work of units in the department. Each unit VA&R chairman is required to submit a narrative report by December 15, 2016 to department chairman on all activities their unit is involved in.

Year End Reports

Annual reports due to department chairman by April 15, 2017, reflect the program work of units in the department. It is requested that those reports are accompanied by photos of select unit projects. Members and units should follow department's protocol and deadlines. Department chairman has to submit a narrative report to division VA&R chairman by May 15, 2017.

As part of your narrative report, please include answers to the following questions:

- How did the units participate in the caregiver support program?
- Describe how members earned their Service to Veterans hours.
- What assistance did units give at a stand down in the department?
- What did units learn about hosting a stand down?
- What went well: what would they do differently?

Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Awards

Service to Veterans

Member Award: Hour Bar recognition for Service to Veterans Volunteers

Type of Award: Hour Bar

Presented to: Member by her department via the ALA National Headquarters.

Materials and Guidelines:

- Volunteers are recognized when specific hour milestones are reached: 50, 100, 300, 500, 1,000.
- After the first 1,000 hour bar is awarded, the next bar will be earned in 1,000 hour increments up to 20,000 hours. Hour bars are also offered in increments of 25,000 and 30,000 hours.
- Hour bars are provided at no cost to the volunteer however the appropriate pin (from which the hour bar is affixed) can be gotten after the first 50 hours of volunteering.

Unit Award; Outstanding Unit VA&R Program Award

Type of award; Citation

Presented to; One Unit chairman per department/division

Materials and Guidelines;

- Entries must include the award cover sheet located in this program Plan.
- Awarded to the unit chairman in each department/division who conducted the best overall promotion of the VA&R program.
- The entry must be typewritten in narrative format not to exceed 1,000 words.
- Include pictures, clippings, scrapbooks, folders, etc.
- Attach an award cover sheet, including the name of the award, as well as the name and contact information for the department and unit VA&R chairman.
- Entries must be sent by the department chairman to her national division chairman postmarked by June 1, 2017 or e-mailed by 5:00 p.m. EDT June 1, 2017.

2. NVCAF Award: National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)
support recognition

Type of Award: Verbal announcement during VA&R chairman's remarks
at the 2017 ALA National Convention.

Presented to: Departments, units and/or members who qualify for stated
Contribution level to NVCAF. Donations are made through
The American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.

Guidelines:

- NVCAF will recognize departments/units/members that contribute in this way
Bronze; \$1,000-\$2,400 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1, 2016-July 31, 2017
Silver; \$2,500-\$4,999 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1, 2016- July 31, 2017
Gold; \$5,000-\$14,999 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1, 2016-July 31, 2017
- To be considered, donations to the ALAF must be received in the national office from August 1, 2016-July 31, 2017
- ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in July.

3. Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Awards

National Award; VAVS Volunteer of the Year Award/ALA NAC Nominee

Type of Award; Citation + \$500 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF
of her choice presented by the American Legion
Auxiliary.

Presented to; Member

Materials and Guidelines;

- Candidates for VAVS National Advisory Committee Volunteer of the year will be submitted by the chiefs of voluntary service.

- Awarded to the nominee who has given extraordinary service to our nation's veterans through ALA VA&R program and the VAVS program.
- Nominee must serve in an established VA assignment and be defined as a regularly scheduled volunteer.
- Should be actively involved in working with veterans in any one of the following areas; outpatient clinics, nursing homes, homeless veteran programs, hosted veteran-related functions outside the VA, or visited veterans confined to their homes (as assigned by VAVS).
- The American Legion Auxiliary selects the ALA Volunteer of the Year. The name of the ALA Volunteer of the Year is forwarded for consideration as the NAC Volunteer of the Year.

Member Award: 10,000 Hour Volunteer Service Award

Type of Award: Citation +\$100 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by The American Legion Auxiliary.

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines;

- Given to volunteers who have reached 10,000 hours of service in a VA facility during this year (April 1, 2016-March 31, 2017).
- Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

Individual Recognition Award; Volunteer Recruitment & Service Department Award

Type of Award; Citation presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs

Presented to; Hospital Representative

Materials and Guidelines;

- No entry form required
- Awarded to the hospital rep at every facility that shows an increase in both volunteers and volunteer hours at a VA Medical Center from April 1, 2016-March 31, 2017.
- The award winner will be determined by the national VAVS representative through verification of hours and number of volunteers as recorded by VAVS.

Individual Recognition

Award: 100 Percent VAVS Meeting Attendance Award

Type of Award: Attendance Card presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Presented to: Hospital Representative and Deputy

Materials and Guidelines;

- No entry form required
- An "Attendance Card" will be awarded to each representative and deputy who has 100 percent attendance to VAVS committee meetings at her assigned facility.
- The national VAVS representative will verify the winners from VA records.

Additional Information

Welcome Home Celebrations

Provide assistance to your local VA health care system in supporting returning service members and their families in the community. VA supports this initiative by providing information about the opportunities available to them through the VA. Every VA health care system sponsors welcome home celebrations in their facilities and community.

National Salute to Veterans

This initiative salutes America's heroes, the more than 98,000 of the U.S. Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 annually.

Additional Resources You Can Use

1. Homeless Veterans Coalition: www.nchv.org
2. Quilts of Valor www.qovf.org
3. How To Sheet; How to raise awareness in your communities about the ever increasing number of homeless veterans. www.ALAforVeterans.org.
4. How To Sheet: How to increase donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival www.ALAforVeterans.org
5. VA Homeless Programs www.va.gov/homeless/index.asp
6. The American Legion Family Support Network www.legion.org/familysupport
7. American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Creative Activities Action Guide www.ALAforVeterans.org

American Legion Auxiliary 2016-2017 Plan How To Guides

- Hold your raffle at a special fundraising dinner for NVCAF. Invite the local business leaders who contributed and community leaders to the event (mayor, police and fire chief, Chamber of Commerce plus the others who are important in your community.
- If you have a veterans hospital or veterans home in your area, check with your hospital or home representative to see if they have local Creative Arts program. Check to see if they have any medal winners (gold, silver and bronze). If they do, invite the participant to your fundraiser and ask them to bring their art and talent. You might ask if they are willing to donate a piece of art for your fundraiser. Perhaps the performing arts medal winners would provide entertainment. If you don't have access to a Creative Arts artist, you can access a list of artists to see if any are in your area. <http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/caf/2010/participant-info.asp>
- Don't forget to include your Legion Family in your event. The American Legion and Sons of The American Legion are a great help, and getting them involved helps build a strong Family relationship.

- Remember to promote your event. Send information to your local newspaper, write a letter to the editor, and invite local reporters and news stations to your event.
- A great and simple way to raise funds for NVCAF is to incorporate it into your poppy program. Check with your Poppy chairman for your department's approved dates to distribute poppies (i.e., Memorial Day Veterans Day etc.) Select a small group of volunteers who are willing to distribute poppies one day just for the NVCAF. Select a good spot-Target, Wal-mart, local market, liquor store or anywhere in your community that has lots of traffic. Be sure to get approval from the location before you go so your hard work will be successful. Bring materials with you that reference NVCAF and what it does for participants.
- Does your local veterans hospital or veterans home have a Creative Arts Festival? If not, it's a great opportunity for your unit members to work with your local VA hospital or home to get one started. This year, a grant fund has been set up to help your local VA hospital or VA home with its Creative Arts Festival and/or workshop. The fund is also available for hospitals that want to start a new local Creative Arts Festival or Creative Arts Workshop. You can find the application for the mini-grant www.ALAforVeyerans.org
- Once you get your local Creative Arts Festival started, or if you have one in your area, why not host a mini Creative Arts Festival at your post home or at a facility at your hospital/home? Your Unit can supply art supplies, volunteers and refreshments. Be sure to work with the recreation therapist at your local hospital/home, and don't forget that you can use poppy funds for this event.
- Don't forget to promote your local Creative Arts Festival to all veterans in your area (i.e., letter to the editor, flyers in local posts our VA hospital/home-just to name a few).
- Did you know that awards are presented to departments, Units and individuals that donate money to NVCAF?
- The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is a week of learning, exploring fellowship and celebration of the healing power of the arts. Each dollar you raise helps a veteran in his or her quest for healing. Be creative in your fundraising and please pass on your success and struggles to your department VA&R chairman with a cc to your division chairman.