



Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation 2025-2026 Program Engagement Plan

Our Mission

In the spirit of Service, Not Self, the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary is to support The American Legion and to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military, and their families, both at home and abroad. For God and Country, we advocate for veterans, educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace and security.

Our Vision

The vision of the American Legion Auxiliary is to support The American Legion while becoming the premier service organization and foundation of every community providing support for our veterans, our military, and their families by shaping a positive future in an atmosphere of fellowship, patriotism, peace and security.

Our Impact

We are one of the nation's most prominent supporters of veterans, military, and their families. We help to advance the mission of The American Legion. From helping to draft the GI Bill in 1944 to advocating for veterans on Capitol Hill, the nonpartisan American Legion Family is instrumental in advancing legislation that improves the quality of life for our nation's veterans and servicemembers.

Purposes

In fulfillment of our Mission, the American Legion Auxiliary adheres to the following purposes:

- To support and advocate for veterans, active military and their families
- To support the initiatives and programs of The American Legion
- To foster patriotism and responsible citizenship
- To award scholarships and promote quality education and literacy
- To provide educational and leadership opportunities that uphold the ideals of freedom and democracy and encourage good citizenship and patriotism in government
- To increase our capacity to deliver our Mission by providing meaningful volunteer opportunities within our communities
- To empower our membership to achieve personal fulfillment through Service Not Self

The purpose of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee is to promote programs and services that assist and enhance the lives of veterans and their families, ensuring restoration and/or transition to normally functioning lives.

Values

Our statement of values is predicated on the founding purposes:

- Commitment to the four founding principles: Justice, Freedom, Democracy, Loyalty
- Service to God, our country, its veterans and their families
- Tradition of patriotism and citizenship
- Personal integrity and family values
- Respect for the uniqueness of individual members
- Truthful open communication in dealing with the public and our members
- Adherence to the adopted policies and rules

Key Program Statements

- Support rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies.
- Support veteran caregivers, family members and survivors.
- Enroll Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.
- Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.

- There isn't a VA hospital close to your community. Find opportunities for Auxiliary members to serve veterans in your area such as serving the homeless.

Keep in mind

Engaging in thoughtful conversation

Do not bring up topics related to a veteran or service member's experiences during war (e.g., shootings, missions, or loss of other service members.). These topics will surface after you have had time to build trust and should come only from the veteran or service member initiating the conversation. No veteran or service member should ever be put on the spot to discuss details of his or her military service.

Listen without judgement

As a volunteer, it is important that you listen without judgement. Sometimes, these conversations can be difficult to hear. Listen with an open heart and allow the veteran or service member to talk for as long as he or she wishes. Remember: As a volunteer, it is not your job to counsel or offer advice to the service member, veteran, or family member.

Confidentiality

All information concerning a veteran, patient, staff person, or other volunteer and the record of treatment or service is to be kept confidential and shared with no one. Consider familiarizing yourself with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which protects the rights of individuals in a healthcare setting. More information can be found online:

www.hhs.gov/hipaa/index.html

Dress and Attitude

It is expected that volunteers, regardless of their setting, will dress appropriately for the circumstances. This means American Legion Auxiliary branded attire when appropriate. Those in a healthcare facility will adhere to the code of that facility. It is further expected that when "on duty," volunteers will be pleasant, cordial, helpful, and positive. Professional Behavior.

Following rules and assignments

As a volunteer, you are required to accept and follow rules and instruction as given by the authority of the facility. If asked to do something you do not agree with, you have the right not to accept the assignment. If the assignment is mission critical at the point in which it is given, fulfill the request, and express concern after the fact, in private, with the appropriate individual – your direct supervisor, the ALA rep/dep, or the VAVS director.

Working with veterans/patients, families, VA staff and other volunteers

Do not publicly criticize the home or facility. Such criticism is disloyal and must be avoided. If there is a reason for criticism, bring it to the attention of the appropriate person who will communicate any issues through proper channels.

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Compensation Discussion

It is never appropriate to discuss pension or compensation issues with a veteran/patient. That individual should be referred to the appropriate resource who is trained to respond to those types of questions. American Legion service officers are trained to assist veterans with those types or issues. These officers can be located through your local unit or post.

Looking for ideas?

ALA Committee Facebook Groups are spaces on the social media network for ALA members to discuss or share about broad or narrow topics related to each committee. This group is a place to share service activities and events, ask questions, obtain information, and network for those interested in working the American Legion Auxiliary's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ALAVAR/>

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What can you do?

Assist in activities that help homeless veterans.

Ideas: Members and Units

- Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department 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 department 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 for 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 downs, events where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.
- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects and permanent 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, and hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent. Include a sign that says, "Please Take, if Needed," "Free 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's coordinator in your department and prepare a resources bulletin for units.
- Contact the homeless veteran's 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:
 - o 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/challeng.asp.
 - o Stand Downs
 - o VA sponsored events

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 to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.

Ideas: Members/Unit

- Obtain and become familiar with the 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.
- 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 Wheelchair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, Paralympics, 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.
- 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 conducting a local Creative Arts Festival.
- Advocate for art therapy, music therapy, drama and recreational therapy programs in VA health care systems.

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

Ideas for 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 informational table at a US 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 a house build 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.

Ideas: Members

- If you live near a VA facility, become a regular VAVS volunteer and invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.
- Send notes and provide supplies to support those who volunteer at VA facilities.
- 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.

Enroll Auxiliary Members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.

- Work with VAVS directors to create meaningful assignments for every volunteer.
- Work with VAVS directors to identify service projects suitable to 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 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. (name and contact information can be found in supplement.)
- 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.)

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

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. The Service to Veterans 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

- Read the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers
- Sew quilts for the Quilts of Valor Foundation. For more information, please visit www.qovf.org.
- Help a veteran use the internet.
- Supply postage for local veterans in rest homes or assisted living facilities.
- Organize transportation for veterans to assist them with essential errands or medical appointments; many live far from a VA facility and shouldn't be driving if they don't feel well.
- Contact the Legion Service Officer at your post and offer to be on the list of people to call when a military family needs help.

- Buy school supplies, throw a baby shower, or send care packages to military kids who are headed to college.
- Report your Service to 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 for Quilts of Valor.
- Contact members, including those who never or 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 you PR chairman to tell the community what work your unit members are doing for veterans.

Department

- Distribute information to units and volunteers 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 event. Utilize department websites, newsletters and other media.
- Encourage units and individual members to participate in the Quilts of Valor project through Quilts of Valor Foundation: www.govf.org.

Transitioning back to civilian life is one of the biggest challenge's veterans face today. Educate yourself about resources so you can help veterans access all their VA benefits, not just health care. Work with your 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 attain benefits through referrals.
- 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/healthcare

Unit/Department

- Invite the local, county or state Service Officer to be a guest speaker at a unit/department meeting.

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 Veterans 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 system.
- Invite the VA caregiver support coordinator in the VA healthcare system closest to you to make a presentation to your unit, district or communitywide meeting.

Department

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

Additional Resources

- **ALA Resources:** How to Organize a Job Fair for Veterans and/or Military and Veteran Spouses.
 - o www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes
 - o www.ementorprogram.org/militaryspouse-ementor/
 - o The American Legion and Habitat for Humanity Volunteer Involvement Kit – www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf
 - o VA Caregiver Support – www.caregiver.va.gov
 - o Elizabeth Dole Foundation – www.elizabethdoletfoundation.org
 - o Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Network – milvetcaregivernetwork.org

How to Get Involved:

- Support the therapeutic rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies.
- Support veteran caregivers, family members, and survivors.
- Volunteer at local VA facilities, including state VA facilities in your area.
- Collaborate with organizations that support veterans and their families, such as Wreaths Across America, Honor Flight Inc., and the Military and Veteran Caregiver Network.
- Look in your community for opportunities to support veterans, their caregivers, their families, and their survivors.
- Support The American Legion's Be the One mission.

Outside Partnerships

- **Wreaths Across America**
 - o Take part in local wreath placement at a national cemetery.
 - o Sponsor wreaths for placement through Wreaths Across America.
- **Honor Flight Inc.**
 - o Volunteer with local hubs.
 - o Utilize your unit's poppy funds to support important aspects of Honor Flight activities. For more information, please see www.legion-aux.org/Poppy-Funds.
 - o Participate in welcome-home events.
 - o Coordinate the creation and delivery of cards and letters to Honor Flight hubs for mail call.
 - o Consider volunteering as a guardian for an Honor Flight. Please note — there is an associated cost.
- **Military and Veteran Caregiver Network**
 - o Learn who is considered a caregiver. This will help you identify caregivers in your community and maybe even as a caregiver yourself. If you identify as a caregiver, consider joining their online peer support community.

- o Familiarize yourself with local caregiver resources found in the Hero Care Resource Directory
- o Refer to the MVCN's community calendar for educational and volunteer opportunities
- **National Veterans Creative Arts Festival**
 - o Promote awareness of healing through arts, crafts, and hobbies.
 - o Donate to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival through the American Legion Auxiliary Foundation.
 - o Donate to local Veterans Creative Arts Festivals (e.g., time, supplies, money).
 - o Identify arts, crafts, and hobby projects targeted to veterans (writing, oral history recording, visual and performing arts, quilting, and gardening).
 - o Donate art supplies to your local U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facilities including state veterans' homes, community living centers, and VA medical centers.
 - o Plan and organize a local Veterans Creative Arts Festival.
 - o Advocate for art therapy, music therapy, drama, and recreational therapy programs within the VA healthcare system.
 - o Apply to the ALA Foundation for Veterans Creative Arts Festival Grants to be used for local competitions and festivals in your community. For more information, please go to <https://alafoundation.org/vcaf-grants/>.
- **Center for Development and Community Engagement (CDCE, formerly known as VAVS)**
 - o Recruit Auxiliary members as volunteers for the VA Center for Development and Community Engagement at VA healthcare facilities.
 - o If you see a need in your community that is not being addressed, contact your local VA.
 - o Familiarize yourself with the service of the VA caregiver support program
 - o Volunteer at your local VA facility for events such holiday gift shops, Bingo, baby showers, etc.
 - o Don't forget to include all American Legion Family members in your VA events.
 - o Coordinate a supply drive for the needs of hospitalized veterans by gathering items such as socks, underwear, toiletries, etc. Please contact your local VA facility or American Legion Auxiliary CDCE representative for needed items.
 - o Don't forget your state VA facilities, such as state veterans' homes. The veterans who reside there have needs that we may fill as well. For more information and local points of contact, please refer to <https://nasdva.us/resources/>.

Service to Veterans (Outside of VA Facilities)

- Support veteran caregivers, family members, and survivors in your local community.
 - o Provide a spa day or caregiver day out for community veteran caregivers.
 - o Connect caregivers with outside organizations that offer support, such as the Military and Veteran Caregiver Network.
 - o Offer to sit with a veteran while the caregiver runs errands.
 - o Offer to run errands for a caregiver.
 - o Prepare information for units concerning the needs of caregiver support.
 - o Offer to provide meals or arrange a meal train for the families of hospitalized or recently deceased veterans.
 - o Connect the families of recently deceased veterans to outside resources to ensure they get the support they need. For example, TAPS or the local service officers.
 - o Contact an American Legion Service Officer at your post and offer to be on the list of people to call when a veteran's family needs help.
- Look for ways in your community to ensure the ever-changing demographics of veterans and their families are supported.
 - o If your area has many working-age veterans or veterans with families:
 - o Take part in a veteran job fair by organizing or working at an informational table.
 - o Promote local veteran-centric job fairs in your community. Support The American Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home or community center.
 - o Buy school supplies, host a baby shower, or send care packages to veterans' children who are headed to college.

- If your area has older or homebound veterans:
 - Adopt a local veteran — find a veteran in your community who faces loneliness and isolation. Offer care and support, such as morale phone calls, running errands, and ensuring they are receiving proper nutrition.
 - Transportation of veterans to appointments or running errands.
- Look for Community Veteran Engagement Boards in your area (CVEBs) and provide support in the form of information, donations, or volunteers to the events in your area.
- Become the catalyst to find needs and encourage members to help veterans in their community.
- Promote volunteer opportunities in veteran-centric activities in community settings.
- Utilize websites, newsletters, and other media to promote your events and gain community support.
- Report your ALA Service to Veterans hours to your unit VA&R chair.

Support The American Legion's Be the One Mission

*For veterans: ANY veteran in suicidal crisis can now be seen at any VA or non-VA health care facility **FREE OF CHARGE**. The veteran does not even have to be enrolled in the VA system for this benefit. It includes up to 30 days of inpatient or 90 days of outpatient care at any VA or non-VA facility.*

- The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline — 988 then press 1 — helps make it easier to remember and share the number to access help in times of need. This service is free and confidential. When you call, chat, or text, a trained responder will listen and help. You decide how much information to share. Support doesn't end with your conversation. Responders can connect you with the resources you need.
- You can also send a text message to 838255 to communicate with trained professionals.
- For more information, please visit www.veteranscrisisline.net.
- BUDDY CHECKS: Contact your local American Legion post to see if you may volunteer with their Buddy Check Program or during Buddy Check week Oct. 21-25, 2024. For more information, please visit www.legion.org/buddycheck/about.
- VA S.A.V.E.: Suicide Prevention Training
- S.A.V.E. stands for:
 - Signs of suicidal thinking should be recognized.
 - Ask the most important question of all: "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"
 - Validate the veteran's experience.
 - Encourage treatment and expedite getting help.

Additional information may be found at www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/prevention/index.asp, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eljsbl3zu-A, www.mentalhealth.va.gov.

How to Increase Donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Committee: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Contact Information for Questions: va&r@alaforveterans.org

Objective: Support rehabilitation of veterans through art therapy by fulfilling the Auxiliary's annual financial obligation as a presenting co-sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF).

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- Check with your department VA&R chairman to see what your unit goal is and develop a plan to meet that goal.
- Once you have your goal, share it with your unit and keep them informed about your fundraising progress.
- Assign a small committee to ask local businesses for in-kind donations for a special NVCAF raffle. With the items collected, you can create special baskets to raffle. Don't forget to ask your friends and family to purchase raffle tickets. Take the February 2013 issue of the *Auxiliary* magazine. Take the attached fact sheet with you to help explain the festival. When

you visit local businesses, be sure your committee is well informed. For additional information visit www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov/.

- 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 veteran's 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 participants 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.
- 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 department VA&R chairman or 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 veteran's 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. How to Facilitate a Local Veterans Creative Arts Festival how-to sheet, found in the Members Only Area on the VA&R program page of the National website, will help you get started. Work with your hospital representative to see how you can get this project started. If you don't know who your representative is, check with your department VA&R chairman. 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.ALAforVeterans.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 recreational 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, your 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? Awards are presented for Bronze (\$1,000 to \$2,499), Silver (\$2,500 to \$4,999), and Gold (\$5,000 to \$14,999) by close of books of the administrative year.
- As unit chairman, you can create a special awards program for your members' participation in the Creative Arts program. Your awards program might include awards for different levels of contributions or the most creative fundraiser.
- 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.

Facilitating a Local Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Sponsored in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hospitalized Veterans, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) is a week-long event that showcases the creative achievements of veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities. With participation open to any veteran enrolled at a VA Medical Center, an outpatient clinic, or living in a state veterans' home, approximately 140 medal-winning veterans are asked to participate at NVCAF each year. Veterans participate in many mediums, including visual arts such as painting, sculpting and drawing, as well as creative writing, dance, drama and music.

Planning a Local Competition:

- If your VA facility does not currently host a local Veterans Creative Arts Festival, contact a VA staff member that instructs creative arts and recreational therapy (such as creative arts therapists, recreational and occupational therapists, craft care specialists and other healthcare professionals who use the arts in treatment). An additional staff member that could be approached with your ideas is the Voluntary Services Coordinator. Each veteran that participates will need to have a designated VA staff member contact.
- Start to think about how your Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be funded. See [Funding](#) for more information.
- Encourage staff members to pick a date between the recommended dates of January 1 and March 10 to hold the local competition.
 - It would be ideal if the Facility Director can attend, so coordinate date with him/her before the date is confirmed.
 - Be sure to send a formal invitation to the Director, Associate Director, Chief of Staff and Coordinator of Voluntary Services.
 - Choose a location on-site at the VA for the competition. Locations could include an auditorium for theatrical competitions or an atrium for displaying art. If considering an outside location, prepare for an alternative location in case of inclement weather.
 - Contact local musicians to see if they would be willing to donate their talents as accompanists. Anyone can accompany a performer, even a non-veteran. However, if an accompanist plays a lead, they must be a veteran.
- Publicize the event to veterans and the local community. Have staff members promote the event to their patients and distribute promotional flyers around the facility and community message boards (public library, recreational centers, etc.). Be sure to promote the event at other units and veterans' organizations in your area.
- Reach out to local government officials, art galleries, drama and music professors/teachers, theatres, local television reporters and other local celebrities, and ask them to judge the competition. It is recommended to have at least five judges for each category. Follow the link under *Additional Resources* for more information about judging.
- Approach local companies to donate prizes for the winners. It might be most cost-effective to give a ribbon to place winners and award a prize only to first place. If the company cannot donate, they might be willing to provide the prize items at a reduced cost. Examples for prizes could include:
 - Gift certificate to an art supply store, music store, bookstore or a mall
 - Tickets to a play or movie theatre
 - Art class sessions
 - Gift subscription to *Auxiliary* magazine or art magazine
- All paperwork for NVCAF entrants must be postmarked to the VA national chairpersons no later than October 1. In mid-September, follow up with VA staff members to make sure that all the forms and other submission regulations have been followed. If not, offer to help in any way possible.

Funding:

- While the housing, meals, ground transportation, and other routine expenses for veterans invited to attend NVCAF are covered through national festival funds, additional expenses, such as travel arrangements, are the responsibility of the local VA facility.
 - o If promotional items, prizes and other services (such as accompanying musicians) are not donated, there will be additional costs.
 - o Some American Legion Auxiliary departments have funds (donated from units) for travel expenses for veterans selected to participate in NVCAF, or have allocated for other items, such as prizes, to be used by specific VA facilities.
- Ask for donations. Remember, the worst someone can say is “no”; you never know what you will get if you don’t ask. Everything needed for a local competition, including travel arrangements, can be donated. Ask other service organizations that volunteer at the VA facility to help collect donations.
 - o If an individual or business can’t donate a product, see if they will donate money.
- Examples of possible fundraisers include:
 - o A craft fair. Participants would need to pre-purchase their booths. Auxiliary members could sell concessions.
 - o A street painting festival. Partner with the city to host this event. Artists will need to sponsor themselves or find a sponsor.
 - Consider finding a sponsor(s) to provide all artists with the same supplies and ensure that medium used on the sidewalks are temporary.
 - Have artists submit depictions of the art they will draw ahead of time.
 - Coordinate with the local newspaper to cover the festival (ex. A lifestyle reporter). Work out a deal to have a group of veterans select the best art, possibly called “Veterans Choice”, and feature the winning artwork in the newspaper.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/national-veterans-creative-arts-festival/>

<https://www.streetpaintingfestivalinc.org/>

VA&R Annual Reporting:

Annual reports reflect the cumulative summary of units’ mission service in the department. Each department Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee chair is required to submit via email a narrative report to the division Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee chair, plus copy the national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee chair by May 15.

The annual report is separate from the submission for national award consideration and impact number reporting. However, department reports may be taken into consideration for national awards.

Photos (in a high-resolution format) that show unit mission Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee activities accompany these reports.

Note: Individual members and units should follow their department’s guidelines and deadlines.

Committee-Specific Reporting Guidelines:

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

- How do you support rehabilitation and healing of veterans through arts, crafts, and hobbies?
- How do you support veteran caregivers, family members, and survivors?
- How have you supported your local VA facility?
- How have you supported veterans and their families in the community by collaborating with external like-minded organizations such as Honor Flight, Quilts of Valor, etc.?

- What other opportunities have you taken to support your local veterans and their families in your community?

Deadlines/Important Dates

- Year-end reports — May 15: Department chairmen report due via email to division chairmen with a copy to national chairman.
- Department and Unit Award Nomination Form Completed and Submitted: June 1.
- NVCAF Award: NVCAF Support Award — Send donations to the ALA Foundation to National Headquarters for the current calendar year by Dec. 31.

2025-2026 National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation VA&R Program Awards Deadlines and Submission Requirements

All award submissions must include a narrative (either a PDF or Microsoft Word document) explaining why the department or unit you're nominating should receive the award. The narrative can also be the department chair's report. You may also upload other supporting documentation that will give the committee a full picture of the important mission work your department or unit has accomplished this year. These files can be photos (JPG, JPEG or TIFs -- no larger than 14MB) or PDF documents. If you have more than three supporting files, please email the committee email address listed in the form.

Here are the national awards for this committee:

Unit Award: Most Outstanding VA&R Program (per division)

- All unit entries must be submitted via [electronic form](#) by 5 p.m. EST on June 1.

Note: You will receive a confirmation when your award is submitted.

National Awards Form Link: <https://www.legion-aux.org/National-Awards-Form>

Department Award: Best Department VA&R Program (per division)

- All department entries must be submitted via [electronic form](#) by 5 p.m. EST on June 1.

Note: You will receive a confirmation when your award is submitted.

National Awards Form Link: <https://www.legion-aux.org/National-Awards-Form>

Please note – when applicable, unit and department deadlines differ.

Service to Veterans (Member Award)

- Hour bar recognition for Service to Veterans Volunteers
 - Award: Hour Bar
 - Presented to: Member by her department via ALA National Headquarters Materials and guidelines.
- Volunteers are recognized when specific hour milestones are reached: 50, 100, 300, 500 and 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. Hour bars are also offered in increments of 25,000 and 30,000 hours. After achieving 35,000 hours ALA National Headquarters will issue a separate Lifetime Service Veterans pin.
- Hour bars are provided at no cost to departments; however, the appropriate pin (from which the hour bar is affixed) can be obtained from Emblem Sales at the department's expense.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) support recognition

NVCAF Award: NVCAF Support Recognition

- Award: Recognition during VA&R chairman's remarks at the 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.

- Materials and guidelines:
 - o To be considered, donations to the ALAF must be received by the ALA Foundation from Aug 1 – July 31 of the following year.
 - o ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in August.
- NVCAF will recognize departments/units/members that contribute:
 - o Bronze: \$1,000-\$2,499 to the NVCAF from Aug 1-July 31 of the following year.
 - o Silver: \$2,500-\$4,999 to the NVCAF from Aug 1-July 31 of the following year.
 - o Gold: \$5,000-\$14,999 to the NVCAF from Aug1-Jul 31 of the following year.
 - o ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in August.

Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services (VAVS)

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

- Award: Citation + \$500 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary
- Presented to: Member
- Materials and guidelines:
 - o Candidates for VAVS National Advisory Committee (NAC) Volunteer of the Year will be submitted by the chiefs of voluntary service to the national VAVS deputy (please see supplement for deadline and contact information).
 - o Awarded to the nominee who has given extraordinary service to our nation's veterans through the ALA VA&R program and the VAVS program.
 - o Nominee must serve in an established VA assignment and be defined as a regular scheduled volunteer.
 - o 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).
 - o 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

- Award: Citation plus \$100 donation to VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary.
- Presented to: Member
- Materials and Guidelines:
 - o Given to volunteers who have reached 10,000 hours of service in a VA facility from April 1 to March 31 of the following year.
 - o Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

Member Award: 20,000 Hour Volunteer Service Award

- Award: Citation plus \$200 donation to local VAVS facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary.
- Presented to: Member
- Materials and Guidelines:
 - o Given to volunteers who have reached more than 20,000 hours of service in a VA facility from April 1 to March 31 of the following year.
 - o Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

Individual Recognition Award: Volunteer Recruitment &. Service Department

- Award: Citation presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs
- Presented to: Hospital Representative
- Materials and Guidelines:
 - o No entry form required

- o Awarded to the hospital rep at every facility that shows an increase in both volunteer and volunteer hours at a VA Medical Center from April 1 to March 31 of the following year.
- o The award winners will be determined by the national VAVS representatives through verification of hours and number of volunteers as recorded by VAVS.

Individual Recognition Award: 100 percent VAVS Meeting Attendance.

- Award: Attendance Card presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Presented to: Hospital Representative and Deputy
- Materials and Guidelines:
 - o No entry form required.
 - o An "Attendance Card" will be awarded to each representative and deputy who has 100 percent attendance to VAVS committee meetings at her assigned facility.
 - o The national VAVS representative will verify the winners from VA records.

Department Recognition from The American Legion Award: Michael Guty Homeless Veterans Outreach. (Please note this is not an ALA award, it must be submitted to The American Legion.)

- Award: (plaque presented by The American Legion National Commander at The American Legion's National Convention.)
- This award will be given to The American Legion department that demonstrates American Legion Family involvement in homeless veteran initiatives that show outstanding support for activity in any or all of these areas: volunteerism, prevention, support housing, advocacy and fundraising.
- The required nomination form is available at www.legion.org or by writing or calling the Veterans Employment and Education Commission, The American Legion, 1608 K Street NW, Washington DC 20006; phone 202-861-2700; by email at VE&E@legion.org; or on the VA&R program page at www.ALForVeterans.org.

James H Parke Scholarship

- This substantial scholarship is awarded annually by Veterans Affairs to a student volunteer.
- The American Legion Auxiliary contributes \$2,000 annually to this scholarship fund.
- To be eligible, candidates must:
 - o Have completed 100 hours of regularly scheduled VAVS volunteer service during the calendar year prior to September 1.
 - o Be a student in the 10th grade or above.
 - o Not have reached their 19th birthday.
- The Medical Center director nominates a candidate for the award by submission of the nomination form to the president of the fund by November 1 of each calendar year, late nominations will not be considered.
- The nomination form should be completed to reflect the volunteer service and background of the candidate and include age, years of volunteering, number of volunteer hours, areas of service and affiliated/supporting organizations, if any. See www.va.gov for information on VAVS, James H Parke Scholarship.
- The national winner receives a plaque and a letter of commitment.
- This presentation is usually made at the Annual Meeting of the VAVS National Advisory Committee.

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 veterans of the US Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14th annually.

How-to Sheets

- How to Raise Awareness in Your Communities About the Ever-Increasing Number of Homeless Veterans.
- How to Increase Donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Additional Resources You Can Use

1. Homeless Veterans Coalition: www.nchv.org
2. Other "Hoe to Sheets" can be found at www.ALforveterans.org
3. Quilts of Valor: www.govf.org
4. VA Homeless Programs: www.va.gov/homeless/
5. HUD Homeless Assistance Programs:
https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/homeless/programs
6. On-Call: Handbook for Homeless Veterans and Service Providers
www.legion.org/publications/168493/homelessveterans-handbook
7. The American Legion Family Support Network: www.legion.org/familysupport
8. American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Creative Activities Action Guide www.ALforveterans.org
9. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov