



# HOW TO FACILITATE 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, a 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.
  - See *Sample Press Release* for how to promote the event to local newspapers, or consider writing a Letter to the Editor in which you invite the community to attend.
- 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.



## AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY SUPPORT TOOLS

A collection of resources from National Headquarters to assist and guide members and volunteers in serving veterans, servicemembers and their families.

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- 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 included:
  - Gift certificate to an art supply store, music store, book store 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 April 1. In mid-March, 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.
  - If promotional items, prizes and other services (such as accompanying musicians) are not donated, there will be additional costs.
  - 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.
  - If an individual or business can’t donate a product, see if they will donate money.
- Examples of possible fundraisers include:
  - A craft fair. Participants would need to pre-purchase their booths. Auxiliary members could sell concessions.
  - 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:

- [www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov](http://www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov)
  - Rules for participation and official judging; printable entry forms; etc. The competition handbook is only available online during the months of January, February and March. For specific information regarding the competition process, contact Elizabeth Mackey, NVCAF Director at [Elizabeth.Mackey@va.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Mackey@va.gov).
- [www.streetpaintingfestivalinc.org](http://www.streetpaintingfestivalinc.org)



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- Large street painting festival in Florida, with sponsorship information and artist applications. You will want to start on a smaller scale, so charge accordingly.



## American Legion Auxiliary News Release

Street Address, City, State ZIP Code

[www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org), [your unit's website, if available]

Contact: [Unit PR Chairman], [Unit PR Chairman's Phone Number]; [Unit PR Chairman's E-mail Address] for [Department President's Name]

[DATE]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

### Local Veterans Exhibit Art Talent

[CITY]- Artwork by local veterans will be on display to the public at the [Facility Name] on [Date] at [Time]. It is estimated that over [#] pieces of art will be on display. Categories consist of fine art such as painting, drawing, sculpture and photography; applied art that includes ceramics, woodcarving, needlework and leatherwork; and craft kits such as string art, poster art and fabric art.

Local artists will judge the artwork to determine first, second and third place in each category. The first place winning pieces will advance on to the national level where they will compete with entries submitted by veterans from other VA facilities around the country.

The competition is an annual event that provides veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities the opportunity to participate in creative self-expression in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music as part of their therapy, and to gain recognition for these artistic accomplishments. First place winners from the national competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, hosted this year by the Tomah VA Medical Center in La Crosse, Wisconsin the week of October 18-25 with the art exhibit and stage show performance on Sunday, October 24. For more information visit [www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov](http://www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov)

The American Legion Auxiliary has actively supported this event since 2000, when Past National President Kris West realized the importance this festival held. "This program allows our beloved veterans to rehabilitate their lives, giving them self-respect and confidence that many are lacking through creative outlets of music, dance, drama and other artistic endeavors," states West.

Founded in 1919, the American Legion Auxiliary is the world's largest patriotic women's service organization. With a membership over 850,000, local Auxiliary units have a strong presence in more than 9,500 communities nationwide. The Auxiliary's mission to *serve veterans, their families and their*



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*communities* is carried out through its hundreds of outreach programs delivered by its members, volunteers and National Headquarters.

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