

How to Organize a Veterans in Community Schools Event

Committee: Education

Contact for Questions: education@ALAforVeterans.org

Background

Veterans in Community Schools is an initiative endorsed by The American Legion that brings history to life by connecting military veterans with students—either in classrooms or at school assemblies—as part of lessons on World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, or more recent conflicts such as Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As the number of living veterans from earlier conflicts declines, we are presented with a limited-time opportunity to share their stories and preserve these valuable lessons for future generations.

Veterans are living witnesses to history. The American Legion Family believes their experiences during and after military service should be heard and honored. In addition to discussing historical events, veterans can speak on topics such as supporting military families, proper flag etiquette, and the mission and values of The American Legion Family. Sharing their experiences often provides emotional healing for veterans and is typically seen as a rewarding and meaningful experience.

Steps to Organize a Veterans in Community Schools Event

Participation in this initiative is a suggested activity under the American Legion Auxiliary's Education Programs Action Plan. Activities may be reported under either the Education or Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) program—but not both.

1. Identify and Contact Schools

Reach out to local schools to offer support in organizing a *Veterans in Community Schools* event. Contact the school principal first—via email, phone, or in person—and propose holding the activity for a class, grade level, or the entire student body.

Select any school level—elementary, middle, or high school—and tailor the program accordingly. If possible, have someone with a connection to the school (e.g., a parent or friend of a teacher) make the initial contact.

2. Propose an Activity Plan

If the principal refers you to a teacher or department chair, collaborate with them to shape the program into a meaningful educational experience.

Discuss how veterans' stories can enhance the curriculum and provide supporting resources (listed below) to help teachers prepare students ahead of the visit.

Plan the format, timing, and venue for the event (e.g., classroom, cafeteria, gymnasium, or auditorium). The date can be near Veterans Day (November 11) or Memorial Day, but flexibility is encouraged based on the school calendar.

Customize the content for different age groups:

- **Elementary/middle school:** Flag etiquette, citizenship, or an overview of military service.
- **High school:** In-depth discussions of military service, modern roles of the armed forces, or participation in the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.

Offer to create handouts or supplemental materials for students to take home. All materials should be reviewed and approved by school officials and should not explicitly promote membership in The American Legion Family.

Assign roles to participants, such as greeters, moderators, and ALA or Legion representatives. It's helpful to know the proper way to address service members, even though military titles aren't required.

3. Identify Veterans to Participate

Once a date is agreed upon, find veterans from relevant service eras who are willing to speak.

Possible sources include:

- ALA members' family members
- Local Legion post commanders or committee chairs
- School staff who are veterans or know family members who are

Aim for diversity in branch of service and time of service to give students a broader understanding of military life.

4. Prepare the Veterans and the Students

Meet with participating veterans to clarify what they are comfortable sharing. Coordinate with teachers to prepare students and establish respectful guidelines. For example, students should be asked not to inquire whether the veteran has killed someone, as it may be a traumatic or inappropriate question.

Offer suggested questions and talking points in advance:

- When and where did you serve?
- What motivated you to join, and why did you choose your branch?
- What was basic training like?
- What were your responsibilities?
- What were some memorable or humorous moments?
- Where did you travel during your service?
- What was your experience transitioning back to civilian life?
- Are you part of any veterans' organizations?
- How did your service shape your values and perspectives?

5. Implement the Event

Use your detailed plan to ensure a smooth event. Consider hosting a small reception afterwards for veterans, school staff, and student representatives if resources allow.

Sample Agenda:

1. Assemble students and veterans.
2. Welcome and explain the purpose of the event.
3. Recite the Pledge of Allegiance and/or present the flag (consider involving JROTC).
4. Invite brief remarks from any distinguished guests (e.g., mayor, school official).
5. Allow veterans to introduce themselves and share their stories.
6. Conduct a student-led Q&A session.
7. Thank each veteran and offer individual remarks or small gifts if appropriate.
8. Consider closing with the Pledge of Allegiance again to reflect on its meaning.
9. Conclude the event with a collective thank you to all participants.

6. Follow Up

- **With the school:** Send thank-you notes to administrators and ask whether they would like to host future events. Provide information about American Legion Family programs for students, families, and the broader community.

- **With veterans:** Send personalized thank-you notes and ask if they are interested in participating in future events.
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Promote the ALA and Report Your Impact

While promoting ALA membership is not the primary purpose of this event, members are encouraged to wear ALA apparel and share why they value their affiliation. Please track and report all hours and activities to your Unit's Education or VA&R Chair.

Additional Ideas

- Assign someone to take photos or video (with proper permission).
 - Write a summary or blog post for the unit newsletter or department publication.
 - Collect and share school-generated content (e.g., student essays, thank-you notes, school newspaper articles) with permission.
 - Submit your activities in your Unit's annual impact report.
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Resources

- [*America's Veterans Teacher Guide – The American Legion*](#)
- [*Promoting Historic Preservation in Community Schools – The History Channel*](#)
- [*Our Veterans: Sharing Their Stories – The History Channel*](#)
- [*Veterans History Project – Library of Congress*](#)