

# **VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION**

## **PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT PLAN**

**2024-2025**

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

This year, President Charlotte's theme is "Securing our foundation to build a stronger future".

One of our foundational programs is Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation.

In general, we can promote our mission by:

1. Volunteering at VA Health Care Facilities:
  - Auxiliary members can volunteer at VA hospitals and clinics. Their assistance can make a significant impact on veterans' lives.
  - Activities may include companionship, organizing recreational events, or helping with administrative tasks.
2. Assist Veteran Caregivers and Family Members:
  - Recognize the vital role played by caregivers and family members in supporting veterans.
  - Offer emotional support, respite care, and resources to help them cope with the challenges they face.
3. Support Rehabilitation and Healing:
  - Encourage veterans to participate in arts, crafts, and hobbies. These activities can provide therapeutic benefits, foster creativity, and aid in their healing process.
  - Consider organizing workshops or events where veterans can engage in artistic expression or learn new skills.
4. Promote Job Fairs for Veterans:
  - Collaborate with organizations like the American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs, and local Chambers of Commerce.
  - Spread the word about job fairs specifically tailored for veterans and their families. These events can connect them with employment opportunities.
5. Serve Veterans in Your Area:

- Look for opportunities to directly serve veterans within your community.
  - Consider volunteering at shelters, food banks, or programs that support homeless veterans.
6. Raise Awareness About Mental Health Assistance:
- Educate veterans and their families about available mental health resources.
  - Encourage them to seek help when needed and provide information on crisis hotlines and counseling services.
7. Be the One to Make a Difference:
- As individuals, we can take action. Start by initiating a veterans program or project within your local American Legion Unit or District.
  - Whether it's organizing a fundraiser, creating a support group, or advocating for policy changes, every effort counts.

Remember, small acts of kindness and advocacy can collectively create a positive impact on the lives of veterans. Let's honor their service by standing with them and ensuring they receive the care and support they deserve. 🙌🏻🎗️

If you need further assistance or have any other questions, feel free to ask! 😊

**#BuildingTheHouse**

Linda Knoblach-Harkness

VA&R Chairman

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## **V.A.V.S. Representative/Deputy**

### **Calling All Volunteers: Support Our Veterans!**

Did you know that Florida boasts 7 VA Medical Centers, 7 State Nursing Homes, and 6 Outpatient Clinics? Additionally, there's 1 facility in Biloxi, Mississippi. These centers play a vital role in providing essential care and services to our veterans.

### **Immediate Need for Representatives and Deputies:**

- **VA Medical Centers:** Broward, Daytona, Miami, and Tampa urgently require dedicated representatives and deputies.
- **Nursing Homes:** Emory L. Bennett, Daytona Beach and Alexander Sandy Nininger, Pembroke Pines also need your support.

### **How You Can Help:**

- **Step 1:** Consider becoming a VA Voluntary Service Representative (V.A.V.S. REP) or Deputy (V.A.V.S. DEP).
- **Step 2:** Reach out to me at [veteransaffairs@alafl.org](mailto:veteransaffairs@alafl.org) if you're interested in serving at any of these facilities.
- **Step 3:** Spread the word! Share this information with your fellow members at Post homes and districts. Let's rally together to make a difference in the lives of our veterans.

Remember, every act of service counts. By standing with our veterans, we honor their sacrifice and ensure they receive the care they deserve.

## **SERVICE TO VETERANS LOCALLY**

### **Honoring Our Volunteers: Service to Veterans**

Service to Veterans recognizes the invaluable contributions of volunteers who selflessly serve veterans, service members, and their families beyond the walls of a VA Medical Center. These dedicated individuals engage in meaningful projects, both from their homes and within their local communities. Here are the key points:

- **Community and Home-Based Service:**
  - As a volunteer, you can extend your support beyond the medical centers, by reaching out to veterans wherever they reside.
  - Whether it's organizing events, providing companionship, or assisting with essential tasks, your impact is felt far and wide.

- Visit veterans and remember them on special occasions.
- Offer to drive veterans to doctor appointments.
- Offer to stay with a veteran while his/her primary caregiver goes shopping or out for a break.
- Take a veteran for a Sunday drive, picnic, or maybe to see one of his/her friends.
- Treat veterans to tickets for sporting events or movies.
- Arrange an outing to a Legion meeting for special events such as a Veterans Day dinner.
- Furnishing a room in transitional housing programs as a special project.
- Help furnish new living space for a veteran graduating from a transitional housing program. This might include the veteran and his/her family. School supplies for children or meals might be extra touches.

**Personal Recordkeeping:**

- Service to Veterans volunteers maintain their own records, meticulously tracking your hours and efforts.
- This commitment ensures transparency and accountability, reflecting your genuine dedication.

**The New Service Pin:**

- National is proud to introduce a special pin designed specifically for these community and home-based volunteers.
- This pin symbolizes your tireless work in supporting veterans and their families.

**Hour Bars:**

- As an additional recognition, hour bars can be earned and attached to the pin.
- Each hour bar represents a significant contribution, a testament to your unwavering commitment.

We celebrate you, the unsung heroes who make a difference in the lives of our veterans. Your compassion, resilience, and service embody the true spirit of gratitude and honor.

More information regarding service to veterans may be found on the National website under Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation:

Resource: A Guide for Volunteers, [www.alaforveterans.org](http://www.alaforveterans.org) – download or [www.emblem.legion.org](http://www.emblem.legion.org) for the printed version.

## **ASSIST VETERANS IN ACCESSING VA BENEFITS / HEALTH CARE**

Coordinating with local American Legion Post Service Officers is essential for providing effective support to veterans. Here are actionable steps to enhance services and engage with veterans:

### **1. Local Service Officers:**

- Connect with your local American Legion Post Service Officer. They play a vital role in assisting veterans with their needs.
- Collaborate with them to identify veterans who require support and connect them with available resources.

### **2. Guest Speaker Invitations:**

- Invite the Unit, District, or Department Service Officer to be a guest speaker at unit or department events.
- Their expertise can educate members about veterans' benefits, programs, and services.

### **3. Locate Service Officers:**

- Find your local Service Officer by downloading the list from [legion.org/serviceofficers](http://legion.org/serviceofficers).
- This resource provides valuable contact information for connecting with Service Officers.

### **4. Assist Eligible Veterans:**

- Help eligible veterans attain benefits by referring them to the appropriate channels.
- Encourage veterans to explore the VA health care system, including hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), and Vet Centers.

### **5. Town-Hall Meetings:**

- Participate in town-hall meetings organized by The American Legion.
- Encourage veterans and their family members to attend these gatherings, where they can voice concerns and learn about available services.

### **6. Women Veterans Hotline:**

- Share the VA Health Care Hotline for women veterans: 1-855-VA-Women (1-855-829-6636).

- Women veterans can access information and support through this dedicated hotline.

Remember, our collective efforts make a difference in veterans' lives. Let's continue to serve those who have served us!

## **ASSIST IN ACTIVITIES THAT HELP HOMELESS VETERANS**

Here are a few impactful ways to support homeless veterans. Each action contributes to making a positive difference in their lives. Let's break down these suggestions:

### **1. Assisting the Homeless Veteran Coordinator:**

- Reach out to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department.
- Offer your assistance in responding to requests related to homeless veterans or service providers.
- By working together, you can ensure timely and effective support for those in need.

### **2. Handmade Items for Warmth:**

- Crochet hats, scarves, or mittens to be distributed directly to homeless veterans.
- These handmade items provide warmth and comfort during challenging times.

### **3. Financial Support:**

- Make payments for overdue rent, utility bills, deposits, and security deposits.
- Financial assistance can prevent homelessness and stabilize living situations.

### **4. Stand Down Events:**

- Host or volunteer at homeless veterans' stand down events.
- These events offer free goods and services, including haircuts and medical exams.
- It's a chance to connect with veterans and address their immediate needs.

### **5. Engage with Local Shelters and Projects:**

- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters, transitional housing projects, and permanent housing projects in your community.
- Identify their volunteer and in-kind contribution needs:
  - **Meal Preparation and Serving:** Help provide nutritious meals.

- **Clothes Collection and Distribution:** Gather clothing donations and distribute them to veterans.
- **Hygiene Kits and Buddy Baskets:** Assemble and deliver essential hygiene items.
- **Household Items and Furniture:** Assist in securing necessary items for veterans' homes.

#### 6. **Tree of Warmth:**

- Create a “Tree of Warmth” by collecting scarves, mittens, and hats.
- Attach them to a tree in a location frequented by homeless individuals.
- Include a sign inviting those in need to take what they require.

By supporting homeless veterans, we honor their service and can help restore their dignity.

## **SUPPORT REHABILITATION AND HEALING OF VETERANS THROUGH ARTS, CRAFTS AND HOBBIES**

As the national presenting sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary has a significant opportunity to support this program and raise awareness of veterans' creative achievements.

Here are some actionable steps that the American Legion Auxiliary can take to enhance its involvement and impact:

### 1. **Fundraising Initiatives:**

- Encourage departments to sponsor fundraisers specifically dedicated to supporting the NVCAF.
- Increased monetary support will contribute to the success of the festival and highlight veterans' creative talents.

### 2. **Earn Recognition at National Convention:**

- Units and departments can earn recognition by making donations to support VA Creative Arts Festivals.
- Volunteering individually or as a unit at local Creative Arts Festivals demonstrates commitment to veterans' well-being.

### 3. **Targeted Arts, Crafts, and Hobby Projects:**

- Identify arts, crafts, and hobby projects that resonate with veterans.

- Examples include writing, oral history recording, visual arts, performing arts, quilting, and gardening.
- Units can organize their own projects or introduce existing veteran arts initiatives within the community.

#### **4. Supplement Visual Veteran Artists' Needs:**

- Contribute donated supplies to support visual veteran artists.
- These supplies play a crucial role in their creative expression and healing process.

#### **5. Support Veterans' Participation:**

- Allocate funds through departments to help local veterans attend state and national events such as the Wheelchair Games, Veterans Creative Arts Festivals, and Paralympics.
- By facilitating their participation, we empower veterans to engage in meaningful activities and connect with their peers.

Every effort counts, and by championing veterans' creative achievements we are contributing to their recovery.

## **HELP THE AMERICAN LEGION, STATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROMOTE JOB FAIRS FOR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

Supporting veterans and their families involves active engagement and meaningful actions. Here are some significant ways to contribute:

### **1. Informational Table at Local Job Fairs:**

- Host an informational table at local job fairs to provide veterans with resources, career guidance, and information about available opportunities.
- Connect veterans with job search resources and help them explore employment options.

### **2. Local Job Fairs at Your Post Home:**

- Support the Legion by helping host local job fairs at your American Legion post home.
- These events create networking opportunities and connect veterans with potential employers.



**3. Serve as a Career E-Mentor for Women Veterans:**

- Encourage Auxiliary members to serve as career mentors for female veterans.
- Participate in e-mentoring networks that virtually pair mentors with veterans, providing guidance and support.

**4. Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity:**

- Specifically, consider volunteering for home building and renovation projects that benefit veterans and their families.
- Locate veteran-specific projects through The American Legion or local Habitat for Humanity chapters.

By actively participating, we honor veterans' service and contribute to their well-being.

## **ASSIST AND SUPPORT CAREGIVERS OF VETERANS**

Supporting veterans and their caregivers is essential, and your proactive approach can make a significant impact. Here are practical steps to consider:

**1. Invite the VA Caregiver Support Coordinator:**

- Reach out to the VA caregiver support coordinator in the VA healthcare system closest to you.
- Invite them to make a presentation at your unit, district, or community-wide meeting.
- Their insights and information can raise awareness and provide valuable resources for caregivers.

**2. Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network:**

- Familiarize yourself with the Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network.
- This network connects caregivers, allowing them to share experiences, provide emotional support, and exchange practical advice.

**3. Become a Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Trainer:**

- Consider becoming a trainer or volunteer in the field of veteran caregiver peer support.
- Your expertise can empower other caregivers and enhance their well-being.

#### **4. Legacy Corps AmeriCorps Membership:**

- If the Legacy Corps project operates in your state or locality, explore the opportunity to become a Legacy Corps AmeriCorps member.
- This service allows you to directly assist veterans and their families.

#### **5. Volunteer as a VA Voluntary Service Support Caregiver:**

- Check if the VA health care system closest to you offers volunteer opportunities for support caregivers.
- Volunteering in this capacity allows you to directly contribute to veterans' care and well-being.

Remember, your dedication matters, and by actively engaging, you honor both veterans and their caregivers

## **REPORTS**

**End-of-Year Reports are due**

**Units to Districts April 1, 2025**

**Districts to Department April 15, 2025**

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

VA Caregiver Support – [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov)

Elizabeth Dole Foundation- <http://www.elizabethdolefoundation.org>

Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network <http://www.taps.org/MVCN>

## **AWARDS**

### **DEPARTMENT AWARD:**

**Dorothy Smith Award:** Revolving Trophy

To be awarded annually to the Unit that reports the “Best All Around VAR

Program or Project” Please follow the instructions (precisely) in the Unit Guide

Each entry must be received by the Department Chairperson no later than

thirty (30) days prior to Department Convention.

## **NATIONAL AWARDS**

All award submissions must include a narrative (either a PDF or Microsoft Word document) explaining why the department or unit being nominating should receive the award. The narrative can also be the department chair's report. The Department Chairman 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. **The submission is due to Department no later than May 1,2025**

### **NATIONAL AWARD: 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 and 1,000.

After the first 1,000-hour bar is awarded, the next bar earned will be in 1,000 hour increments up to 20,000 hours. Hour bars are also offered in increments of 25,000 and 30,000 hours.

### **NVCAF AWARD**

All unit entries must be submitted via **electronic form** to **veteransaffairs@alaf.org** by **5 p.m. EST on May 1,2025**.

### **NVCAF AWARD:**

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NAFA) support recognition

Type of Award: Verbal announcement during VAR chairman's remarks at the 2025 ALA National Convention.

Presented to: Departments, Units and/or Members who qualify for stated contribution level to NAFA. Donations are made through the American Legion

Auxiliary Foundation.

Materials and Guidelines:

NAFA will recognize Departments/Units/Members that contribute in this way.

Bronze: \$1,000-\$2,400 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2024-July 31, 2025

Silver: \$2,500-\$4,999 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2024-July 31, 2025

Gold: \$5,000-\$14,999 to the NAFA from Aug. 1, 2024-July 31, 2025

To be considered, donations to the NAFA must be received in the national office from August 1, 2024 through July 31, 2025.

ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in July.

### **VETERAN AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICE (V.A.V.S.) AWARDS**

#### **National Award: V.A.V.S. Volunteer of the Year Award/ALA NAC Nominee**

Type of Award: Citation + \$500 donation to V.A.V.S. facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary.

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines:

Candidates for V.A.V.S. National Advisory Committee (NAC) Volunteer of the Year will be submitted by the chiefs of voluntary service and department chairperson by November 1, 2024, and to the National V.A.V.S. deputy.

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 V.A.V.S. 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, 2024-March 31, 2025).

Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by the first Friday in June.

### **MEMBER AWARD: 20,000 Hour Volunteer Service Award**

Type of Award: Citation + \$200 donation to V.A.V.S. facility or VCAF of her choice presented by the American Legion Auxiliary

Presented to: Member

Materials and Guidelines:

Given to volunteers who have reached more than 20,000 hours of service in a VA facility during this year (April 1, 2024-March 31, 2025).

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, 2024 –

March 31, 2025.

The award winner will be determined by the national V.A.V.S. representative through verification of hours and number of volunteers as recorded by V.A.V.S..

**INDIVIDUAL RECOGNITION AWARD: 100 Percent V.A.V.S. 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 V.A.V.S. committee meetings at her assigned facility.

The national V.A.V.S. representative will verify the winners from VA records.

**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 have completed 100 hours of regularly scheduled V.A.V.S. volunteer service during the calendar year prior to September 1; be a student in the 10th grade or above; and have not 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. Nominations received after that date 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](http://www.va.gov) for information on V.A.V.S., 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 V.A.V.S. National Advisory Committee.

**ALWAYS:** Check the Unit Guide, website and National website for specific requirements for all awards.