

2017-2022 American Legion Auxiliary Programs Action Plan

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

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

Committee Contact Information

va&r@ALAforVeterans.org

What can you do?

1. 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, 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 coordinator in your department 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

2. 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/Units

- 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 Wheel Chair 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. 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 conducting a local Creative Arts Festival.
- Advocate for art therapy, music therapy, drama and recreational therapy programs in VA health care systems.
- Research other forms of rehabilitation for veterans such as the National Wheel Chair games. Distribute contact information to units.

3. 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 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.

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

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.

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 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.)

5. 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 recognizes volunteers who provide service to veterans, servicemembers 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 in support of 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 your PR chairman to tell the community what work your unit members are doing for veterans.

Department

- 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.

6. Transitioning back to civilian life is one of the biggest challenges 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/health-care

Unit/Department

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

7. 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.

Additional Resources

ALA Resources: How to Organize a Job Fair for Veterans and/or Military and Veteran Spouses

- www.uschamber.com/hiringourheroes
- www.ementorprogram.org/militaryspouse-ementor/
- The American Legion and Habitat For Humanity Volunteer involvement toolkit–
www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/habitat.pdf
- VA Caregiver Support – www.caregiver.va.gov/
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation- www.elizabethdolefoundation.org
- Military and Veteran Caregiver Peer Support Network - milvetcaregivernetwork.org

VA&R Reporting*

Mid Year Reports

Mid-Year reports reflect the program work of units in the department, and are intended as an opportunity for mid-year correction. Each department VA&R chairman is required to submit a narrative report to the division VA&R chairman, plus copy the national VA&R chairman.

Year End Reports

Annual reports reflect the program work of units in the department, and may result in a national award for participants if award requirements are met. Each department VA&R chairman is required to submit a narrative report to the division VA&R chairman, plus copy the national VA&R chairman. Members and units should follow their department's protocol and deadlines.

**For deadlines and contact information, please consult the Annual Supplement to the 2017-2022 Programs Action Plan or visit the VA&R Committee page on the national website, www.ALAforVeterans.org.*

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

- How did the units participate in the caregiver support program?
- Describe any exceptional efforts members made in earning their Service to Veterans hours.
- What assistance did units give at a stand down in your department? What did units learn about hosting a stand down? What went well; what would they do differently?

VA&R Awards Deadlines and Submission Requirements:

Taking the time to share a favorite story about the positive impact you or someone you know has had on our mission is worth doing! It helps us tell the world who we are, what we do, and why we matter. Just three simple steps to add your part to our national success story:

- 1) Please follow instructions as you fill out the National Report and Awards Cover Sheet found in the awards section of the Programs Action Plan.
- 2) Provide details/examples about the activity as outlined in the award's materials and guidelines section.
- 3) Submit as indicated in the Annual Supplement to the Programs Action Plan.

National Report and Awards Cover Sheet, deadlines, and VA&R committee contact information may be found on the VA&R committee page on the national website, www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Service to Veterans

- A. **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 hours. 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 to 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. See *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers*.
- B. **Unit Award: Most Outstanding Unit VA&R Program**
 - Award: Citation Plaque
 - Presented to: One unit in each division (5) announced by the national VA&R committee at the pre-convention meeting.
 - Materials and guidelines:
 - The entry must be typewritten in narrative format, not to exceed 1,000 words.
 - Include pictures, clippings, scrapbooks, folders, etc.
- C. **Department Award: Best Department VA&R Program**
 - Award: Citation
 - Presented to: One department in each division (5) announced by the national VA&R committee at the pre-convention meeting.
 - Materials and guidelines:
 - The entry must be typewritten in narrative format, not to exceed 1,000 words.
 - Include pictures, clippings, scrapbooks, folders, etc.

National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) support recognition

A. 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:
 - To be considered, donations to the ALAF must be received by the ALA Foundation from Aug. 1-July 31 of the following year.
 - ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in August.

NVCAF will recognize departments/units/members that contribute:

- Bronze: \$1,000-\$2,499 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1-July 31 of the following year.
- Silver: \$2,500-\$4,999 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1-July 31 of the following year.
- Gold: \$5,000-\$14,999 to the NVCAF from Aug. 1-July 31 of the following year.
- To be considered, donations to the ALAF must be received by the ALA Foundation from Aug. 1-July 31 of the following year.
- ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in August.

Veteran Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS)

A. 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:
 - 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).
 - Awarded to the nominee who has given extraordinary service to our nation's veterans through the 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.

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

C. Member Award: 20,000 Hour Volunteer Service

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

D. Individual Recognition Award: Volunteer Recruitment & Service Department

- 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 to March 31 of the following year.
 - The award winners will be determined by the national VAVS representative through verification of hours and number of volunteers as recorded by VAVS.

E. 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:
 - 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.

F. **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, supportive 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.ALAforVeterans.org.

G. **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 VAVS volunteer service during the calendar year prior to September 1
 - Be a student in the 10th grade or above
 - 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 servicemembers 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 U.S. Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 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 "How to Sheets" can be found at ALAforVeterans.org
3. Quilts of Valor: www.qovf.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/homeless-veterans-handbook
7. The American Legion Family Support Network: www.legion.org/familysupport
8. American Legion Auxiliary Veterans Creative Activities Action Guide,
www.ALAforVeterans.org
9. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov
10. The national VA&R Committee Facebook group, search ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R)
11. Your national VA&R committee members (see VA&R program page on the national website or Annual Supplement for contact information)