



2017-2022

VA&R Plan of Action for Units and Members

1. Assist in activities that help homeless veterans.
 - a. Ideas: Units and Members
 - Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your Department and offer to assist 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.
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.
****The Fargo VA Medical Center is hosting a Creative Arts Festival February 14,**

2018. Information on the Festival is being sent from National in December. Keep an eye out for it!**

- a. Ideas: Units and Members
 - 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.
3. Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs, and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.
 - a. Ideas: Units and 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.
 - Host an informational table at a local job fair.
 - Support the Legion by helping host a local job fair at your post home.
4. Enroll Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.
 - a. Ideas: Units and 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.
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, 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.

a. Ideas: Members

- 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.

b. Ideas: Units

- 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.

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.

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.

a. Ideas: Units and 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

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

7. Assist and support caregivers of veterans.

a. 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.

b. Ideas: 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.

Awards

A. Member Awards: Hour Bar Recognition for Service to Veterans Volunteers

- 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*.
- 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
- *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.
- 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
- *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.

- B. Unit Award: Most Outstanding Unit VA&R Program - Citation Plaque
- Presented to One unit in each division 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. 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.

This is just part of the Plan of Action available from the National office. The 12 page; 5 year Plan can be found at alaforveterans.org under the Mission Outreach Committees under the "Members Only" tab. If you haven't signed up yet to use the National website, all you need is your membership number. It's easy and a very good go-to tool for ALA information and ideas.

Please email (bootsnd@gmail.com) or call 701-361-8908 if you have any questions.

LaVonne Matthews
2017-2018 VA&R Chair
Department of North Dakota

