Practical Strategies for Engaging Veteran and Military-Affiliated Patrons at Your Library
Introductions

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Why Veteran and Military-Affiliated Patrons?

By the numbers:

- **1,335,848** Active Duty Service Members
- **1,551,972** Active Duty Family Members
- **800,064** Reserves and National Guard
- **1,015,386** Reserves/National Guard Family Members
- **18,592,457** Veterans

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics; Military OneSource Military Community Demographics
Libraries and Veteran and Military-Affiliated Patrons

Library by Petty Officer 2nd Class Magen F Reed is in the public domain.

USAG Japan library holds Stuffed Animal Sleepover at the Library by Winifred Brown is in the public domain.
Statewide Partnerships, Training, Programming, and Tools
Inclusive Statewide Programs
State of Connecticut
Military Saves Week

Connecticut State Library

[Links to related resources]

Finance - Service to Veterans & Military Families - LibGuides Home at Connecticut State Library, Division of Library Development (ctstatelibrary.org)
State Resources for Engaging Blind and Physically Disabled Veterans

Connecting Visually Impaired Veterans with Assistive Technology

Connecticut State Library for the Blind and Physically Disabled
How to Engage Veterans and Military Families in a Public Library

Presented by Lee Ann Amend, Library Director for Sharon Public Library, Sharon, MA
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Where Do I Begin?

Choose Your Audience

- Vietnam Veterans
- Post-Vietnam Veterans (wars and campaigns that came after Vietnam such as: Desert Storm, Shield, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, etc.)
Know Your Audience

Vietnam veterans

• Mostly retired, living on a fixed income, and have time to enjoy free programming
• They enjoy military history and other historical topics
• Daytime programming is easier for this older population
• Appreciates being thanked for their service
• Willing to talk about their experiences with other veterans

OIF, OEF and other post Vietnam veterans

• Most are working and have families
• Don’t feel comfortable being thanked for their service and don’t consider themselves heroes
• Most prefer not to talk about their experiences
• Many suffer from PTSD and other physical and emotional issues
• Have difficulty applying for VA benefits
• Don’t know what libraries have to offer, and don’t use them
Secure Funding for Your Program

Funding opportunities include:

• LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act)
• Humanities (state or national)
• Local Cultural Council Grants
• Friends of the Library
• Local businesses and restaurants (can often claim tax credit for their donations to a good cause)
• Other funds such as budget funding or other private grants
Planning Your Program

• Design your **first program for** military families to get the **largest audience** you can. You want to learn who they are, and what type of programs, services and information they would be interested in.

• **Expect parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses and children** of veterans to attend.

• Create a program that will **appeal to all ages** and **ask for volunteers**.

• **Choose a time and date** that doesn’t coincide with another town-wide or sports program. Remember, **most OIF/OEF Vets are working**.
Promote and Publicize

• Create informational **flyers, brochures** and other materials.

• Send information out through your **website, email contacts, social and other local media sources**.

• Send information to the **schools, parent teacher organization, local veterans organizations**, and other groups.

• Create a **patron program registration form**. Keep contact list information for future use.
Educate and Inform

• Remember, Veterans and their families may not know what libraries offer. Create an information brochure or packet of information for all ages.

• Display technology and other “Library of Things” items that patrons can check out. Ex. musical instruments, hotspots, laptops, headphones, e-readers, tools, sewing kits, hearing and sight equipment, games, STEM kits, grab & go kits for children, movies for all ages, books on applying for VA benefits, movies, etc.

Image courtesy Sharon Public Library
Gather Information

• Create a survey asking questions about services, programs and information that military families would attend. Include questions about timing of event, special speakers such as Veteran benefit experts, college admission counselors, etc.

• Distribute and request that it be completed before leaving the event.

• Create a sign-up sheet for those interested in joining a library sponsored veteran’s club. Let them know they can have an opportunity to help plan and host events or programs.
Program Suggestion: 
Musical Café for Military Families and Friends

- Consider hiring a band or DJ to play a variety of music.
- Contact local restaurants for appetizer donations for the event. Remind them about their tax deduction. Provide beverages.
- Make sure you have a host for the program to announce program activities.
- Invite and introduce the local veterans affairs officer and other members of local VA organizations to meet participants and distribute information.
- Partner with your Friends of the Library organization for help with the event.
Musical Café for Military Families and Friends (continued)

- Have children make themed decorations during the storytime/craft sessions a month before the event. Hang them up so parents can see their children’s artwork.
- Plan activities for children in the children’s room or other space.
- Invite the Youth Advisory Committee to plan activities for tweens and teens for the event. Provide snacks.
- Make sure all participants fill out the survey instrument before they leave.
- Thank everyone for their participation.

Image courtesy Sharon Public Library
Thank Volunteers After the Event
Building Successful Partnerships
Russell Library Veterans’ Writing Group: We Were There

Images courtesy Russell Library
Veterans’ Writing Group

“We Were There” is the Russell Library Veterans’ Writing Group that has been meeting since 2012.

This group has participants from all branches of service, and both men and women.
Partnerships

• Community Reads: One Book One Town
• Community Foundation of Middlesex County
• Connecticut Humanities
• Local Schools: 4th Graders Book Discussion
Christy Billings and Liz Petry: Facilitators

Partners in crime…(aka writing!) for the Russell Library Veterans’ Writing Group: “We Were There.”

Image courtesy Russell Library
One Book One Middletown Community Read

- Article in American Libraries Magazine: *Helping Warriors Unleash the Power of the Pen*.
- Planned to host a writing group for Veterans with Liz Petry, a local author, to model our writing group on the Veteran’s Writing workshop written about in the article.
- Liz had taught college English and her husband was the commander of the Veterans of the Vietnam War in Middletown.
Prompts based on passages from *Unbroken* by Laura Hillenbrand

1. A Person You Admire
2. Memorable Event or Place
3. Cultural Differences Encountered

At the end of three weeks, the writers wanted to continue.

We planned a format for the sessions and looked for funding.
Community Foundation Middlesex County

Image courtesy Russell Library
The How of Our Weekly Meetings

Meeting Format (Pre-COVID)

• Agenda of discussion items. These include events the writers are attending, excerpts of podcasts or video clips, articles, book, magazine, or NYT articles/excerpts.

• Writers would read their work, and receive critiques or comments.

• Last 30 min would be writing on a prompt.
Veterans’ Writing Group

Images courtesy Russell Library
Partnership CT Humanities

• With a grant, Author Craig Grossi and his dog Fred, who traveled home with him from Afghanistan came to the Middletown Military Museum.
• He held two sessions, one for the public, and one for the Veterans Writing Group.
Talking about the *Writing Process* with the Veterans and Craig and Fred

Images courtesy Russell Library
Virtual Book Discussion with Lawrence School 4th Graders and Russell Library Veterans

Image courtesy Russell Library
In Their Own Words

Jerry Augustine
Army, Vietnam, 196th Light Infantry Brigade

“I almost lost my life six times…. I feel I had a guardian angel and got to come home. There’s a reason for me to be here because now I help out Veterans.”

Images courtesy Russell Library
Thank you from the Russell Library Veterans’ Writing Group.

Image courtesy Russell Library
Libraries and Veterans Toolkit
Introducing the Toolkit

The Toolkit contains:

- Lesson plans
- Exhibit ideas
- Program outlines
- Collection development ideas
- Best practice documents
- and more!

The goal of the Toolkit is to help ease the way for those just getting started in this work - and to make it easier for those already engaged to find new ideas and new strategies to increase the success of their programs.
About the Toolkit

- Searchable and browsable
  - Type of library
  - Type of program or activity
  - Type of audience
  - Topic of program or activity
- CC BY-NC licensed
Visit the Toolkit

https://veterans.libguides.com
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Questions?

Or contact the Libraries & Veterans National Forum Project Team at librariesveterans@gmail.com