



# American Legion Auxiliary

## Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers



In the Spirit of Service Not Self  
for Veterans, God and Country





# **Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers**

**Revised 2014**

## **PREFACE**

This guide book contains the policies and procedures of the American Legion Auxiliary that govern volunteer service rendered by our members. The following volunteer programs, Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) and Service to Veterans (the combination of the American Legion Auxiliary programs formerly known as Field Service and Home Service) are a significant part of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) Committee.

Information pertaining to the VA&R Committee structure and budget is also located in this guide book.

For additional information about VA&R and its service programs, please refer to the annual VA&R Plan of Action at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In April 1946, The American Legion Family joined forces with several other veterans service organizations, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to form what is known as Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS). Today, American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) volunteers serve alongside members of the community as VAVS volunteers and as volunteers through the Auxiliary's own Service to Veterans program. The information included in this guide book is meant to educate members on everything from what to expect as a volunteer, to the obligations of the organization and its leadership structure on a national, state, and local level.

## **HISTORY OF THE FORMAL VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAM**

Since World War I, the women of the American Legion Auxiliary have taken an active role in the care and rehabilitation of veterans. These early efforts, however, were largely uncoordinated and not integrated into a formal healthcare plan or program. It wasn't until 1930 that care and rehabilitation for veterans were integrated under a unified Veterans Affairs program similar to what we know today.

During World War II, it was determined that a need existed for a coordinated volunteer effort to direct the activity of committed individuals and hundreds of service and welfare groups such as the Auxiliary. This need developed into a formal volunteer program providing aid and assistance to members of the armed forces injured in war.

By the end of the war, the immediate focal point of interest for many volunteer groups seemed lost; however, leaders of these groups realized that the training these volunteers had received during wartime shouldn't be lost, and a new outlet for their efforts had to be identified.

Since these volunteers had focused specifically on aiding and assisting servicemembers, it was only natural that leadership of the groups they represented decided to focus their time, skill, and effort in peacetime, helping care for a new group of men and women now considered veterans.

On April 8, 1946, representatives of several veterans service organizations, including The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary, met in Washington, D.C., with the Assistant Administrator for Special Services. This meeting resulted in the still new Veterans Administration developing regulations and procedures making a

provision for the use of volunteers through the VA Special Services program for hospitalized veterans. Before this meeting concluded, their first VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Advisory Committee was formed.

Quickly, the VA realized the potential of a coordinated volunteer effort. Less than a year later, on Feb. 12, 1947, the scope of the VAVS plan was widened to include coordination of volunteer aid in all appropriate phases of the VA medical center program.

In later years, as more wars ensued, the Auxiliary heeded the call for volunteers. In 1964, the Auxiliary inaugurated a new program called Field Service Volunteers. Answering a need and call to action, in 1974 the Auxiliary introduced the Home Service program which recognized and supplemented the care given to America's veterans.

In 2013, the American Legion Auxiliary convention body voted to combine Field Service and Home Service hours under an umbrella called Service to Veterans. As it stands today, under direction of the ALA's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program, members serve as VAVS volunteers and as Service to Veterans volunteers. VAVS volunteers must serve in a VA healthcare facility (VA medical centers, VA hospitals, clinics, etc.), whereas Service to Veterans volunteers can serve from their homes or in the community with other service organizations.

Regardless of where service takes place, American Legion Auxiliary members are known across the country as a go-to resource for this country's veterans and their families. The Auxiliary membership is proud of its legacy of volunteer service, and it is our goal to continue our valuable contribution in the years to come. Both programs continue to reflect our care, commitment, and compassion for veterans.

## **AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION CODE OF ETHICS**

The ALA has adopted a code of ethics to guide both VAVS and Service to Veterans volunteers while serving in their communities. This code is meant not only to protect veterans and their families, but also to protect volunteers and the integrity of the service programs.

**Compassion, Dignity, and Respect:** As a volunteer, your main purpose is to make sure that all veterans and servicemembers are treated with the compassion, dignity, and respect they have earned and deserved. This includes but is not limited to engaging in thoughtful conversations as well as listening without judgment.

**Engaging in thoughtful conversation:** Do not bring up topics related to a veteran or servicemember's experiences during war (i.e., shootings, missions, or loss of other servicemembers). These topics will surface after you have had time to build trust and should come only from the veteran or servicemember initiating the conversation. No veteran or servicemember should ever be put on the spot to discuss details of his or her military service.

**Listen without judgment:** As a volunteer, it is important that you listen without judgment. Sometimes, these conversations can be difficult to hear. Listen with an open heart, and allow the veteran or servicemember to talk for as long as he or she wishes. Remember: As a volunteer, it is not your job to counsel or offer advice to the servicemember, veteran, or family member.

**Confidentiality:** All information concerning a veteran, patient, staff person or other volunteer and the record of treatment or service is to be kept confidential and shared with no one. Consider familiarizing yourself with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which protects the rights of individuals in a healthcare setting. More information can be found online: <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/index.html>.

**Dress and Attitude:** It is expected that volunteers, regardless of their setting, will dress appropriately for the circumstance. This means American Legion Auxiliary attire when appropriate. Those in a healthcare facility will adhere to the code of that facility. It is further expected that when "on duty," volunteers will be pleasant, cordial, helpful and positive.

### **Professional Behavior:**

- ★ Following rules and assignments: As a volunteer, you are required to accept and follow rules and instruction as given by the authority of the facility. If asked to do something you do not agree with, you have a right not to accept the assignment. If the assignment is mission critical at the point in which it is given, fulfill the request, and express concern after the fact, in private, with the appropriate individual – your direct supervisor, the ALA rep/dep, or the VAVS director.
- ★ Working with veterans/patients, families, VA staff and other volunteers: Do not publicly criticize the home or facility. Such criticism is disloyal and must be avoided. If there is a reason for criticism, bring it to the attention of the appropriate person who will communicate any issues through proper channels.



- ★ Compensation discussion: It is never appropriate to discuss pension or compensation issues with a veteran/patient. That individual should be referred to the appropriate resource who is trained to respond to those types of questions. American Legion service officers are trained to assist veterans with these types of issues. These officers can be located through your local unit or post.

## **VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

Caring for our veterans is at the core of the American Legion Auxiliary mission. We have a proud tradition to maintain. What can your department or unit do to ensure that the VA&R Program has the volunteer resources it needs to get the job done? Work collaboratively with your VAVS reps, your department's hospital director, VA&R chairman, department president, and VAMC Chief of Voluntary Service to coordinate your efforts to increase and diversify volunteer opportunities in each facility in your department to identify ways to serve the veteran population inside and outside VA healthcare facilities.

Once a volunteer has been trained and has been determined to be a good match for this work, it is everyone's responsibility to keep the flow of communication going, to promptly resolve any misunderstandings in an amicable way, and to work together to solve any problems that prevent smooth and efficient service.

The biggest challenge the American Legion Auxiliary and other VSOs face is our approach to meeting the needs of an intergenerational volunteer force. How do we appeal to three to four generations of potential volunteers, each with its own unique mindset and value system? Consider the following:

- ★ When you are the point person for a service project, be welcoming to all, regardless of an individual's American Legion Auxiliary membership status.
- ★ Look for opportunities to mentor other volunteers and to be mentored; we all have unique talents and skills.
- ★ Match personal and professional talent with interesting volunteer options.
- ★ Offer opportunities that have flexible hours.
- ★ When appropriate, invite your volunteers to bring a friend or family member with them for a particular project.

- ★ Listen with an open mind, and be willing to try to find a different way to accomplish something.
- ★ Provide opportunities where volunteers can grow personally and professionally.
- ★ Identify challenging assignments where volunteers can see quick results.
- ★ Make use of technology in sending invitations for service projects; ask for help if you don't know how.

## **HOW CAN AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY MEMBERS VOLUNTEER?**

American Legion Auxiliary members are able to volunteer in many different ways in any of the various committees within the organization. VA&R governs two categories of ALA volunteers: VAVS volunteers and Service to Veterans volunteers. While the goal of both programs remains the same, there are many differences in how those goals are reached. The most significant difference between the two programs pertains to where the service takes place and how volunteers are recognized for their service.

In the following sections, the specific differences between VAVS and Service to Veterans have been outlined. While reviewing the different programs, consider how other members of your community can become involved. ALA obtains members through attraction. By organizing volunteer events in the community, you are not only attracting attention to the ALA's mission but also educating the community on the needs of servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

# VETERANS AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICE (VAVS)

VAVS (Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service) supports VA (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs) and VHA (Veterans Health Administration) strategic goals by recruiting, supporting, and retaining a knowledgeable, diverse, and engaged supplemental workforce of volunteers to assist management in the delivery of VA healthcare by improving access to care, assisting with long-term care, improving patient satisfaction and much more. The Auxiliary is not the only group that provides VAVS volunteers, but we do have representatives who serve on the VA's National Advisory Committee.

## VAVS Training

While some consistency exists within the VA Healthcare System, each facility is responsible for the orientation and placement of volunteers. As a new volunteer to a VA facility, you should expect the following:

- ★ An interview with a member of the Voluntary Services staff to discuss your skills, interest, and intent.
- ★ A formal orientation program produced and scheduled by the facility: facility, staff, and policy information. Regularly Scheduled volunteers will be fingerprinted, undergo a background check, be photographed for an ID and given a tuberculosis test. For some positions, the VA also requires special training (e.g., computer access or feeding patients).
- ★ Different types of volunteers make up the VAVS. You will need to decide what you qualify for and how much time you would like to donate. Consider one of the following classifications:
  1. Senior Volunteer (21 years or older)
    - ★ Regularly Scheduled Volunteer: An individual who has registered in the VAVS program in a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision and who has been fingerprinted and completed a background check and volunteer orientation through a VA facility.
    - ★ Occasional Volunteer: An individual who works an ad-hoc schedule reporting to the VAMC Voluntary Service Office for assignments when on site.
  2. Student Volunteer: VA term for volunteers under 21 years of age, with students under age 18 having written parental or guardian approval to participate in the VAVS program.

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3. Non-ALA members are welcome to become VAMC volunteers having their hours counted to the benefit of the Auxiliary. Nonmembers are eligible for recognition and awards.
- ★ Sign in at the beginning of each shift. All VA facilities now track your volunteer hours electronically. This sign-in is important for several reasons: ensures coverage under Federal Tort Claims and for Worker's/Workman's Comp; serves as the official record of volunteer hours; and guarantees that the American Legion Auxiliary is credited properly. ALA hours, as well as the Legion's, are recorded in their annual report to Congress, so accurate recording is critical. The VA's annual tracking runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30, while the Auxiliary's hours are tracked from April 1 to March 31. Consider using your own personal system to track your hours. Report these hours to your unit to be included in the Auxiliary's annual impact numbers. Uniforms: Follow the dress code of your particular VAMC. When permissible, wear the ALA emblem and/or pin so veterans and VA personnel know who you represent.

### **VAVS Volunteer Opportunities**

As a VAVS volunteer, opportunities exist at Veterans Affairs medical centers (VAMCs) across the country. Volunteers participate in everything from greeting servicemembers, veterans, and their families as they enter VAMCs to assisting VAMC staff with administrative duties. Volunteers will be placed in different positions depending on need and availability. VAVS coordinates all volunteer services for the 1,200+ medical facilities and 125 cemeteries around the country. Volunteers can expect to volunteer at the following facilities:

- ★ Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC): With more than 150 locations around the country, VAMCs provide professional medical care in a hospital-like setting.
- ★ Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC): Clinics around the country supplement VAMCs by supplying outpatient services.

### **VAVS Leadership Structure and Responsibilities**

Just like the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program, and the American Legion Auxiliary, VAVS has structured leadership who carry responsibilities within the organization. Part of VAVS national leadership is made up of Auxiliary members who serve as the national ALA

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representative (called a “rep”), national ALA deputy representative (called a “dep”) and national ALA VAVS Certifying Officer. Auxiliary members also serve as ALA representatives and deputy representatives at the VAMC.

### Leadership Positions

#### **National VAVS Representative and Deputy Representative:**

In addition to a detailed job description (see [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org)) prescribed by the American Legion Auxiliary and the VA Office of Voluntary Services, the national VAVS rep and her deputy represent the Auxiliary on the national level through participation in the National Advisory Committee. The National Advisory Committee meets twice annually, typically in the spring and fall. The representative is also actively involved in a subcommittee and study group as appointed, makes recommendations for policy change, and addresses volunteer issues of national significance. She works closely with the ALA’s national VA&R chairman on evaluating the overall participation of the Auxiliary in recognized voluntary service.

#### **Department-Level VAVS Representative/Deputy Representative:**

Appointed by the department president and certified by the ALA’s national president, these individuals report directly to a VAMC director and coordinate American Legion Auxiliary volunteer activity at a specific VA healthcare facility. For further details on department-level responsibilities as a representative and deputy representative, refer to responsibilities in Department Level Structure.

*Note on representing multiple organizations: A rep/dep to a VAMC representing the ALA may not hold the same position for another organization.*

#### **(ALA) Department Hospital Center Director:**

Nearly two-thirds of American Legion Auxiliary departments have a volunteer position that coordinates the efforts of its activities in VA medical centers located within the state.

#### **National ALA VAVS Certifying Officer**

This position is held by the American Legion Auxiliary national president. The national certifying officer is responsible for signing

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off on all representative and deputy changes that may occur throughout her term as ALA national president.

### **VAVS Volunteer Recognition**

While volunteers are recognized by the VAMC for which they volunteer and can earn ALA hour bars for service given, it is important for departments to recognize individuals or groups as well. An acknowledgement through something as simple as a letter from the department president lets a special group of volunteers know that what they do is appreciated and recognized.

### **VAVS Hour Accreditation Process**

The American Legion Auxiliary has a tradition of recognizing time and service through the use of pins and hour bars. The steps that follow for formal recognition are the same for Hospital, Senior, or Student Volunteer members and nonmembers.

#### **Step 1: Certification of Hours**

Volunteer hours are certified on index-size cards produced by National Headquarters. These cards are provided to department secretaries and distributed based on the department's procedures. Once a volunteer has reached a milestone in her accumulated hours, the department secretary will fill out the certification card and send it to National Headquarters.

#### **Step 2: Submitting Hours to the American Legion Auxiliary**

Certified cards should then be sent by the department secretary via mail to ALA National Headquarters at 8945 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46260.

#### **Step 3: Order Fulfillment — Hour Bars**

Upon receipt of the hour cards, ALA National Headquarters will send the appropriate bars to the person making the request on behalf of the volunteer. 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 30,000 hours. After a volunteer has reached 30,000 hours, she will be awarded a lifetime hour bar for her service.

#### **Certificates for 10,000 Hours and More**

See the current national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Plan of Action for information.

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### **Hour Bar Pins**

Department secretaries order pins from Emblem Sales via the Web at [emblem.legion.org](http://emblem.legion.org) or 1-888-453-4466. Generally, departments will purchase pins for their members when possible; in some cases, the individual must purchase her own pin. These items are considered special orders and therefore are not listed in the catalog. You must call Emblem Sales at 1-888-4LEGION to place an order. Pins will be sent to the person making the order on behalf of the volunteer. Oftentimes, departments honor their volunteers at conferences and annual meetings and present pins or additional hour bars at those times. ALA National Headquarters provides hour bars that have been earned and certified by departments free of charge to the department representative.

### **VAVS Volunteer Reporting**

It is important that all hours served by VAVS volunteers are reported to the appropriate party in a timely manner. VAVS volunteer hours should be compiled by a VAMC's representative or deputy representative. Those hours then should be reported to the national VAVS representative or deputy representative. The representative or deputy representative sends these hours to ALA National Headquarters, where they are passed on to The American Legion to be reported to Congress.

## SERVICE TO VETERANS VOLUNTEERS

Service to Veterans volunteers are American Legion Auxiliary members who provide service to veterans outside a VAMC. Whether organizing a stand down, assembling care packages/tray favors/greeting cards, assisting with a veteran's burial or gravesite upkeep, sewing, cooking, or shopping for active-duty military/veterans and/or their families, member volunteers are at the heart of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program structure.

### Service to Veterans Training

While there is no formal Service to Veterans training program required on a national level, some departments encourage volunteers to complete an American Legion Auxiliary orientation to further acquaint the volunteer with our organization. This session also affirms their understanding of and commitment to the level of service we give to our veterans.

### Service to Veterans Volunteer Opportunities

After a member has completed her orientation (if required in your department) or has made the decision to volunteer outside of a VAMC, her first step should be to identify a servicemember, veteran, and/or family member's needs within the community. Consider the following when trying to locate where to identify these needs:

- ★ Start with your own post home. Some Legionnaires are now aged, infirmed, confined due to illness or inability to drive, and spend most of their time at home or in nursing homes.
- ★ Utilize leaders in your community. Contact government officials, religious leaders, and social service offices to ask about different programs in the community serving veterans. Once you have obtained contact information, reach out to the various organizations and ask them to identify their needs.

Once you have identified the needs in your community, brainstorm different ways to meet these needs with your unit or American Legion Family. Following is a list of ideas to get your started:

- ★ Visit with 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.



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- ★ Treat veterans to tickets for sporting events or movies.
- ★ Transitional housing programs have many needs. Secure donations for staple items such as laundry soap, cleaning supplies, kitchen items, new undergarments, etc.
- ★ Donate a membership to The American Legion. Arrange an outing to a Legion meeting for special events such as a Veterans Day dinner, memorial service, etc.
- ★ Furnish 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.

### **Service to Veterans Leadership Structure and Responsibilities**

Service to Veterans has been designed to give members a chance to volunteer in their communities without the structure of a VAMC. If a department has a very high number of volunteers, they might have a Service to Veterans director or chairman (formerly the Field Service or Home Service director/chairman) who is responsible for collecting VA&R service hours and requesting hour bars from the department secretary for her department. In most cases, this responsibility is most likely handled by a member of the VA&R Committee.

### **Service to Veterans Volunteer Recognition**

Hour bars for your Service to Veterans pin can be earned through work done on behalf of veterans in state or community-based nursing homes/soldiers homes, contracted veterans homes, daycare centers, foster homes, halfway houses, hospices, homeless shelters, stand downs, Christmas Gift Shops (not at a VAMC), veteran cemeteries or gravesites for any service tasks including but not limited to transportation, snow removal, landscaping/yard mowing, and assisting with tax preparation.

Hours can also be earned through work done in your home for the benefit of homebound, sick or injured servicemembers and veterans. These activities might include sewing, mending, and/or babysitting while the veteran attends medical appointments or rehab sessions, or making quilts or knitting for hospitalized or homeless veterans. Anything done directly for a veteran outside of a VAMC is considered Service to Veterans.

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*Providing these services to a member of the volunteer's family or a relative cannot be counted.*

These hours can be counted only once and not reported again under another committee such as National Security or Community Service. If you are unsure which committee your hours belong to, just pick the one that makes the most sense. The most important thing is that hours are counted only one time for your department.

Junior members may also earn hours through services provided while under supervision of a senior volunteer (examples: reading, playing board games, planning activities around special holidays, and upkeep of veteran gravesites).

### **Service to Veterans Hour Accreditation Process**

A Service to Veterans volunteer will be responsible for the following if she would like her hours of service recognized under the American Legion Auxiliary's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program:

- ★ Record service hours and value of any expense donations made in service, and submit them to the unit/department VA&R chairman.
- ★ Provide feedback to unit/department about volunteer assignments as well as other volunteer needs and/or opportunities known or discovered. Remember: It is our obligation to prevent veterans from feeling isolated. It is our responsibility to give them back just a little of the comfort they safeguarded for us.
- ★ Represent the ALA as prescribed in the Code of Ethics.

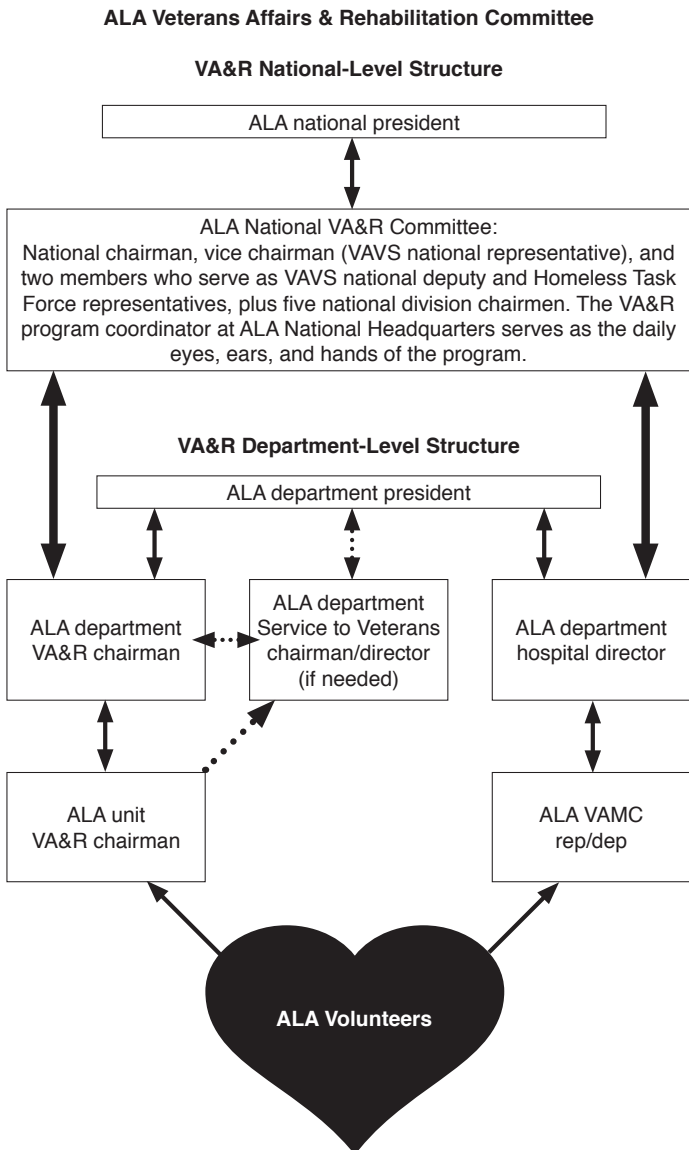
The department should schedule and put into place policies for providing timely information for volunteers interested in keeping proper reporting of hours for receiving pins and bars.

### **Service to Veterans Reporting**

Service to Veterans volunteers most likely report their hours to the unit chairman; she reports to the department VA&R chairman and/or Service to Veterans chairman (directly or through the district) using whatever method is outlined for your department. Finally, these hours are added to the running total of impact hours that American Legion Auxiliary members donate to servicemembers, veterans, and their families each year. This allows ALA members to have a sense of the huge impact we have on the lives of our veterans, and it gives ALA National Headquarters the tools to tell an impressive story to the national media.

# AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY VETERANS AFFAIRS & REHABILITATION COMMITTEE

The following chart illustrates the national, department, and unit structure of the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program.



## National VA&R Leadership

**Experience:** Typically, those serving at the national level have been a department president. These volunteers are knowledgeable of all areas of the VA&R Program and have VAMC and/or Service to Veterans experience.

**Appointment Process and Structure:** Appointed by the American Legion Auxiliary national president, the VA&R Committee includes the national chairman, VAVS representative, VAVS deputy representative and a representative from each of the five American Legion Auxiliary divisions.

**National Chairman:** The role of the national committee chairman is to develop the annual Plan of Action, maintain open lines of communication with all members of the committee, attend all meetings as directed by the national president (i.e., the National VAVS Conference), prepare Auxiliary bulletins, manage committee tasks, and submit mid-year and annual reports. The chairman serves a one-year term.

**Veteran Affairs and Voluntary Service National Representative and Deputy Representative:** In addition to a detailed job description (see [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org)) prescribed by the ALA and the VA Office of Voluntary Services, the VAVS rep and her deputy represent the American Legion Auxiliary on the national level through participation in the National Advisory Committee. The National Advisory Committee meets twice annually, typically in the spring and fall. She is also actively involved in a subcommittee and study group as appointed, makes recommendations for policy change, and addresses volunteer issues of national significance. She works closely with the national VA&R chairman on evaluating the overall participation of the American Legion Auxiliary in recognized voluntary service. The VAVS representative and deputy representative serve three-year terms.

**National Division Chairmen:** Division chairmen are responsible for advancing the goals stated in the Plan of Action, serving as a communication link between the committee, departments and units, assisting in the compilation and submission of required reports, judging award entries, and promoting recruitment and retention of volunteers on all areas of service. This group meets at various times throughout the year, as authorized, to coordinate their efforts. Division chairmen serve a one-year term.

## Department VA&R Leadership

**Experience:** The programs and initiatives of VA&R are central to the American Legion Auxiliary's mission; it is recommended that members appointed to a department-level position have the following qualifications:

- ★ Direct experience with a variety of VA&R programs.
- ★ Working knowledge of American Legion Auxiliary and VA policies and procedures governing VA&R volunteer activity.
- ★ Demonstrate interest and passion for volunteer work aiding veterans.
- ★ Natural ability to motivate and inspire others.
- ★ Excellent people skills for relationship building and volunteer recruitment.

**Appointment Process and Structure:** The department president will make appointments to the committee. It is recommended that each department have policies in place that define the number of committee positions, position titles, detail responsibilities, and lengths of service.

In addition, the department president shall appoint/approve a VAVS representative, associate and deputy representative for each VAMC facility in the department. These appointees may be members of the department's VA&R Committee.

**Department President:** The department president plays a large role in ensuring that the needs of veterans in her state are met. Even if the department has a hospital director, the president should be actively involved in the development and nurturing of strong working relationships with the directors at the medical centers, veterans homes, veterans centers and other VA-related agencies that facilitate the care of veterans in her state.

If the department does not have a director for the hospital and/or Service to Veterans, the president will conduct periodic reviews of the job descriptions for those positions, or she may initiate the development of one. She may also have supervisory responsibilities and may be involved in an annual review of that volunteer's performance. She is responsible for appointing the representatives and deputies for the VA facilities in her state.

**Department Secretary:** In the absence of a hospital director, the department secretary plays an important role in assisting the committee and representatives/deputies in handling the administrative responsibilities of the hospital director. She is most likely responsible for processing appointments made by the department president.

The department secretary is responsible for submitting all VAVS representatives' and deputies' certification paperwork in a timely manner to the national office. She ensures that ALA representatives/deputies are not representing more than one organization at a VAMC facility. In the absence of a hospital or Service to Veterans director and with the cooperation of the department VA&R chairman, she may also have the responsibility for recording volunteer hours, processing pin and hour bar requests, and making final distribution of these items.

**Department VA&R Committee:** While there are some similarities in the structure and responsibilities of a department committee to the national committee, the success of the ALA in achieving its goals of service and volunteerism rests at this level. Department committees are at the core of our program.

Committee members are responsible for advancing the goals stated in the Plan of Action, attending meetings and conferences as directed by the chairman and approved by the department president, serving as a communication link between the department and its units, assisting in the compilation and submission of required reports, promoting recruitment and retention of volunteers in all areas of service or in the area for which they have specific responsibility.

**Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Department Representative, Deputy Representative and Associate Representative:** As these individuals are critical to both the American Legion Auxiliary and the VA in establishing our presence in a specific VAMC, their job description becomes more complex and must satisfy the needs of both organizations. The following list an overview of their responsibilities:

- ★ Be registered as a regularly scheduled volunteer.
- ★ Form a close working relationship with the VAMC director and the chief of Voluntary Service.
- ★ Work with the VA&R Committee to coordinate the recruitment and training of new volunteers choosing to

represent the American Legion Auxiliary at that facility.

- ★ Coordinate training updates as needed and assist with the retention of current volunteers at that facility.
- ★ Work closely with American Legion Auxiliary volunteers at their VAMC, communicating opportunities, soliciting feedback, mediating conflict, and handling other volunteer needs. Attend special facility events such as stand downs and welcome-homes.
- ★ Attend quarterly VAVS meetings. Certified reps and depts who miss three consecutive meetings must be replaced or recertified. Organizations must be removed from the VAVS Committee when none of the certified members is in attendance at three consecutive meetings.
- ★ Schedule and participate in Annual Joint Review sessions. November is the month assigned for ALA Annual Joint Reviews.
- ★ Ensure that the national VAVS rep is receiving minutes of quarterly meetings and attendance records and remains in the loop on any changes in ALA status with the facility.
- ★ Ensure that hours of both Regularly Scheduled and Occasional volunteers are properly recorded and attributed to the ALA.
- ★ Work closely with the hospital director or the department secretary on volunteer recognition (certificates, pins, hour bars). The VA and American Legion Auxiliary each have separate pins and certificates for recognition and a separate system of processing them.
- ★ If an associate or deputy is also appointed to the VAMC, work with her as a team member, sharing responsibilities (attending VAVS meetings, working with volunteers, etc.).
- ★ Serve on subcommittees of the local VAVS Committee.

*Note on representing multiple organizations: A rep/dep to a VAMC representing the ALA may not hold the same position for another organization.*

**Hospital Director (If Applicable):** A volunteer serving in this position will have direct responsibility for the supervision of representatives/deputies in her department, developing and

maintaining close working relationships with VAMC directors, and having a clear understanding of programs sponsored by units on the local level through periodic facility visits. She will also direct volunteer recruitment and retention initiatives.

This individual will most likely coordinate VAMC volunteer recognition programs. She may also be expected to have a close working relationship with the national VAVS rep.

**Service to Veterans Director (If Applicable):** Formerly the Home Service or Field Service director, volunteers serving in this position create and present orientation courses for interested volunteers (as demand dictates). They also assist in the recruitment of Service to Veterans volunteers, set up proper recordkeeping files, and order pins and bars. Not all departments are able to purchase pins for volunteers, or, some expect volunteers to purchase their own pins from Emblem Sales. Hour bars are procured for free from ALA National Headquarters by the designated department representative.

## **District and County Leadership**

Some departments have a district and/or county structure. Please check with your department for details regarding the opportunities and responsibilities that might prevail.

## **Unit Leadership**

There are many variables that dictate the size and scope of a unit-level VA&R Committee. Units are responsible for setting up their own leadership structure depending on the needs of their community. It is important to consider the following when developing a VA&R Committee:

- ★ How many members does the unit have?
- ★ What is the interest of those members?
- ★ Does the unit work collaboratively with the Legion post and/or SAL squadron on VA&R programs and initiatives?
- ★ Is there a VAMC, Fisher House, state veterans home or veterans center in your community?
- ★ What opportunities present themselves for Service to Veterans?
- ★ Are there any homeless veterans issues to be tackled?

If a unit chooses to develop its own VA&R Committee, it is suggested that when making committee assignments and choosing a chairman,



look for members who express and possess the following interests and traits:

- ★ Passion for helping others.
- ★ Compassion for our veterans and families in need.
- ★ Experience in volunteering (of any kind).
- ★ Personal experience with a family member in military service.
- ★ Commitment to make a difference in her community.
- ★ Leadership: the ability to motivate program involvement and implementation.
- ★ Planning: the ability to coordinate.

## **BUDGET AND FUNDING**

### **Building a VA&R Budget:**

There are many variables that must be considered when building a department budget to support VA&R initiatives including responsibility and accountability. At minimum, funding consideration should be given to the following areas of support: chairman and/or VAVS rep/dep travel to sanctioned VA meetings; postage and printing of regular communication to units; department training for VAVS reps (if a large number); possible training for Service to Veterans volunteers; and state- or district-wide homeless programs/sponsorships such as stand downs.

#### **★ Fundraising:**

Work with other community agencies, organizations, and businesses for donations of time, goods, services, or dollars. Currently, federal grants are available to aid homeless veterans. Ask among your membership for anyone who is familiar with grantwriting or reporting since fulfillment of grant obligations is a significant responsibility.

#### **★ Poppy Funds:**

Collected for the care of veterans and servicemembers from poppy distribution, donations can be used to fund a variety of veteran needs. For the purposes of this guide book, the following uses of these funds are approved on the department level:

- The rehabilitation of veterans honorably discharged from the United States Armed Forces after April 6, 1917.
- The welfare of the families of veterans of the above-named period.

- The rehabilitation of hospitalized military service personnel returning home and waiting discharge who require treatment in service hospitals.
- The welfare of veterans, active military personnel, and the families of veterans and active military personnel of the above-named period where financial and medical need is evident.
- The purchase of poppy kits and supplies used to make symbolic poppies and poppy items that will be distributed for donations to the Poppy Fund.

(For the complete policy, refer to the Poppy Program webpage at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).)

## **EVENTS AND ONGOING PROGRAMS**

The American Legion Auxiliary and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee have established programs that continue to support servicemembers, veterans, and their families throughout the year. These programs continually need support from VAVS and Service to Veterans volunteers. If you have never volunteered, consider volunteering for one of the following programs to get you started:

### **ALA Christmas Gift Shops**

Typically hosted at a VAMC or in a facility treating a large number of veterans, Christmas Gift Shops vary from location to location and department to department. Traditionally, American Legion Auxiliary volunteers and/or units and departments work together to collect donations or purchase items that are considered suitable gifts a hospitalized veteran can give to a family member or loved one. Gift Shops may be in a specific location, may take the form of a gift cart, or may travel from one physical location to another. At a VAMC, the rep or Chief of Voluntary Services is the best source for the history and tradition of this program at that facility. With the wave of new veterans entering the VA system, these gift shops will become more critical than in years past. Gift Shop sponsors should consider offering more age-appropriate gifts that will appeal to young families and small children.

### **National Veterans Creative Arts Festival**

Sponsored by the American Legion Auxiliary in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) is a weeklong event that showcases the creative achievements of veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities. With

participation open to any veteran enrolled at a VA medical center or outpatient clinic, or one living in a state veterans home, approximately 120 medal-winning veterans are asked to participate at NVCAF each year. Veterans participate in various media, including visual arts such as painting, sculpting, and drawing, as well as performing arts such as creative writing, dance, drama, and music. In addition to the national festival, participating VA facilities may also host local competitions, where volunteer help is always appreciated.

For more information, visit [www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov](http://www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov).

## **Operation Comfort Warriors**

Operation Comfort Warriors is a program of The American Legion that was established to meet the needs of wounded, injured, or ill military personnel by providing them with items not usually supplied by the government. These items include DVDs, books, electronics, sweatsuits, puzzles, calling cards, and even larger items such as ping-pong tables, computers, kayaks, and much more. With the number of wounded servicemembers on the rise in our nation, there is an increased need for comfort. Hours spent serving this endeavor could be counted as Service to Veterans hours.

For more information, visit [www.legion.org/troops/operationcomfort](http://www.legion.org/troops/operationcomfort).

## **Stand Downs**

Historically, during war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. At secure base camp areas, troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, mail and receive letters, and enjoy the camaraderie of friends in a safe environment.

Today, the term “stand down” refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation’s thousands of homeless veterans on any given night of “combat” life on the streets. Homeless veterans are brought together in a single location for one to three days. Here they are provided access to the community resources needed to begin addressing their individual problems and rebuilding their lives. As in the military, stand downs afforded battle-weary troops the opportunity to renew their spirit, health, and overall sense of well-being. Today’s stand downs afford the same opportunity to homeless veterans.

There is no specific formula to plan and hold a stand down. In fact, each community adds its own uniqueness to a stand down. Some offer basic services, while others offer more by including entertainment and cultural activities. Some stand downs are recreated to follow a regimented,

military-style program, which is familiar and comforting to the veteran, while others create an atmosphere of empowerment to the extent of electing officers among the homeless veterans.

For information on how to host your own stand down, visit the VA&R Program webpage at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).

## CLOSING

Our success in meeting our core mission is dependent upon our ability to ensure that volunteer opportunities are created or passed down and have meaning to a variety of individuals – members and potential members.

Your willingness to serve, give of your time and of yourself to help our veterans, and help the American Legion Auxiliary meet its mission is greatly appreciated. The national Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee wants to thank each one of you for the commitment you have made.

## RESOURCES

**Center for Women Veterans** [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet)

**Homeless Initiatives: VA Programs & Facilities: National Coalition for Homeless Veterans** [www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org)

**National Center for PTSD** [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

**National Coalition for the Homeless** [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

**VA Homeless Veterans Program Office** [www.va.gov/homeless](http://www.va.gov/homeless)

**VA Medical Center Facilities** [www.va.gov/directory/](http://www.va.gov/directory/)

**VA National Cemetery Administration** [www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)

**VHA Handbook 1620.01, Voluntary Service Procedures**  
[www.va.gov/vhapublications/viewpublication.asp?pub\\_id=2165](http://www.va.gov/vhapublications/viewpublication.asp?pub_id=2165)

For additional resource information, please refer to the American Legion Auxiliary's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee Plan of Action. The Plan and this Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers publication are available for free download at [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org).

## GLOSSARY OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

ALA – American Legion Auxiliary.

CBOC – (pronounced SEE-bok) Community-Based Outpatient Clinic.

**Chief, Voluntary Service** – Refers to the VAMC staff person who has full responsibility for the recruitment, training, scheduling, and retention of volunteers at a specific center.

**Department** – ALA term for a state or territory.

**Deputy Representative** – A third person assigned to assist the rep/dep as the liaison between the ALA department and a specific VAMC. The deputy has voting privileges at VAVS meetings in the absence of the rep or associate rep. Sometimes called the “dep rep.”

**Facility Associate Representative** – An associate representative from an adjacent state to the VAMC who participates in the facility’s Volunteer Program. Duties (except for voting privileges, which may be delegated in the absence of the representative) are the same as a representative but are limited to the adjacent state. The associate representative must hold membership in an American Legion Auxiliary unit in the adjacent state.

**Facility Deputy Associate Representative** – A deputy associate representative from an adjacent state to the VAMC who participates in the facility’s Volunteer Program. The deputy associate representative must hold membership in the organization in the adjacent state.

**Homeless Task Force Rep** – An American Legion Auxiliary VA&R Committee member assigned as a member of The American Legion Economics Commission Homeless Task Force. Homeless issues and initiatives are considered by The American Legion to be a Legion Family effort.

**Junior Member** – An ALA member younger than 18 years of age.

**Legion Family** – Used to reference all three organizations: ALA (the American Legion Auxiliary), TAL (The American Legion), and SAL (Sons of The American Legion).

**National VAVS Deputy** – Appointed by the ALA national president and performs duties as assigned by the national VAVS rep. Commonly called the “dep.”

**National VAVS Representative** – Appointed by the ALA national president, this individual represents the Auxiliary on the national VA Advisory Committee for Voluntary Services. This person also has overall responsibility for all rep/dep activities. Commonly called the “rep.”

**Occasional Volunteer** – Works an ad-hoc schedule reporting to the VAMC Voluntary Service Office for assignments when on site.

**Regularly Scheduled Volunteer** – An individual who has registered in the VAVS program in a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision and who has been fingerprinted and completed a background check and volunteer orientation through a VA facility.

SAL – Sons of The American Legion.

Student Volunteer – VA term for volunteers under 21 years of age, with students under the age of 18 having written parental or guardian approval to participate in the VAVS program. (Facility management determines minimum age for a VA volunteer.)

TAL – The American Legion.

VA – Refers to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA is divided into three components: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and Research.

VA&R – Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Committee of the American Legion Auxiliary. This committee supports the initiation, sponsorship, and development of programs and services that enhance the lives of our veterans, members of the military, and their families.

VAMC – VA Medical Center. Currently there are more than 150 medical centers/hospitals and multiple independent mobile clinics in the VA system around the country serving inpatient and outpatient needs.

VAVS – VA Voluntary Service. This is the department within the VA that coordinates all volunteer services affecting the more than 1,200 medical facilities (including VAMCs, CBOCs and mobile clinics) and the more than 100 VA cemeteries.

VAVS Dep – Short for “deputy,” this is a VA term for the person appointed by the American Legion Auxiliary department president to serve as an assistant to the ALA rep. The VAVS dep is certified by the ALA national president through her department. The deputy has voting privileges at VAVS meetings in the absence of the rep or the facility associate rep. She is sometimes called the “dep rep.”

VAVS Rep – Short for “representative,” this is a VA term that identifies a department representative appointed by the department president to serve as a liaison between the American Legion Auxiliary department and a specific VAMC. The VAVS rep is certified by the ALA national president through her department.

VolunTeen – No longer a term used by the VA, a VolunTeen is a Junior Auxiliary member or nonaffiliated youth 12-18 years of age. (Facility management determines minimum age for a VA volunteer.)

VSO – Veterans service organization. A commonly used term to identify organizations such as The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary that care for veterans.

WOC Volunteer – VA’s term to define a volunteer accepted into the VAVS program who is classified in the VA system as Employees Without Compensation.

## **HELPFUL INFORMATION FOR VOLUNTEERS**

### **Friendly Visitor**

Through regular visits, the volunteer brings friendship to a newfound friend who has a desperate need for someone to take a personal interest in his/her well-being. Establish a routine for visitations because elderly people adhere to a routine and look forward to visits.

Suggestions for the Friendly Visitor:

- ★ Chat on everyday subjects — be a good listener.
- ★ Read aloud local newspapers or books or write letters.
- ★ Admire and give importance to the friend’s possessions and appearance.
- ★ Encourage hobbies, knitting, scrapbook making, sewing, plant growing, painting, music.
- ★ Take magazines, flowers, and clippings for discussions.
- ★ Encourage interest in doing for others: writing letters, sending cards, doing little volunteer work, if able.
- ★ Play checkers, cribbage, cards, or other games.
- ★ Encourage your friend to take a walk with you.
- ★ Take your friend for a drive.
- ★ Send cards for special days.
- ★ Suggest watching special TV programs or listening to special radio programs.
- ★ Plan small surprises: Bring dinner to a veteran’s home (with permission), or bring a child or pet along on a visit.
- ★ Phone between visits.
- ★ Learn the veteran’s interests; find out if he/she is interested in computers or the Internet.

- ★ Take the veteran to a public library for books or movies (or books on CD).
- ★ Rent video movies of interest.
- ★ Ask to see photos in family photo albums.
- ★ Help make phone calls to family members, if desired.
- ★ Take the veteran to the mall, or go window shopping.
- ★ Take the veteran to a movie, if interested.

Remember to accept your newfound friends as they are – not as you want them to be.

### **Rapport with Residents**

Visitors, including family members, often express frustration in trying to establish meaningful relationships with nursing home residents. The following suggestions were adapted from a publication of the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform (NCCNHR). The suggestions focus on what you can do to be a good visitor:

- ★ All visitors should respect the privacy and dignity of residents' rooms. This includes knocking before entering, not adding and removing things from a room without the residents' permission, and not rearranging the room to suit your tastes. In general, ask yourself how you would want a visitor to behave in YOUR home.
- ★ Address residents as the adults that they are. If you are a new visitor, introduce yourself properly and ask if you can stay for a visit. Make it clear why you are there.
- ★ Establish trust and physical and verbal warmth in all your communications with residents. Be attentive, and let them know that you are truly interested in them.
- ★ Be honest about your own reactions and feelings. Share honestly with them if you want them to be honest with you.
- ★ Don't do things or ask questions behind their backs that would violate their trust in you. Respect confidentiality.
- ★ Ask about their activities in the home and contacts outside the home (family, friends, etc.).
- ★ Give them a chance to talk about their own history without prying. Discuss interests you have in common.



- ★ Provide opportunities for them to share how they really feel about living in a nursing home and their problems and experiences in the home. Don't try to convince them that their feelings are wrong or minor – be a sympathetic listener.
- ★ Do not make promises you cannot keep. This includes promises to visit or take them on outings.
- ★ Always remember that you are visiting for the benefit of the resident, not for your own sake. If the resident does not feel like talking, ask if it would be better for you to leave and return on another day.

### **Suggestions for Communicating with the Alzheimer's Resident**

- ★ Remember that the resident is suffering from an organic brain disease. His/her world is confusing and frightening.
- ★ The resident cannot control much of his/her behavior. If the resident shows anger or hostility toward you, try not to take it personally. The resident may be reacting in the only way possible.
- ★ Be aware of your own behavior. Try to remain calm and gentle, and avoid showing signs of frustration and anger. Alzheimer's type dementia (ATD) residents often mirror the behavior of others.
- ★ Begin conversations by telling the resident who you are, calling her/him by name, and orienting her/him to the situation.
- ★ Speak slowly and clearly. Allow the resident adequate time to process the information.
- ★ If the resident does not understand a question, repeat it exactly as you stated it the first time. Use questions which call for a "yes" or "no" answer whenever possible.
- ★ Maintain eye contact with the resident when talking to him/her. Use facial expressions to emphasize your point (e.g., nod, smile).
- ★ Use objects to help the resident understand what you are telling him/her (e.g., bring a jacket; you are suggesting that the two of you take a walk).
- ★ If the resident starts to walk away while you are talking, don't try to stop him/her right away. Move along with him/her, and keep talking. (If you are met with resistance, it may be best to stop and try again later.)
- ★ Don't place unreasonable demands on the resident. Don't expect him/her to perform lost skills. Instead, simplify complex tasks by

breaking them into manageable units (e.g., brushing teeth involves many steps – take them one at a time).

- ★ Encourage activities that the resident can still perform and enjoy (e.g., walking, listening to music, looking at photo albums, etc.).
- ★ Try to learn the abilities and inabilities of the individual resident. In many cases, you will have to work around the behavior because you will not be able to change it.

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# American Legion Auxiliary Mission:

*In the spirit of service, not self, the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary is to support The American Legion and to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military, and their families, both at home and abroad.*

*For God and Country, we advocate for veterans, educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace and security.*



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