

## VOLUNTEER TRANSPORTATION NETWORK: THE FACTS

The Department of Veterans Affairs welcomes volunteers in serving those who have served their country. The Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) is a great way to engage in volunteerism in your community and honor our nation's veterans. Since its inception in the late 1980s, nearly 12 million veterans have been assisted, over 24 million volunteer hours have been rendered, and 448 million miles have been driven to transport veterans seeking services and benefits from a VA facility or other authorized facility.

VTN links volunteer drivers with those seeking care from the VA. Due to a large demand for these veteran services, VTN has seen an increase in the number of hours of service provided over the last five years, but also a dramatic decrease in the number of drivers due to age and medical reasons during the same period. America's veterans need your help.

*This summer, commit yourself and a team of your friends, family, and neighbors to honor our nation's veterans, strengthen America's communities, and join United We Serve. This tool kit will give you the basics to recruit a team, organize your group, and make an impact this summer.*

# GETTING STARTED

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a team with your friends and neighbors to share the effort;
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals;
- Celebrate your successes together.

**The Challenge:** Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization, or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized independently-run group that fills a need gap in the community.

A step-by-step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows. Please let us know how your project goes and what you learn by telling your story at [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov).

## STEP ONE: IDENTIFY LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Local organizations and VA Medical Centers will already have relationships with veterans in your community. There are several ways to identify volunteer opportunities.

- Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you.
- Check [Serve.gov](#) and search by keyword "veterans."

## STEP TWO: BUILD A TEAM

Teams can help share the work, motivate members, and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to serve with you.

- Host a house meeting or pot luck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers and plan next steps.
- [Get a guide for hosting a house meeting.](#)
- Post your service activity on [Serve.gov](#) to recruit new volunteers.

## STEP THREE: SET A GOAL

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Find out what your partner organization needs and then work to fill that need. Commit as individuals and as a team to drive a specific number of miles or to assist a specific number of veterans. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You'll be surprised at how

much you can do when you commit, focus, and follow through.

- [Get a goal-setting guide.](#)

#### **STEP FOUR: SERVE YOUR COMMUNITY**

The key to effective service is planning. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you volunteer.

- [Get a tip sheet for your service activity.](#)
- When volunteering with VA be prepared to fill out some minimal paperwork. If you are serving as a driver, you will need a valid driver's license, proof of insurance and completion of a VA volunteer orientation.

#### **STEP FIVE: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSES**

Your team members, the community, and the President want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments by reporting your results. We will highlight the best stories throughout the summer. Tell us about your successes and what you have learned, or just tell your story of service at [Serve.gov](#).

## FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS: SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your community. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions. Get plugged in with them!

It will be helpful to provide background on the local service landscape to the attendees of your house meeting. A few phone calls can produce all the information you need to know about your options.

- Search your [local military families or veterans](#) organizations
- Ask them how volunteers can bring value (use script below)
- Connect [online](#) with your local VA
- If none of these organizations exist in your community, contact your state's [Veterans Affairs Office](#) to begin your own volunteer group to fit local needs.

## SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT:

- Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm interested in volunteering with your organization. May I speak with your volunteer coordinator?
- What tasks do you need volunteers to help with?
- Do you need volunteers to drive veterans to local facilities?
- Do you need a volunteer to help coordinate other volunteers?
- If I organize a group of my friends to volunteer with me, how many volunteers can you take?
- How many days a week do you need volunteers?
- What kind of training/background check do you provide? How long do you anticipate the clearance process taking?
- Are you the best person for me to contact?

Group name	Contact name	Contact number	Days to Volunteer	# of vols needed

## **FOLLOW UP**

### **SPREAD THE SERVICE**

- After every event, thank your volunteers and sign them up for the next event.

## HOUSE MEETINGS

House meetings are a valuable tactic for recruiting volunteers and building a team. House meetings allow community members to share their concerns and join together to work for progress. Within the room, you already have all the tools you need to enact change on a local level. Every attendee can contribute time or resources or leadership abilities.

Your house meeting will help you identify your leadership team. The people that are committed enough to come to your house meeting should be considered potential leaders of the initiatives being implemented in their communities.

As a house meeting host, invite people from your social network to participate in a discussion about your community, pressing needs, and potential solutions. House meetings often engage people new to service and unclear about next steps. Serving with the support of a team will increase the ease and comfort of many new volunteers.

Building community through house meetings is a critical step toward the President's ultimate goal, which is to support everyday Americans in a grassroots effort to improve lives and strengthen communities.

# GOALS AND DUTIES

## GOALS

- Choose and plan a service project for the summer.
- Set measurable group and personal goals for your United We Serve project.
- Identify 5 attendees to be team leaders.
- Plan the next meeting of the leadership team and identify next steps for each leader.
- Obtain commitments from all attendees to volunteer on a regular basis from June 22–September 11.

## HOST DUTIES

### BEFORE

- To have **20** people attend, you will need to invite **50**. Brainstorm a list of **50** people to invite. Include your friends, family, members of your faith group, colleagues, book club attendees, etc.
- Make calls to the **50** people on your list to invite them to your house meeting. Remember that phone calls are much more effective than a mass email.
- Post your house meeting on [Serve.gov](http://Serve.gov) and invite local residents interested in volunteering to attend.
- Browse [Serve.gov](http://Serve.gov) to see what needs in your community aren't being met and which organizations you might be able to partner with. Take some preliminary steps to identify local partners already working in the community.
- Prepare necessary materials.

### DURING

- Be prepared to give a short explanation of why you became involved/what inspired you to serve.
- Consider how you most want to serve your community. President Obama has identified four target areas for summer service: health, education, community renewal, and energy and environment. What does your community most need?

### AFTER

- Thank attendees and get their pledge to serve this summer.
- Organize a follow-up volunteer leadership meeting with your new team to take next steps.



# HOUSE MEETING PLANNER

Use this brainstorm sheet to think of those you want to invite, including those who have never volunteered before or may be new to Untied We Serve.

Name	Phone #	Invited (Y/N)	Committed (Y/N)	Confirmed (Y/N)	Notes
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
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50.					

**Name:** Please print the invitee's full name.

**Invite:** Please mark **yes, no, maybe** or **left message (LM)**. This will help you track who you need to contact and who you should be calling for confirmation. The only real invitations are when you speak with someone directly.

**Commit:** Please mark **yes, no** or **maybe**.

**Confirm:** Please mark **yes, no** or **left message (LM)**. You'll need to call every invitee who said yes or maybe, and every invitee who only got a left message. Please do not assume that **anybody** will come without a confirmation the day before your meeting. It can't hurt to give people a quick reminder, and you need to know how many people will be at your meeting to make that meeting as effective and enjoyable as possible.

# HOUSE MEETING AGENDA

**\*\*\*Before starting the meeting, have everyone sign in and appoint a timekeeper who will keep each section running on time.\*\*\***

## **0:00–0:10                   HOST WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

- Host of the meeting introduces themselves and welcomes attendees.
- Host shares why (s)he was inspired to organize the house meeting and the purpose of the meeting.

## **0:10–0:25                   ATTENDEE INTRODUCTIONS**

- Go around the room and ask each person to introduce themselves and share their reason for wanting to serve this summer.

## **0:25–0:45                   CHOOSE A PROJECT**

- Host introduces three or four project ideas and opens up the room for discussion.
- Discuss what projects will work best in your community.
- Group votes on project choice.

## **0:45–0:55                   SET GOALS AND IDENTIFY LEADERSHIP**

- Ask which attendees are interested in being volunteer leaders – they should stay after the meeting for 15 minutes and commit to a weekly planning meeting from June 22 – September 11.
- Ask each attendee to consider personal summer goals and make a realistic but ambitious summer commitment.

## **0:55–1:00                   CONCLUSION**

- At the end of the meeting, the group should have:
  - At least one project to commit to for the summer.
  - A leadership team.
  - Pledges from each attendee to participate.

## **1:00–1:15                   LEADERSHIP TEAM MEETING**

- Meet with volunteer leaders to set weekly meeting and divide responsibilities.
- Fill out attached worksheets.

# LEADERSHIP TEAM WORKSHEET

The members of my team include:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Our weekly leadership meetings occur every \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

Who are 5 other friends and family members who you will call to enlist in your group's project?  
Make these calls during the leadership team meeting, if possible:

Name	Phone Number	Email

# SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

## BREAKING DOWN YOUR GOAL

What is your group's project?

Who are your local partners?

What is your group's goal? (ie, how many lbs of donated food will you secure, how many hours will you spend reading to kids, how many homes will you audit?)

How many weeks do you have until the National Day of Service and Remembrance on September 11th?

What will you have to average per week between now and September 11th to reach your goal?

How many volunteers will you have to recruit on average per week to reach that goal? How many hours would you guess they have to work? If it's not clear at first, you should be ambitious and then adjust your recruitment goal as you go.

## TRACKING PROGRESS TO GOALS

Our team will report progress to goals every \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ will share our progress to goals with all team members by **email/phone calls** every \_\_\_\_\_.

We will also share our story and accomplishments at [serve.gov](http://serve.gov).

## **SETTING GOALS: SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS**

While the demand for rides to veterans' facilities is sky-rocketing, the number of volunteer drivers is decreasing.

*What will you do to help our nation's veterans access the health services they need?*



## SET CONCRETE GOALS

Setting goals helps you be accountable to yourself and also increases accountability within a group. Clear goals at the beginning of a project will help you determine how your project will work and what role group members can play. Once goals are set, you can track your progress, compare your results with other group members, and figure out what works best so everyone can meet (or exceed) their goals.

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Commit as an individual and as a team to volunteer a certain number of hours to assist veterans this summer. Then keep your commitment. Let's see what we can do together!

- As an individual, I will commit to \_\_\_ driving shifts each week over the summer.
- As a team, we will commit to \_\_\_ driving shifts each week over the summer.
- As an individual, I will commit to serving at \_\_\_ Welcome Home/Stand Down Events for soldiers.
- As a team, we will commit to serving at \_\_\_ Welcome Home/Stand Down Events for soldiers.
- I will recruit \_\_\_ volunteers to join me in serving veterans over the summer.

## TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD GOAL

- Set a weekly or biweekly deadline to report progress. For example, "Our team will report progress every Friday. The person responsible for reporting results for your team is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Make sure every group member is in the loop. Designate a group member to track and share the results. For example, "Our team will share our progress with all members by email/phone calls every week. The person responsible for sharing progress is \_\_\_\_\_."
- Keep track of your progress. Score sheets like the one below can be helpful.

<b>Week</b>	<b># shifts driving veterans as individual</b>	<b># shifts driving veterans as team</b>	<b># veterans served as individual</b>	<b># veterans served as team</b>	<b># volunteers active</b>
<b>June 22</b>					
<b>June 29</b>					
<b>July 6</b>					
<b>July 13</b>					
<b>July 20</b>					
<b>July 27</b>					
<b>August 3</b>					
<b>August 10</b>					
<b>August 17</b>					
<b>August 24</b>					
<b>August 31</b>					

<b>September 7</b>					
<b>Total</b>					

## **TIPS: SERVING AMERICA'S VETERANS**

Each volunteer experience and opportunity to assist your community's veterans is going to be different. Finding a meaningful and rewarding experience will depend on your own interests and goals. Your first step toward volunteering should be to check with local veterans groups. They may already have projects to join or experts ready to train your team on tasks needed.

### **A good volunteer team:**

- Meets all the requirements and attends requisite trainings of the veterans organization you are volunteering with.
- Respects the contributions that veterans and their families have rendered to our country and commits to following through on assignments.
- Is willing to complete the tasks that are most needed in the local veterans community.
- Is willing to listen and engage with the veterans community on a meaningful level.
- Understands the need for privacy and confidentiality with certain tasks that relate to health care, per the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act of 1996.

## **HELP VETERANS ACCESS THE HEALTH SERVICES THEY NEED:**

The Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) provides rides to veterans seeking health services. Many veterans may live a great distance from a VA hospital, and because so many rely on small fixed incomes, they find that the cost of transportation to a VA hospital is too high. They're left with dire choices that leave them forgoing treatment they need or skimping on other necessities to pay for transportation.

### **Expectations of VTN volunteers:**

- Adhere to schedule given.
- Know hours required by assignment.
- Be adaptable to different assignments given.
- Be thankful and show appreciation to service members, veterans, and their families.

### **Requirements for VTN volunteer:**

- Valid driver's license.
- Background check.
- Proof of safe driving record.
- Proof of liability insurance.
- VA physical performed at VA expense.
- Completion of local VA volunteer orientation.

- Completion of orientation with the office that coordinates transportation (may require a test drive).
- In some cases, registering as a medical center volunteer may be necessary.

**Visit these sites to get connected:**

- Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you.
- Find your local [DAV Hospital Service Coordinator](#) and inquire about volunteering.

**IF DRIVING IS NOT FOR YOU, TRY HELPING OUT IN THESE WAYS:**

- **BE A FRIEND AT YOUR LOCAL VA FACILITY:**

Like all medical facilities, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics need volunteers. These volunteers are needed because many hospitalized veterans are disconnected from family or friends, and they are very far from home.

Volunteers perform a wide range of duties. Some enjoy direct contact with patients, participating in recreational programs and other activities on the wards. Other volunteers assist the VA's professional staff in several ways that involve little patient contact. Your role as a volunteer at a VA medical facility can be as basic, and as important, as just being a friend to a patient in the trying days of illness and therapy.

**Expectations of VA volunteers:**

- Adhere to the schedule given.
- Know hours required by assignment.
- Be adaptable to different assignments given.
- Be thankful and show appreciation to service members, veterans, and their families.

**Requirements for VA volunteers:**

- Requirements to volunteer vary per assignment at the event.
- Background checks may be required depending upon your assignment.
- In some cases, registering as a medical center volunteer may be necessary.

**Visit this site to get connected:**

- Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you.

- **WELCOME HOME EVENT:**

The number of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) service members and veterans continues to increase. It is imperative that these service members and veterans are fully educated about VA health care services, eligibility, and any potential benefits. This is a special opportunity for the VA to let service members and veterans know that their service to their country is appreciated. To meet these requirements, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) policy states that each VA Medical Center must provide a "Welcome Home" event for OEF/OIF service members and their families and/or significant other.

The "Welcome Home" event is held at least annually for OEF and OIF service members, veterans, and their families and/or significant others.

This event provides pertinent information on VA benefits and includes participation by Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) staff; VHA health care services; supportive services for families and/or significant others; and Services of the OEF–OIF Program Manager, Transition Patient Advocates, and OEF–OIF Case Managers.

Costs associated with "Welcome Home" events are funded by the sponsoring VAMC and generous donations from community organizations.

**Expectations of "Welcome Home" volunteers:**

- Adhere to schedule given.
- Know hours required by assignment.
- Be adaptable to different assignments given.
- Be thankful and show appreciation to service members, veterans, and their families.

**Requirements for "Welcome Home" volunteers:**

- Requirements to volunteer vary per assignment at the event.
- In some cases, registering as a medical center volunteer may be necessary.
- Background checks may be required depending upon your assignment.

**Visit this site to get connected:**

- Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you.
- For a listing of Welcome Home Events scheduled in 2009 check this [website](#).

- **STAND DOWN FOR HOMELESS VETERANS:**

Stand Downs are one way in which the Department of Veterans Affairs provides services to homeless veterans. Typically one–to–three day events provide services to homeless veterans such as food, shelter, clothing, health screenings, VA and Social Security benefits counseling, and referrals to a variety of other necessary services, such as housing, employment and substance abuse treatment.

Stand Downs are collaborative events, coordinated between local VAs, other government agencies, and community agencies that serve the homeless.

Since 1988, Stand Downs have been used as an effective tool in reaching out to homeless veterans, reaching more than 200,000 veterans and their family members between 1994–2000. In 2008, more than 30,000 veterans and 4,500 families received outreach services from Stand Downs aided by 24,500 volunteers.

Donations:

VA facilities may accept donations towards special programs like Stand Downs.

**Expectations of “Stand Down” volunteers:**

- Adhere to schedule given.
- Know hours required by assignment.
- Be adaptable to different assignments given.
- Be thankful and show appreciation to service members, veterans, and their families.

**Requirements for “Stand Down” volunteers:**

- Requirements to volunteer vary per assignment at the event.
- In some cases, registering as a medical center volunteer may be necessary.
- Background checks may be required depending upon your assignment.

**Visit this site to get connected:**

- Contact your local [VA Medical Center](#) and ask to speak with the VA Medical Center's Voluntary Service Office or the Voluntary Service Program Manager. You can also submit this [email form](#) to your local VA Medical Center and a local Program Manager will get back to you.
- For a listing of Stand Down Events scheduled in 2009 check this [website](#).

## **CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Your work this summer matters and should be celebrated. Remember to go to [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov) and tell us your summer story of service.

Also, be sure to keep track of what worked for you this summer and what could be improved. You can learn from this service project when you organize your next service project!