



How to Facilitate a Local Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Sponsored in conjunction with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the American Legion Auxiliary and Help Hospitalized Veterans, the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) is a week-long 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, an outpatient clinic, or living in a state veterans home, approximately 140 medal-winning veterans are asked to participate at NVCAF each year. Veterans participate in many mediums, including visual arts such as painting, sculpting and drawing, as well as creative writing, dance, drama and music.

Planning a Local Competition:

- If your VA facility does not currently host a local Veterans Creative Arts Festival, contact a VA staff member that instructs creative arts and recreational therapy (such as creative arts therapists, recreational and occupational therapists, craft care specialists and other healthcare professionals who use the arts in treatment). An additional staff member that could be approached with your ideas is the Voluntary Services Coordinator. Each veteran that participates will need to have a designated VA staff member contact.
- Start to think about how your Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be funded. See Funding for more information.
- Encourage staff members to pick a date between the recommended dates of January 1 and March 10 to hold the local competition.
 - It would be ideal if the Facility Director can attend, and so coordinate date with him/her before the date is confirmed.
 - Be sure to send a formal invitation to the Director, Associate Director, Chief of Staff and Coordinator of Voluntary Services.
 - Choose a location on-site at the VA for the competition. Locations could include an auditorium for theatrical competitions or an atrium for displaying art. If considering an outside location, prepare for an alternative location in case of inclement weather.
 - Contact local musicians to see if they would be willing to donate their talents as accompanists. Anyone can accompany a performer, even a non-veteran. However, if an accompanist plays a lead, they must be a veteran.
- Publicize the event to veterans and the local community. Have staff members promote the event to their patients and distribute promotional flyers around the facility and community message boards (public library, recreational centers, etc.). Be sure to promote the event at other units and veterans organizations in your area.
- Reach out to local government officials, art galleries, drama and music professors/teachers, theatres, local television reporters and other local celebrities, and ask them to judge the competition. It is recommended to have at least five judges for each category. Follow the link under *Additional Resources* for more information about judging.
- Approach local companies to donate prizes for the winners. It might be most cost-effective to give a ribbon to place winners and award a prize only to first place. If the company cannot donate, they might be willing to provide the prize items at a reduced cost. Examples for prizes could include:
 - Gift certificate to an art supply store, music store, bookstore, or a mall
 - Tickets to a play or movie theatre

- Art class sessions
- Gift subscription to *Auxiliary* magazine or art magazine
- All paperwork for NVCAF entrants must be postmarked to the VA national chairpersons no later than October 1. In mid-September, follow up with VA staff members to make sure that all the forms and other submission regulations have been followed. If not, offer to help in any way possible.

Funding:

- While the housing, meals, ground transportation, and other routine expenses for veterans invited to attend NVCAF are covered through national festival funds, additional expenses, such as travel arrangements, are the responsibility of the local VA facility.
 - If promotional items, prizes and other services (such as accompanying musicians) are not donated, there will be additional costs.
 - Some American Legion Auxiliary departments have funds (donated from units) for travel expenses for veterans selected to participate in NVCAF, or have allocated for other items, such as prizes, to be used by specific VA facilities.
- Ask for donations. Remember, the worst someone can say is “no”; you never know what you will get if you don’t ask. Everything needed for a local competition, including travel arrangements, can be donated. Ask other service organizations that volunteer at the VA facility to help collect donations.
 - If an individual or business can’t donate a product, see if they will donate money.
- Examples of possible fundraisers include:
 - A craft fair. Participants would need to pre-purchase their booths. Auxiliary members could sell concessions.
 - A street painting festival. Partner with the city to host this event. Artists will need to sponsor themselves or find a sponsor.
 - Consider finding a sponsor(s) to provide all artists with the same supplies, and ensure that medium used on the sidewalks are temporary.
 - Have artists submit depictions of the art they will draw ahead of time.
 - Coordinate with the local newspaper to cover the festival (ex. A lifestyle reporter). Work out a deal to have a group of veterans select the best art, possibly called “Veterans Choice”, and feature the winning artwork in the newspaper.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/nvspse/national-veterans-creative-arts-festival/>
<https://www.streetpaintingfestivalinc.org/>