

Working with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs)

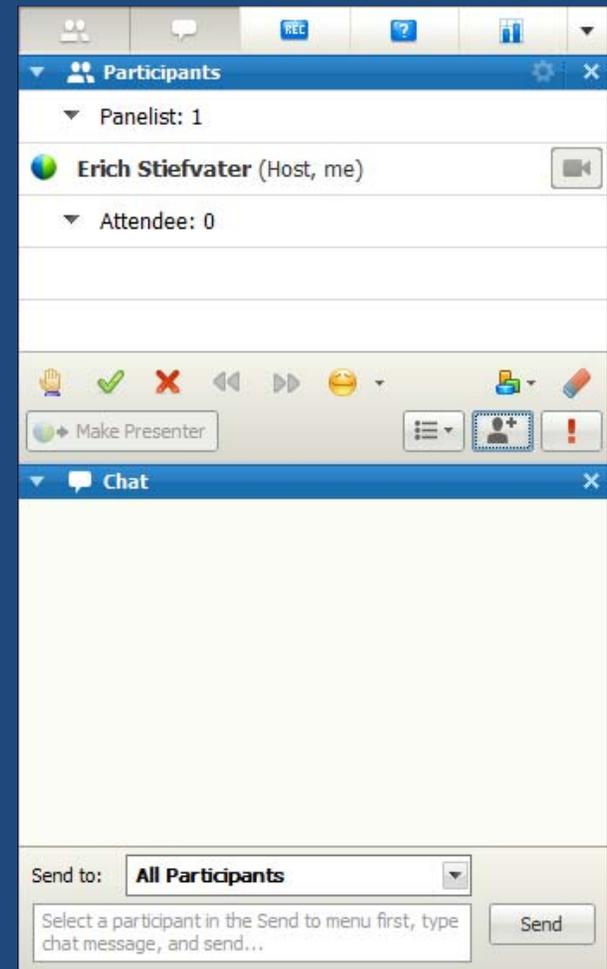
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**Who's on today's
webinar?**

Hello and Welcome!



Margie Legowski
CNCS



Theresa Long
Oklahoma State Office
CNCS



Bob Reeg
American Legion Auxiliary
Call to Service Corps

Webinar hosts:

Debbie Ellis and Erich Stiefvater, Education Northwest

Session Outline

- **What is a Veterans Service Organization (VSO)?**
- **Typology of the VSO Sector**
- **Trends in the VSO Sector**
- **What VSOs Do**
- **Opportunities and Challenges of VSO Collaboration**
- **Forming a Collaboration with a VSO**
- **Examples of VSO-Community Partnerships**

Workshop Outcomes

- **As a result of this session, you will be able to:**
 - Define what constitutes a “veterans service organization.”
 - Better understand the purposes and activities of VSOs.
 - Imagine possible collaborations with VSOs.
 - Gain the knowledge and confidence to approach VSOs for potential collaborations.

What is a Veterans Service Organization?

- Private nonprofit organizations.
- Exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)19 of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Organized in the United States.
- Membership is “supermajority”: past or present members of the US Armed Forces (USAF), military cadets, and/or relatives of members of the USAF.

What is a Veterans Service Organization? (cont.)

- **No part of earnings may benefit any private shareholder or individual.**
- **It must be operated exclusively for one or more stated purposes.**
- **Auxiliaries, trusts, and foundations of VSOs are also exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)19.**

What is a Veterans Service Organization? (cont.)

- Common meaning of the term “veteran service organization” may encompass organizations that are not strictly 501(c)19 organizations.
- Some organizations that serve veterans are not VSOs. For example, government agencies and veterans service providers that are not membership organizations.

Typology of the VSO Sector

- Approximately 100 “top tier “ VSOs.
- Accounting for state or local affiliates, VSOs in the U.S. numbers into the thousands.
- VSOs may be grouped by various characteristics:
 - Member type (servicemember, veteran, relative).
 - Membership size.
 - Period of military service.
 - Organization age.

Trends in the VSO Sector

- Aging and declining memberships in many VSOs.
- Increased demand in services from VSOs with USAF and USAF relative membership.
- Some VSOs modernizing to appeal to new generation of servicemembers and veterans.
- Organizations emerging to support new generation of servicemembers and veterans.

What VSOs Do

- **Promote the social welfare of the community (i.e., to promote the common good and general welfare of the people of the community).**
- **Assist disabled and needy war veterans and members of the USAF and their dependents, and the widows and orphans of deceased veterans.**

What VSOs Do (cont.)

- **Provide entertainment, care, and assistance to hospitalized veterans or members of the USAF.**
- **Carry on programs to perpetuate the memory of deceased veterans and members of the USAF and to comfort their survivors.**
- **Conduct programs for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes.**

What VSOs Do (cont.)

- **Sponsor or participate in activities of a patriotic nature.**
- **Provide insurance benefits for members or their dependents.**
- **Provide social and recreational activities for members.**

VSO Collaborations - Opportunities

- Memberships comprised of servicemembers, veterans, and their families.
- Understanding of USAF and veterans needs.
- Array of programs and services for USAF and veterans.
- Sterling reputations in community.
- Highly committed members.
- Family and friend networks.

VSO Collaborations - Challenges

- **Decision-making structures with concentration of power in a few individuals.**
- **Volunteer leadership rotates with frequency.**
- **Formal policy-setting processes with many stages and deadlines.**
- **Tendency toward insularity and caution.**
- **Affiliates have autonomy in programming.**

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- Know your own intentions of the collaboration.
- Identify appropriate VSO partner(s).
- Identify the proper point of contact.
- Make organization introductions.
- Develop an explicit project proposal.
- Formalize the collaboration.

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Know your own intentions of the collaboration.**
 - Are you seeking to engage VSO members as volunteers in your organization's own service work?
 - Are you seeking to match your members/volunteers to VSO service projects?
 - Is there a specific human need your organization addresses?
 - At what level are you seeking a collaboration?

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Identify an appropriate VSO partner(s).**
 - National – Search for VSOs recognized by the VA at
<http://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>
 - National – Ask for assistance from ServiceNation's Mission Serve .
<http://www.servicenation.org/pages/mission-serve1>

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Identify an appropriate VSO partner(s).**
 - Local -- Identify which VSOs are active in your community's veterans council.
 - Local – Identify which VSOs are active in the VA Voluntary Service program at your local VA Medical Center.
www2.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isflash=1
 - Local – Observe which VSOs participate in veterans day or memorial day observances.

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Identify the proper point of contact.**
 - National
 - Large organizations likely to have a director of programs or program division directors.
 - Small organizations may have a paid staff member, or may only have a volunteer leader (Commander, President).
 - State and Local
 - May or may not have paid staff.
 - Start with the state or local volunteer leader .
 - Expect referral to a committee chair.

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Make organization introductions.**
 - Telephone call with email follow-up recommended as first step.
 - Speak of general interest in collaboration first rather than offer an explicit proposal immediately.
 - Exchange organization marketing materials.
 - Request personal meeting.
 - Invite leaders to an organization event to observe each others' groups in action.

Forming Collaborations with VSOs

- **Develop an explicit project proposal.**
 - Identify a specific project or area of joint work.
 - Identify roles of each organization.
 - Develop a plan of action with persons responsible and timelines for action.
- **Formalize the collaboration.**
 - Exchange letters, memorandums, or resolutions.
 - Announce collaboration to members /public.
 - Offer guidance to members on project implementation.

Examples of Collaborations

Examples of VSO-Community Collaboration

- USO and United Through Reading



For Further Information

- **Bob Reeg, Project Director, American Legion Auxiliary Call to Service Corps, 202.265.7271; rreeg@ALAforVeterans.org; www.ALAforVeterans.org.**
- **Theresa Long, Oklahoma State Director, and CNCS Veterans Liaison, 405.231.5203; tlong@cns.gov; www.nationalservice.org**

Community Blueprint Summit for Change

- **What:** Intensive learning opportunity for individuals who are interested in enacting community-based solutions to the challenges facing service members, veterans and military families.
- **Who:** Organized by Points of Light as pre-conference to the 2012 National Conference on Volunteering and Service
- **When:** June 17 – 18, 2012
- **Where:** Chicago, Illinois
- **Registration and more information:**
www.volunteeringandservice.org

To Continue this Discussion...

Veterans and Military Families

Knowledge Network

<http://bit.ly/VSOPartners>

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Wednesday, June 27
(Stay tuned to the
Knowledge Network
for details)

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