



# 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 2011**

## **PREFACE**

This handbook contains the policies and procedures of the American Legion Auxiliary that govern volunteer service rendered by our members in support of medical, vocational and rehabilitative care received by our veterans through a formalized healthcare program or a home-based program.

The guidelines and suggestions contained in this handbook are intended to assist members in understanding the obligations of the organization at the national, state and local levels.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. Introduction</b> . . . . .	4
a. Mission . . . . .	4
b. History . . . . .	4
c. Code of Ethics . . . . .	5
<b>II. Definition Quick Source</b> . . . . .	6
<b>III. Volunteer Opportunities &amp; Responsibilities</b> . . . . .	8
a. National-Level Structure . . . . .	9
b. Department-Level Structure . . . . .	10
c. Unit-Level Structure . . . . .	14
<b>IV. Volunteer Training Programs</b> . . . . .	15
a. ALA Orientation . . . . .	15
b. VA Training (at VAMCs) . . . . .	15
c. Field Service Orientation . . . . .	16
d. Home Service Orientation . . . . .	18
e. Uniforms . . . . .	19
<b>V. Budget &amp; Funding</b> . . . . .	19
<b>VI. Events</b> . . . . .	20
a. ALA Christmas Gift Shops . . . . .	20
b. Volunteer Recognition . . . . .	20
c. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival . . . . .	20
d. Ride 2 Recovery . . . . .	21
e. Standdown . . . . .	21
<b>VII. Volunteer Recognition</b> . . . . .	22
a. Hour Accreditation Process . . . . .	22
b. Pins . . . . .	22
<b>VIII. Volunteer Recruitment &amp; Retention</b> . . . . .	23
<b>IX. Closing</b> . . . . .	23
<b>X. Resources</b> . . . . .	24

# I. INTRODUCTION

## a. Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation (VA&R) Committee Mission

Basic to the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) is the principle of Service, Not Self. This belief is soundly reflected in the Auxiliary's VA&R program, the oldest ALA program founded on the concept that it is our obligation to provide the means for assisting veterans and their families.

The VA&R National Committee supports the initiation, sponsorship and development of programs and services that enhance the lives of our veterans, active members of the military and their families.

### The VAVS Mission

To provide a structured volunteer program under the management of VA-compensated employees in cooperation with community resources to serve America's veterans and their families with dignity and compassion.

VAVS (Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service) supports VA (Veterans Administration) and VHA (Veterans Health Affairs) 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.

## b. History of the Formal VA&R Volunteer Program

Since World War I, the women of the American Legion Auxiliary have taken an active role in the care and rehabilitation of veteran patients. 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 Administration 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, the 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 a 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 February 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.

Our program today continues to reflect our care, commitment and compassion for veterans. 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.

### **c. VA&R Code of Ethics**

Because of the vital role each Auxiliary volunteer plays in the successful care and rehabilitation of veterans, the ALA has adopted this code of ethics to guide us in our service.

1. **Confidentiality:** All information concerning a patient, staff person or other volunteer and their record of treatment or service is to be kept confidential and shared with no one.
2. **Professional Behavior:**
  - a. **Following Rules & 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 to not 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.
  - b. **Working with Staff, Patients and other Volunteers:** Do not

publicly criticize the facility, staff, patients, personnel, owners or physical plant of any facility. Such criticism is disloyal and must be avoided. If there is a reason for criticism, bring it to the attention of the facility representative who will communicate any issues through proper channels. If the problem is not resolved, the representative should send a report to the American Legion Auxiliary department VA&R chairman.

- c. **Compensation Discussion:** It is never appropriate to discuss pension or compensation issues with a patient. That individual should be referred to the appropriate resource within that facility who is trained to respond to those types of questions. Outside a facility, contacting a local Service Officer is the appropriate action to take.
3. **Dress and Attitude:** It is expected that ALA volunteers, regardless of their setting, will dress professionally and to the code of the facility where they work. It is further expected that when “on duty,” the ALA volunteer will be pleasant, cordial, helpful and positive.
4. **Compassion, Dignity and Respect:** As an ALA volunteer, those served will, under all conditions and circumstances, be treated with the compassion, dignity and respect they have earned and they deserve.

## II. DEFINITION QUICK SOURCE

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

**VAMC** – VA Medical Center. Currently there are 153 Medical Center facilities and 11 independent mobile clinics in the VA system around the country serving inpatient and outpatient needs.

**CBOC** – Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. There are currently 718 in the VA system.

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

**VAVS** – VA Voluntary Services. This is the department within the VA that coordinates all volunteer services affecting the 822 medical facilities (including VAMCs, CBOCs and mobile clinics) and the 125 VA Cemeteries.

**VA&R** – Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation. A commonly used acronym that will appear throughout this document.

**VAVS Rep** – Term used to identify a department representative appointed by the department president to serve as a liaison between the ALA department and a specific VAMC.

**VAVS Dep** – Term used to identify a department deputy; appointed by the department president to serve as an assistant to the ALA rep.

**Associate Representative** – A second person assigned to assist the VAVS rep as the liaison between the ALA department and a specific VAMC.

**Deputy Representative** – A third person assigned to assist the rep/dep as the liaison between the ALA department and a specific VAMC. Has voting privileges at VA rep/dep meetings in the absence of the rep or associate rep.

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

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

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

**Homeless Task Force Rep** – An ALA 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 Legion to be a Legion Family effort.

### **Legion-Specific Terms:**

**Department** – Term for a state or territory

**ALA** – American Legion Auxiliary

**TAL** – The American Legion

**SAL** – Sons of The American Legion

**Legion Family** – Used to reference to all three organizations

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

**VolunTeen** – A Junior member or nonaffiliated youth 12-18 years of age.

**VSO** – Veterans Service Organization. A commonly used reference to identify organizations such as ours.

**Regularly Scheduled Volunteer** – Individuals who have registered in the VAVS program in a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision and who have completed a volunteer orientation through a VA facility.

**Occasional Volunteer** – Individuals serving under the VAVS program who frequently volunteer with a group or organization on an occasional basis.

**Student Volunteer** – VA term for volunteers 21 years old or younger, 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.)

**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.

### III. VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

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

Almost two-thirds of ALA departments have a volunteer position that coordinates the efforts of its activities in VA Medical Centers located within the state.

#### **Field and/or Home Service Director**

While we don't know specifically how many departments have such a volunteer position, this individual would have responsibility for coordinating the training and reporting for Home and Field Service volunteers in her department.

#### **VAVS Representative/Deputy Representative**

Appointed by the department president, these individuals report directly to a VAMC director and coordinate ALA volunteer activity at a specific facility.

#### **VA Medical Centers (VAMC) – Senior Members**

VAMC volunteers are key to the successful operation of any VAMC program. On a national level, The American Legion and Auxiliary

contribute nearly 1.5 million hours in service annually. These volunteers supplement the work of the Medical Center staff filling key roles and making valuable contributions that allow them to focus on patient care. Generally, VAMC volunteers fall into one of two categories:

**Regularly Scheduled Volunteer:**

Reporting to a VA facility for a volunteer assignment on a regular schedule.

**Occasional Volunteer:**

Work an ad-hoc schedule reporting to the VAMC Voluntary Service Office for assignments when on site.

**Non-ALA members** are welcome to become VAMC volunteers having their hours counted to the benefit of the Auxiliary.

**VolunTeens/Student Volunteers (Under Age 18)**

In 1959, the ALA, by resolution, created what is now known as the VolunTeen program. Open to Junior members of the ALA, Sons of The American Legion (SAL), and nonaffiliated youth. These young people have an opportunity to volunteer in a VAMC or work with a senior volunteer in Field Service. Typically students can start at age 7 in Field Service work and at age 15 in a Medical Center.

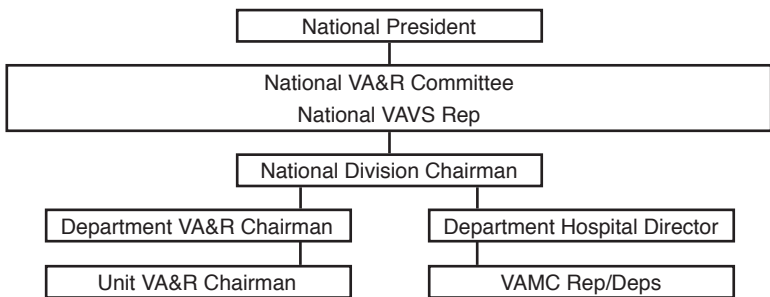
**Field Service Volunteers**

Field Service is defined as any service provided to a sick or injured veteran outside a VAMC or assisting with a veteran’s burial or gravesite upkeep. Field Service volunteers are required to complete a Field Service Orientation offered through their department.

**Home Service Volunteers**

Home Service is for those individuals who volunteer their time sewing, cooking or shopping for (unrelated) active-duty military/veterans and/or their families.

**a. VA&R National-Level Structure**



## **National Committee Structure:**

**Appointments:** Appointed by the national president, the committee includes four committeemembers; each holds a dual position as chairman, national VAVS rep, associate and/or deputy VAVS rep or Homeless Task Force rep. The chairman serves a one-year term. The other three committeemembers serve a three-year term. Also serving on the committee is a representative from each of the five divisions who serves a one-year term.

**Experience:** Typically, those serving at the national level have been a department president. She is knowledgeable of all areas of the VA&R Program and has VAMC, Field or Home Service experience.

**Responsibilities of the 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.

**Responsibilities of the Committee:** Committeemembers are responsible for advancing the goals stated in the Plan of Action, serving as a communications 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 will meet at various times throughout the year, as authorized, to coordinate their efforts.

**Responsibilities of the National VAVS Rep and her Deputy:** In addition to a detailed job description ([www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org)) as prescribed by the ALA and the VA Office of Voluntary Services, the VAVS rep and her deputy represent the ALA 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 ALA in recognized voluntary service.

## **b. Department-Level Structure:**

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.

While what follows are only recommendations, all appointments to this committee should be given great consideration.

**VA&R Role of the 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, Field and/or Home Service, 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.

**Role of the Department Secretary:**

In the absence of a hospital director, the department secretary plays an important role in assisting the committee and rep/deps in handling the administrative responsibilities of her position. She is most likely responsible for processing appointments made by the president.

The secretary is responsible for submitting all VAVS rep/dep certification paperwork in a timely manner to the national office. She ensures that ALA rep/deps are not representing more than one organization at a VAMC facility. In the absence of a Hospital, Field and/or Home Service 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.

**Overall Committee Responsibility:**

Coordinate, manage, maintain and strengthen VA&R programs and initiatives as well as handling the compilation of required reports.

**Appointments:**

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, 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 and a Hospital, Field and/or Home Service director if the department supports such a program. These individuals may or may not serve as members of the VA&R Committee. These

appointees should be members of the department's VA&R Committee, unless the department has Field, Hospital and/or Home Service committees at the department level.

**Recommended Experience for Appointees:**

Because the programs and initiatives of this committee are so central to the mission of the Auxiliary, it is recommended that those individuals appointed to a committee or director position have the following qualifications:

1. Direct experience with a variety of VA&R programs.
2. Working knowledge of the ALA and VA policies and procedures governing VA&R volunteer activity.
3. Demonstrate interest and passion for volunteer work aiding veterans.
4. Strong interest in being a leader with the ability to motivate and inspire others.
5. Excellent people skills for relationship building, volunteer recruitment and retention.

**Role of the Chairman:**

The role of the committee chairman is to develop the annual Plan of Action for units in her department, maintain open lines of communication with all members of the committee, attend meetings and conferences as directed by the department president, prepare appropriate communication for units, manage committee tasks and submit mid-year and annual reports to the president or national/division leadership as directed. In addition, the chairman will assume the responsibilities of a hospital director if one is not appointed in her department. She may also assume budgetary responsibility.

**Role of the Committeemembers:**

Committeemembers 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 communications link between the department and its units, assisting in the compilation and submission of required reports, promoting recruitment and retention of volunteers on all areas of service or in the area for which they have specific responsibility.

**Role of the Hospital Director (If Applicable):**

A volunteer serving in this position will have direct responsibility for the supervision of rep/deps 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.

**Role of the Field and/or Home Service Director (If Applicable):**

Volunteers serving in these positions create and present orientation courses for interested volunteers (as demand dictates). They also assist in the recruitment of Field Service and Home Service volunteers, set up proper recordkeeping files and ordering pins and hour bars.

**Role of the Rep/Deps (including Associate Rep):**

As these individuals are critical to both the ALA 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.

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

**Summary of Rep/Dep Duties and Responsibilities:**

1. Be registered as a regularly scheduled volunteer.
2. Form a close working relationship with the VAMC director and the chief of Voluntary Service.
3. Working with the VA&R Committee, coordinate the recruitment and training of new volunteers choosing to represent the ALA at that facility.
4. Coordinate training updates as needed and assist with the retention of current volunteers at that facility.
5. Work closely with ALA volunteers at her VAMC, communicating opportunities, soliciting feedback, mediating conflict and handling other volunteer needs.
6. Attend special facility events (such as standdowns and welcome-home events), quarterly meetings and annual review sessions as scheduled.
7. Ensure that the National VAVS rep is receiving minutes of quarterly meetings and remains in the loop on any changes in ALA status with the facility.
8. Ensure that hours of both regularly scheduled and occasional volunteers are properly recorded and attributed to the ALA.
9. Work closely with the hospital director or the department secretary

on volunteer recognition (certificates, pins, bars).

10. If an associate or deputy is also appointed to the VAMC, work with her as a team member, sharing responsibilities – attending meetings, working with volunteers etc.
11. Serve on local subcommittees of the local VAVS Committee.

### **District & County Structure:**

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

### **c. Unit-Level Structure:**

There are many variables that dictate the size and scope of a unit-level VA&R Committee. How many members does the unit have? What is the interest of those members? Does the unit work collaboratively with the post and/or squadron on VA&R programs and initiatives? Is there a VAMC, state veterans home, veterans center or Fisher House in your community? What opportunities present themselves for Field and Home Service? Are there homeless veterans issues to be tackled?

### **Appointments:**

Depending on the responses to the questions above, the unit president will appoint a unit VA&R chairman and committeemembers as size and opportunities permit.

### **Committeemember Experience:**

When making committee assignments and choosing a chairman, take advantage of what your members bring to the table:

- ★ passion for helping others
- ★ compassion for our veterans and families in need
- ★ experience volunteering (of any kind)
- ★ a commitment to make a difference in her community
- ★ leadership: the ability to motivate
- ★ program planning: the ability to coordinate

### **Unit & Committee VA&R Responsibilities:**

1. Community Outreach – Reserve units, VA-related facilities or facilities that serve a large number of veterans: Identify who could benefit from regularly scheduled or occasional volunteers, special programming or assistance. Get to know the commanders, directors or spouses. Keep a record of them in a resource file.
2. Proper Training – Once you've identified the need, determine what type of service you can give. If it is Field or Home Service, consider holding an orientation program (see Field and Home Service Training

in the next section) to ensure potential volunteers are properly equipped to handle any situation they may encounter.

- a. Make sure members are aware of ALA and facility-specific policies and procedures.
  - b. If volunteering for a facility as the director to coordinate a formal training program for prospective volunteers, know up front what their policies and procedures are along with performance and expectations.
  - c. If doing Field Service where transportation of a veteran or a family member is essential, ensure members carry proper auto and liability insurance.
3. Program Development and Implementation – once you've identified a need and trained for it, plan to meet it.
4. Recordkeeping
- a. Track your volunteers – know who they are and what they are doing.
  - b. Document Field Service Training with the dates of any conferences, courses or programs attended.
  - c. Record Field and Home Service Hours – assist members in keeping track of hours for recognition. Realize that accurate information will need to come from the unit to the department for certificates, pins and hour bars.
  - d. On annual reports to your department – properly record volunteer hours for Home and Field Service and special activities in support of veterans in a medical center facility or Veterans Home. In reporting hours served at VA Medical Center facilities, consult with the chief of Voluntary Services for a report of hours recorded in the VA system.

## **IV. VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROGRAMS**

### **a. ALA Orientation**

In some departments, volunteers are encouraged to complete an ALA orientation to further acquaint the volunteer with our organization. This session also affirms their understanding and commitment to the level of service we give to our veterans.

### **b. VA Training (at VAMCs)**

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:

1. An interview with a member of the Voluntary Services staff to discuss your skills, interest and intent.

2. Participate in a formal orientation program that is produced and scheduled by the facility.
  - a. Learn about facility, staff and policy.
  - b. Working in a hospital or care center environment.
  - c. Patient interaction – dos/don'ts.
  - d. Your limitations as a volunteer – what you can be asked to do and what you shouldn't be asked to do.
  - e. Discuss uniforms and nametags.
  - f. Facility emergency procedures.
  - g. Facility tour.
  - h. Assignment discussions and other volunteer opportunities.
3. Depending on the assignment, you may be fingerprinted and photographed for an ID and given a tuberculosis test. For some positions, the VA requires a background check and special training if the volunteer will have access to the VA's IT system.
4. Accept a regularly scheduled assignment—meaning you will report to the same location and perform a specific set of tasks during hours that are consistent from week to week. Or, as an occasional volunteer, you may be given direction for reporting when you do come to the facility. Typically, regularly scheduled volunteers receive on-site/on-the-job training from their assigned supervisor.
5. 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 Workman's Comp, serves as the official record of volunteer hours, and guarantees that ALA is credited properly. ALA hours, as well as the Legion's, are recorded in their annual report to Congress, so accurate recording is critical.

### **c. Field Service Orientation**

#### Volunteer Responsibilities:

A Field Service volunteer will be responsible for the following if she would like her hours of service recognized under VA&R:

1. Participate in a Field Service orientation.
2. Work with unit and/or department on Field Service placement.
3. Record service hours and expenses if asked submit them to unit/department VA&R chairman.
4. Communicating regularly with facility director/facilitator about volunteer assignments, performance expectations, annual evaluation etc.

5. Providing feedback to unit/department about placement, other volunteer needs and/or opportunities.
6. Represent the ALA as prescribed in the Code of Ethics.

**ALA Field Service Orientation:**

Those volunteers who would like to receive credit for Field Service hours are required to participate in Field Service Orientation. Please consult with the unit or department VA&R chairman for times and locations.

*Note: Currently, there is no nationally mandated format for Field Service Orientation. Please see the suggested curriculum on the following page for assistance with creating a Field Service Orientation presentation. If you need guidance with creating a curriculum, contact your department or divisional VA&R chairman. Additionally, if your department has a Field Service Orientation in place, the national VA&R chairman would appreciate any feedback at [VA&R@ALAforVeterans.org](mailto:VA&R@ALAforVeterans.org).*

**Field Service Orientation Recommendations:**

Facilitators: department or unit VA&R chairmen, committeemembers or Field Service directors or any qualified Field Service volunteer.

**Qualifications of a Facilitator:**

It is recommended that a facilitator be an individual recognized in the department or the unit as an active and experienced Field Service volunteer. In addition, this individual should have the following attributes:

1. Solid verbal communication skills; ability to engage participants in discussion.
2. Strong organizational skills; experience with running productive meetings that are agenda-driven and time sensitive.
3. Knowledgeable regarding the following orientation curriculum:
  - ★ History of ALA's Field Service program.
  - ★ Explanation of ALA's VA&R Committee structure at all levels.
  - ★ Introduction and discussion centered on the ALA Code of Ethics.
  - ★ Field Service placement options and opportunities.
  - ★ Job assignments and the role of the volunteer.
  - ★ Performance evaluations – with facility feedback to unit and department on placement.

- ★ Volunteer administrative responsibilities (proper reporting of hours, training certification, maintaining hours and expenses, reporting).
- ★ Volunteer Recognition – certificates, pins and bars.

The department should schedule and put into place policies for providing timely Field Service Orientations for volunteers when and where necessary.

### **Certification of Completion:**

When the orientation has been successfully completed, each participant will receive a Field Service card (blue in color and business-card size) certifying completion of the orientation.

### **Earning Field Service Hours:**

Field Service hours 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, standdowns, Christmas Shops (not at a VAMC), veteran cemeteries or gravesites, transportation, snow removal, landscaping/mowing yard and assisting with tax preparation. Anything done directly for a veteran outside of a VAMC or a volunteer's home is considered Field Service.

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

### **Field Service Cards:**

The department secretary can order Field Service cards at no cost through the National Headquarters office.

### **Recording Completion:**

Facilitator will send signed copy of the Code of Ethics and record of orientation completion to unit VA&R chairman.

### **d. Home Service Orientation**

While no formal orientation is necessary for a Home Service volunteer, she may participate in the Field Service Orientation if inclined. Like Field Service volunteers, Home Service volunteers will individually track hours and expenses and report annually to the unit VA&R chairman.

### **Earning Home Service Hours:**

Home Service hours can 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, babysitting while the veteran attends medical appointments or rehab sessions, or making quilts/knitting for hospitalized or homeless veterans. Providing these

services to a member of the family or a relative cannot be counted.

**Reporting Field and Home Service Hours in Annual Reports:**

For the purposes of annual VA&R reporting, Field Service hours should be recorded only for those volunteers who have completed the orientation (formally, the Field Service Course). Home Service hours, recorded under VA&R, should be directly related to the care, rehabilitation or welfare of a sick, wounded or deceased veteran. These hours can be counted only once and not reported again under another committee such as National Security or Community Service.

**e. Uniforms**

In 2006, it was recommended that the ALA forgo a national standard for a uniform, instead deferring to the individual VAMC for appropriate attire. It is expected that attire will vary from department to department and from facility to facility.

**V. BUDGET & 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 Field and Home Service volunteers; and state- or district-wide homeless programs/sponsorships such as standdowns.

**Fundraising:**

Work with other community agencies, organizations, and businesses for donations of time, goods, services or dollars.

**Poppy Funds:**

As a result of poppy distribution, donations can be used to fund a variety of VA&R needs. For the purposes of this guide, the following uses of these funds are approved on the department level:

1. To benefit honorably discharged veterans who are in rehabilitation or hospitalized.
2. To benefit servicemen and women who are in rehabilitation or hospitalized and awaiting discharge.
3. For the welfare of veterans' families (family is defined as spouse and child).

4. To defray the expenses of department VA&R chairmen and committeemembers who may be conducting training sessions for hospital, field or home service volunteers or attending authorized conferences for which they are accredited representatives (example: annual VAVS Conference).
5. For transportation expenses of VAMC volunteers and Field Service volunteers.

(For the complete policy, refer to the American Legion Auxiliary Unit Handbook.)

## VI. EVENTS

### **a. ALA Christmas Gift Shops:**

Typically hosted at a VAMC or in a facility treating a larger number of veterans, Christmas Gift Shops vary from location to location and from department to department. Traditionally, ALA 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 travel from one physical location to another. At a VAMC, the rep or the chief of Voluntary Services is the best source for the history and tradition of this program at a specific 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.

### **b. Volunteer Recognition:**

While volunteers are recognized by the facility for which they volunteer and can earn 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.

### **c. National 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 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, 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.

In addition to the national festival, participating VA facilities may also host local competitions.

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

**d. Ride 2 Recovery:**

R2R supports Spinning® Recovery Labs and outdoor cycling programs at military and VA locations around the United States to help injured veterans overcome obstacles they face. Cycling is an important part of the recovery and rehabilitation program for two reasons:

1. Cycling is an activity that almost all patients with mental and physical disabilities can participate in.
2. Participation in the Ride 2 Recovery program helps speed up the recovery and rehabilitation process.

Visit [www.ride2recovery.com](http://www.ride2recovery.com) for more information.

**e. Standdown:**

What is a standdown?

In times of 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, standdown refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's estimated 107,000 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 and are provided access to the community resources needed to begin addressing their individual problems and rebuilding their lives. In the military, standdowns afforded battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health and overall sense of well-being. Today's standdown affords the same opportunity to homeless veterans.

There is no specific formula to plan and hold a standdown. In fact, each community adds its own uniqueness to a standdown. Some offer basic services, while others offer more by including entertainment and cultural activities to their programs. Some standdowns are re-created 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 regarding upcoming standdown events and much more, visit <http://www.nchv.org/standdown.cfm>.

## VII. VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

### **a. Hour Accreditation Process:**

The ALA has a tradition of recognizing time and service through the use of pins and hour bars. The steps for formal recognition that follow are the same for Hospital, Home or Field Service, Senior or VolunTeen members and nonmembers.

#### **Step 1: Verification of Hours**

To qualify for a pin or bar, volunteer hours must be verified. Hour verification cards, available through the National Headquarters office, are verified/signed by the VAVS Rep and Chief of Voluntary Service for hospital hours and signed by the unit chairman or department chairman for Field and Home Service.

#### **Step 2: Submitting Hours to ALA**

National Headquarters will accept signed hour cards from the department office or the department VA&R chairman, hospital director, Field Service or Home Service director. The person submitting the hour cards to the National Headquarters office will also place any necessary orders for pins or bars. Address: American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters, 8945 N. Meridian St., Indianapolis, IN 46260.

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

Upon receipt of the hour cards, the National Headquarters office 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.

### **b. Pins**

The department secretary orders pins from Emblem Sales (<http://emblem.legion.org> or 1-888-453-4466). Generally, departments will purchase pins for their members. These items are considered special orders and therefore are not listed in the catalog. They will be sent to the person making the order on behalf of the volunteer. The cost of the volunteer pin is absorbed by the department/unit. Oftentimes, departments honor their volunteers at conferences and annual meetings and present a pin or additional hour bars at those times. However,

departments are never charged for hour bars received from National Headquarters.

## **VIII. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION**

Recruitment and retention of VAVS volunteers is imperative for our organization to meet the needs of hospitalized veterans. To that end, every member of the VA&R Committee (at each level) is charged with the responsibility to recruit and retain volunteers.

Inquire with your department's hospital director, VA&R chairman and department president to coordinate your efforts to increase the volunteers at a facility near you.

Caring for our veterans is at the core of the ALA mission. We have a proud tradition to maintain. What can your department or unit do to ensure that the VAMC 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 Volunteer Services to coordinate your efforts to increase and diversify volunteer opportunities in each facility in your department.

The biggest challenge the Auxiliary and other VSOs face is our approach to meeting the needs of an inter-generational 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:

- ★ Offer opportunities to mentor other volunteers.
- ★ Offer interesting volunteer options where personal and professional talent can be put to good use.
- ★ Offer opportunities that have flexible hours they can work around their work and home life.
- ★ Provide volunteer opportunities to help volunteers grow personally and professionally.
- ★ Identify challenging assignments where volunteers can see quick results.
- ★ Offer access to the latest technology.

## **IX. CLOSING**

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

## **A THANK-YOU TO OUR VA&R VOLUNTEERS**

Your willingness to serve, give of your time and of yourself to help our veterans and help the ALA meet its mission is greatly appreciated. The national VA&R committee wants to thank each one of you for the commitment you have made.

## **X. RESOURCES**

Homeless Initiatives: VA Programs & Facilities:  
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

**www.nchv.org**  
**(800) VET-HELP**

VA Medical Center Facilities  
**www.va.gov/directory/**

VA Homeless Veterans Program Office  
**www.va.gov/homeless**  
**(202) 273-5774**

VA National Cemetery Program  
**www.cem.va.gov**

National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH)  
**www.nationalhomeless.org**  
**(202) 462-4823**

Center for Women Vets  
**www.va.gov/womenvet**

National Center for PTSD  
**www.ptsd.va.gov**

For additional resource information, please see the VA&R Committee Plan of Action. The Plan and this Guide are available for free download at **www.ALAforVeterans.org**.



# 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.*



American Legion Auxiliary  
National Headquarters  
8945 N. Meridian Street  
Indianapolis, IN 46260  
P: (317) 569-4500 | F: (317) 569-4502  
[www.ALForVeterans.org](http://www.ALForVeterans.org)  
[www.ALAFoundation.org](http://www.ALAFoundation.org)

© American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters  
All rights reserved. 04/2011