



LIBRARIES HELP AND HONOR OUR VETERANS

Employment, Education, and Community Connection

Libraries [are] safe places where people care and want to help, and where core professional values of respect and confidentiality are upheld,” said former U.S. Army combat medic Jason Deitch.

As service members become Veterans, they and their families have many needs, and America’s libraries are well-positioned to address them.

Often working with Veterans Service Organizations, librarians assist Veterans with learning about available benefits, help translate military work skills to civilian employment, and reinforce family and community connections. Roughly 120,000 strong, libraries are conveniently located across the United States and possess trusted resources and knowledgeable staff ready to serve those who have served our country.

In developing initiatives to help and honor our Veterans, policy makers in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal agencies, the White House, U.S. Congress, and national funders and advocates should look to libraries as partners in this important work.

Delivering Relevant Resources and Services

The range of library services offered to our Veterans and their families is diverse.

One of the most significant is helping Veterans navigate information about the benefits and services they are eligible to receive, and partnering with organizations that can help Veterans access them. For example, the Portland (Me.) Public Library, in partnership with the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project, provides a monthly legal aid clinic for Veterans. Volunteers offer free help to Veterans applying for benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or appealing a denial.

Services related to employment also are widespread. A 2014 RAND report (“Why is Veteran Unemployment So High?”) recommends that, “policymakers who wish to ▶

address veteran unemployment should focus attention on policies and programs that facilitate more efficient job search.” Libraries provide knowledge and resources that cover the waterfront of civilian employment opportunities



and work culture, and help with translating abilities to the civilian context. Many libraries provide targeted resources such as resume and interviewing workshops, support for starting a small business, and advice and programming on improving job skills.

Libraries in higher education also provide services for Veterans. For example, the library at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa teaches two classes per semester as part of the “Military to College: Making the Transition” course, which helps students gain skills that aid them academically,

culturally, socially and financially. The library also offers an online course guide with links to key library resources, contact information for assistance, and web resources for Veterans.

The services provided to all members of a community also are available to Veterans and military families. Libraries provide computer and internet access, as well as digital literacy training and support on the use and value of high-speed broadband and other technologies. The resources of a library are tailored to meet local needs.

Collaborating with Veterans Service Organizations

Libraries are often a first point of contact for Veterans who may be unaware of the VA benefits they are eligible to receive. In a presentation hosted by the South Carolina State Library, VA representative Charles Selby discussed the important role that “trusted communicators” such as first responders (emergency medical technicians, police

officers, et al.) and librarians play in helping to reduce Veteran homelessness by providing information and referrals.

In addition, libraries offer places where service providers can meet with Veterans conveniently and confidentially. For example, the Seattle Public Library offers drop-in help for low-income or homeless Veterans. The library provides the space for a representative from the local Supportive Services for Veteran Families organization to meet to provide and discuss assistance for gaining housing, job-seeking support, and advice on other urgent needs. Peer-to-peer support services groups in Veterans’ organizations meet at the San Antonio Public Library. Many libraries also host Veterans Resource Fairs to showcase organizations that provide various services to Veterans and military families.

California initiated a statewide effort to increase use of benefits by improving information and outreach to its Veterans through libraries. With 38 Veteran Resource Centers established in libraries, and 13 more opening soon, the state is reaching more Veterans and family members. The California State Library, in partnership with the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet), supports participating public libraries in recruiting and training volunteers who assist Veterans and their family members by providing advice on benefits. These libraries established 367 partnerships with Veterans Service Organizations in FY 2015–16. The *Veterans Connect @ the Library* website includes information for Veterans, librarians, and volunteers including programming ideas, training information for library staff, and a list of frequently asked questions.

In fact, libraries serve as community information and referral hubs that can help Veterans and their families find the right information at the right time. Many libraries, such as the Portland (Or.) Community College Library and New Hanover County (N.C.) Public Library, manage online portals of information and services for Veterans. Armed Forces libraries also provide an extensive digital collection available to Veterans and their families.

“If the VA calls and says there’s an opportunity to help Veterans, we’re happy to do what we can,” said William Nation, manager at the Boise (Idaho) Public Library.

ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES



The 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E's of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America's cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 57,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

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