

Successful Community Engagement

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One Quick Exercise

- Fill in the blanks
 - At VA our Goal is to _____
 - Whether it is _____, _____ or _____, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is here to _____.

One Quick Exercise

- Fill in the blanks
 - At VA our Goal is to serve America's Veterans.
 - Whether it is providing award winning health-care to our returning troops, granting compensation for their wounds suffered in service or burying national heroes with the honor they've earned , the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is here to serve those who served us.

Why Am I Here?

- The community is your resource for volunteers
- A community invested in VA is a beautiful thing
- An invested community gives you clout with VA leadership
- You have to be as part of the NAC

What is Community?

Webster's tells us:

- Community:
a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.

What is Engagement?

Webster's tells us:

- 1.to occupy the attention or efforts
- 2.to secure for aid, employment
- 3.to attract and hold fast
- 4.to bind, as by pledge, promise, contract, or oath

What does this mean to you?

Community Engagement in VA

- We are an essential part of every community where we have a presence. We are an outlet for community members to express their patriotism, appreciation and spirit of compassion.

Five Rs of Community Engagement

- Representing
- Recruiting
- Recognizing Resources
- Rewarding
- Reaping

Representing

- **No matter what you are doing in the community, you are making an impression about VA.**
- **Make it positive and inviting.**

Recruiting

- **Every community event is a chance to recruit volunteers.**
- **Every volunteer is an ambassador for your program.**
 - **Volunteers need to embrace this idea.**

Recognizing Resources

- Your sphere of influence
- VSOs
- Church groups
- Community organizations
- Educational institutions
- Chambers of Commerce
- Businesses

Rewarding

- **Know what motivates your volunteers.**
- **Use their motivations to inspire them and give them assignments that fuel their desire.**

Reaping

- **Holding the keys to the community makes you an important resource at your medical center.**
- **Wield your influence to benefit other programs and watch it grow.**

Partners

- **Public Affairs**
- **Chaplain**
- **Department heads**
- **Facility Leadership**
- **Other Organizations**

- **Remember:**
 - **You are either at the table or on the menu!**

BUT HOW?

- Get out of your office!
- Get into staff meetings
- Attend after hour events
- Get to know your staff and volunteers.

But How?

- Attend Facility Meetings

- Get Personal

- Facility meetings allow you to read body language and discern the tone and mood of your audience.

- Get Feedback

- Learn exactly what the concerns and challenges are at your facility and think of ways volunteers or the community might be the solution.

But How?

- Attend Orientation and Employee Functions
 - First Impressions are Lasting Impressions
 - Establish the importance and policies of community engagement from the start and be seen as the go-to expert. Everyone is an ambassador!
 - Establish a Tone
 - Instill a sense of pride and responsibility for the mission.

But How?

- Attend Community Events

- VSO Functions
- Charity Events
- Community Sports
- Block Parties

But How?

- Follow the leader
 - Notice who tends to speak for others and garners the most attention.
 - Target these de facto leaders for assistance and information

Develop

T.A.C.T.

that

L.A.S.T.S

T.A.C.T.

- Timely
 - No one likes to wait.
- Accurate
 - Lying will only prolong a problem and make it come back much bigger.
- Courteous
 - These are America's heroes. Treat them like heroes even if they aren't acting the part at the time.
- Thorough
 - The veteran or volunteer's problem is your problem. Even if you must hand off, follow up.

L.A.S.T.S.

- Listen
 - Let people vent if needed, and listen for the problem.
- Apologize
 - Even if it was not your fault. You Are VA!
- Solve
 - Solve the problem as if it is your own. Follow up!
- Thank
 - Thank people for their service.
- Smile
 - Even on the phone, a smile shows and changes conversation

Build Empathic Energy

- Makes Internal Audiences VA Ambassadors
- Fosters Espirit De Corps
- Empowers Employees and Volunteers
 - (Share Knowledge)

Build Empathic Energy

- Build T.R.U.S.T.
 - Invest **T**ime
 - Be **R**eady When Needed
 - **U**nderstand Their Needs
 - Provide **S**ervice
 - Speak the **T**ruth

Build Empathic Energy

- Be Honest

- Inform and facilitate accurate communication
- Be pleasant when you can't please
- Be firm in your responses.
- Meet your commitments.

Build Empathic Energy

- Be Motivational

- No one will believe in the mission if they can tell that you don't.
- Provide the energy that will generate enthusiasm and cohesion in your internal audiences.

Build Empathic Energy

- Be Open

- Never be dismissive! It fosters resentment.
- Listen to and evaluate each concern or idea brought to you. Treat it seriously.

Let's talk tactics

- Work with policy to resolve problems
 - Don't use policy to explain what you can't do; use policy to help people.

Let's talk tactics

- Why is a wonderful thing to know
 - You are not their mother so you can't get away with I said so.
 - Our veterans and volunteers deserve to know why things are done the way they are. Explain to the best of your ability.

Let's talk tactics

- Take the time to really listen
 - Treat each person as an individual. Listen until you really hear what their problem is.

Let's talk tactics

- **Help people define their needs**
 - **Help people figure out what they want. Guide them to solutions that meet their needs.**

Never Forget

**You need them
more than
they need you!**

Final Thought

You are VA