

## RUNNING A VETS TOWN HALL

**Vets Town Halls are simple to set up and cost almost nothing. They can be run by veterans or non-veterans, and by individuals or organizations.**

While only veterans will speak, all community members, both veterans and non-veterans, are invited to attend and listen. These events are non-political and non-commercial, and all perspectives are valued.

**Here are simple steps to setting up such an event:**

### **Set a Date & Time:**

We recommend hosting the event on Veterans Day. Try to schedule it so it doesn't conflict with any other major events in your community. Plan on a four-hour event.

### **Book a Venue:**

Town or city hall buildings are often ideal and free or inexpensive to use. If the town hall building isn't available, choose an accessible venue that's well-known and central to the community. For the day of the event, make sure you have a point-of-contact and cell phone number that will work on a holiday, and that a microphone/PA system will be available to you. Have plenty of seating.

### **Decide who will Host/MC:**

The MC introduces the event, handles transitions between speakers, and kindly reminds attendees of the ground rules if necessary. If you are a veteran, you may wish to MC the event yourself. If you're a civilian, partner with a local veteran who will MC the event.

### **Publicity/Outreach:**

Once the event details have been established, announce the event to both the general public and to veterans. Effective ways of getting the word out include: social media; press releases to local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations; announcements at town meetings; and posters on community bulletin boards. Make sure to reach out to the local VA, VFW, and other veterans service organizations, as well as any community organizations that you have connections with (colleges, workplaces, faith communities, etc.)

When communicating with the press, make it clear that, while press are welcome and encouraged to attend, they are also asked to respect the privacy of the speakers and check with each speaker to be sure they are comfortable being on the record. Any videotaping should be done as unobtrusively as possible.

### **Speakers:**

Veterans of any era who served in any capacity are invited to speak. It's best to have several speakers scheduled to start off the event. Ideally, veterans from all wars and branches of service should be involved. After pre-registered speakers go, the host takes speakers from the floor. All veterans who attend are welcome to speak, but should not feel pressured to.

Each vet has up to ten minutes to speak. They can say anything they want within the boundaries of good taste in a community forum. Speakers are asked to focus on their own individual experiences, reflections, and insights (rather than speaking on behalf of others or an organization).

It's suggested that the focus should be the emotional experience of the war, whatever that may mean for each particular person.

After all veterans who want to speak have done so, the event is over. There will be no debate on the merits or justifications of war. There will be no recriminations or accusations. If there is a question and answer period, it should be at the end of event, after all veterans who would like to have spoken, and it should be clear that it's optional for speakers to participate.

A community ceremony like this will return the experience of war to our entire nation rather than just leaving it to the people who fought. The bland phrase, I support the troops, will now mean showing up at town hall once a year to hear these people out.

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### **BECOME A VETS TOWN HALL ORGANIZER**

Let us know that you'd like to organize a Vets Town Hall event. We'll be in touch as soon as we can to answer any questions you might have, and to share resources to help you start an event in your hometown. Contact us via our website at [vetstownhall.org](http://vetstownhall.org)

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### **THINKING OF ATTENDING AN EVENT?**

[Visit our website](#) where you can find events, frequently asked questions and forms to ask us anything.

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### **WHO'S BEHIND VETS TOWN HALLS?**

Sebastian Junger is the bestselling author of *War*, about American soldiers in Afghanistan's infamous Korengal Valley, as well as *Tribe*, about their struggles adjusting to life back home.

His documentary *Restrepo* - which he shot, directed and produced with photojournalist Tim Hetherington - won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for an Oscar the following year. Junger remains committed to helping veterans and is the originator of Vets Town Halls.