

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:

Visit vetstownhall.org to sign up as an organizer: We have a variety of resources available, including document templates (press release, posters, etc.), suggested host remarks, and a national calendar to help attendees find their local VTH. We're also available at vetstownhall@gmail.com if you have questions.

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. Allow for a four-hour event. (The actual length of the event will depend on the number of veterans who choose to speak.)

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. In choosing the venue and running the event, aim to create an atmosphere of intimacy and safety. This is a community gathering, not a performance.

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, you may wish to 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.)

(Publicity/Outreach cont'd)

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. Theatrical lighting and large up-front cameras should be avoided. At the event itself, the MC should reiterate these expectations to members of the press.

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 branches of service should be involved – and a special effort should be made to include veterans from previous generations, as this can provide a valuable sense of perspective. 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.

Each event is unique, and situations may come up that aren't addressed above.

Don't hesitate to contact us at vetstownhall@gmail.com with any questions – and when in doubt, refer back to the basic purpose and principles of the event:

- The aim of a Vets Town Hall is to increase communication and understanding between veterans and civilians in their communities.
- Veterans are invited to speak openly about their experiences, and community members are encouraged to attend and listen.
- Vets Town Halls are nonpolitical and noncommercial.
- All perspectives are valued. These events have no agenda.

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.

VISIT VETSTOWNHALL.ORG FOR ORGANIZER RESOURCES