



# Justice For Vets

## 2015 Veterans Day Media & Events Kit

**All Rise!**  
**Veterans Fought for Our Freedom;**  
**It's Our Turn to Fight for Theirs**

Visit [JusticeforVets.org](http://JusticeforVets.org) for more information on Veterans Treatment Courts

*Justice For Vets is a division of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals*

This Veterans Day America will pause to honor the men and women who have served in the United States military. In advance of this solemn holiday, Justice For Vets would like to recognize the outstanding service of our nation's Veterans Treatment Courts and all of the incredible people who have helped make them such a vital and life-saving program.

The United States military instills values all Americans aspire to - discipline, duty, honor, and commitment – values that are evident in millions of veterans who return home strengthened by their experience. Veterans are among our most precious civic assets, and our nation relies on them not only for our defense but for the strength of our communities. While honoring the service of our veterans, we must not forget that some men and women who serve struggle when they come home. For those whose difficulties leads to involvement with the criminal justice system, Veterans Treatment Courts ensure that we leave no veteran behind.

Today, all of you who work in Veterans Treatment Courts are forever changing the way this nation treats veterans when their invisible wounds of war lead them astray. From coast to coast, in jurisdictions large and small, Veterans Treatment Courts are stepping up to make certain our veterans receive the benefits and treatment they have earned when they need it most.

This November, take the opportunity to tell your stories of success and transformation. Let your community know the good work you are doing to serve veterans. In doing so, you will not only build support for your program but you will help demonstrate to this nation that veterans who struggle following their service can recover and lead healthy, productive lives.

Our veterans answered their call of duty. Today, we are answering ours. When one veteran rises from addiction or a mental health condition, we All Rise.

Thank you all for your service to this country and your commitment to ensuring that all our veterans will be treated with the honor and dignity they deserve, as they have so honorably served us.



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# ALL RISE

In most courts, the words All Rise are used to call the courtroom to order. These two words instill a sense of awe and respect for the judicial process, and set the tone for the proceedings. In Veterans Treatment Courts, these two words mean something different.

In Veterans Treatment Court, All Rise is a call to promise – a promise that ensures all veterans have access to the benefits and treatment they have earned; a promise that the court will see the humanity, value and future of every veteran.

All Rise describes a court that understands the military experience; a court that believes our nation is dependent on veterans to lead us by example; a court where the camaraderie among those who served is transformed into healing and empowerment. All Rise signifies that instead of indifference veterans are shown compassion, instead of judgment, they are given assistance, instead of punishment, they are provided a passport to recovery. All Rise captures the tireless dedication and commitment of a Veterans Treatment Court team, relentless in the belief that no veteran is left behind.

All Rise helps this nation live up to its obligation to take care of those who protect us, even those who struggle at home. Because we know that when a veteran in crisis receives the care they have earned, we All Rise.

When a child sees his mother and father reunited, we All Rise.

When two veteran mentors save the life of a fellow veteran in crisis, we All Rise.

When a community steps up to save the lives of our veterans, we All Rise.



## Event Ideas

Veterans Day is a great opportunity to celebrate your program and honor the men and women who have served in the Armed Forces. Here are a couple of events for you to consider. Incorporating the All Rise theme can help build excitement around the event.

**Elected officials can be invited to attend all of these events.**

1) **District Meeting with Member of Congress:** Schedule a meeting with your Member of Congress sometime around Veterans Day.

2) **Community Clean-Up:** Rally your team, participants, and alumni to clean up a park, a street, a highway or a school. Encourage all court staff, law enforcement, probation officers, etc to join in. This could also take place at a local VFW or veteran's memorial.

3) **Community/Alumni Picnic:** These are perfect opportunities for your participants to meet and talk with past graduates, as well as a way to foster community support. Offer free food and invite the public to come learn more about their local Veterans Treatment Court.

4) **5K Run:** Another fun community event that could turn into an excellent tradition and fundraising opportunity. Invite local VSOs to participate and consider raising money to support either your program or a local veteran's charity.

5) **Softball Game:** A couple of years ago there was a great softball game between local law enforcement and Veterans Treatment Court participants. The game was covered by the local press and was a tremendous success. Consider a Mentors v. Participants game.

6) **Donation Drive:** This can be done all month long. Choose a local veterans charity and help them raise donations. This can also be used to get local businesses involved with your program.



## Event Ideas – an All Rise example

In August, the Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court held an event dubbed “All Rise for Exercise.” The event was put together to promote physical fitness and wellness as an alternative to substance abuse and other negative behaviors veterans sometimes use to combat PTSD. It was also a great opportunity to educate the community about Veterans Treatment Court.

The court invited a host of local businesses and organizations for a special workout attended by Veterans Treatment Court staff and participants. “I place a special emphasis on exercise as a hobby men and women in our program should take up,” said Judge Ken Goble. “PT is good for PTSD. This also gives them a chance to see me in a less formal setting.”

Not only was it a great day for all who attended, the event was [covered by the local press!](#)

This is just one example of how your program can come together in an activity that not only strengthens relationships but builds trust with the community you serve.



## Getting Members of Congress to Your Event

**We encourage every Veterans Treatment Court to reach out to invite their members to attend a graduation ceremony, regular Veterans Treatment Court session, or special Veterans Treatment Court event during November.**

Congress has not finalized the budget for fiscal year 2016. Earlier this year the House approved \$15.5 million for Veterans Treatment Courts at the Department of Justice. We need to make sure this number sticks when the House and Senate finalize the budget.

This is one of the best opportunities we have to ensure this funding *and* make them lifetime supporters of your Veterans Treatment Court.

In addition to inviting members of Congress, you can invite your governor, your mayor, your state legislators, your chief of police, and your local media. Nothing communicates the vision, purpose, and effectiveness of Veterans Treatment Court as clearly as a graduation/commencement ceremony.

**NADCP stands ready to help you in securing the attendance of your Members of Congress. Please contact us for assistance!**

Tonya L. Voelker  
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National Association of Veterans Treatment Court Professionals  
703-575-9400 (Office)  
571-384-1863 (Direct Line)  
[tvoelker@nadcp.org](mailto:tvoelker@nadcp.org)



### **Step 1 - Call Your Congressional Member's Washington, D.C. Office**

- Go to <http://cqrcengage.com/nadcp/home> and get your Member's contact information by entering your zip code.
- In your initial call, ask for the staff person who is "responsible" for Veterans issues in that Member's office (usually the Veterans Legislative Assistant).
- When you reach the appropriate staff person, tell them who you are and that you would like to invite your Member of Congress to attend a special Veterans Day Event and provide keynote remarks. Let them know if press will be attending.
- Follow up your first contact with an email within 24 hours summarizing your request.

### **Step 2 - Make a follow-up call**

A few days after your request email, follow-up with a phone call to the staff person confirming they received the request letter.

### **Step 3 - Notify NADCP after you have scheduled your Member to attend.**

Contact us and provide the following information. We will send you information to help make the ask:

1. Name of Member(s) of Congress and/or staff person attending
2. Date and time of ceremony

Tonya L. Voelker  
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National Association of Veterans Treatment Court Professionals/  
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[tvoelker@nadcp.org](mailto:tvoelker@nadcp.org)



#### **Step 4 - Re-confirm the visit**

A few days before the ceremony, contact the Member's Scheduler to confirm your meeting date and time. Life moves pretty quickly for Members and their staff often have to rearrange their schedules at the last minute. Again, staff will appreciate that you did! This is also a great time to provide them with background on your program, let them know who from the press is coming, and ask them for an advance quote for your press release.

#### **Step 5- Day of the event**

Expect that staff members may accompany the Member of Congress even if it was not specifically mentioned.

Consider appointing a person to greet and/or escort the official during the event, and provide materials about Veterans Treatment. Appoint a photographer so you can share pictures on social media and with the Members office.

Ensure that media representatives who attend know the elected official is present. Likewise, ensure that the Member of Congress and his/her staff know that media is present.

#### **Step 6 – Thank your Member of Congress for attending!**

Following your event, make sure to send a personalized “thank you” to your Member for attending. It is important for them to understand how much you appreciate their visit and this will help you build a lasting relationship with your Member.



Senior Director Melissa Fitzgerald presents Congressman Ander Crenshaw (R-FL) with an award following his remarks at a Veterans Treatment Court graduation in Jacksonville, FL

## Sample Letter of Invitation to an Event

To: [Your Senator or Representative]  
ATTN: [Scheduler]  
CC: [Veterans LA]  
FAX: [Congressional Office fax number]  
FROM: [Your Name and City, State]  
RE: Invitation to Veterans Treatment Court Graduation  
DATE: [Current Date]

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman XXXXXXXX:

It is my honor to invite you to provide the commencement address at the graduation ceremony of the XXXX Veterans Treatment Court, [date, time, location].

This graduation will occur in honor of Veterans Day, and will honor all those who have served while paying special tribute to the veterans who have completed the Veterans Treatment Court program.

The [YOUR COURT] represents a proven budget solution for [YOUR LOCATION]. Our Veterans Treatment Court is truly making a difference by connecting justice-involved veterans with the life saving benefits and treatment they have earned. By transforming the lives of our participants, we are saving our state valuable resources. As our district's representative [IF INVITING SENATOR, INSERT: As the U.S. Senator for XXX], it would be an honor to have you address our Veterans Treatment Court graduates. We have also invited [LIST INVITEES] and are working with local media to cover the event.

[ADD BASIC INFO ON YOUR COURT]

Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions you can contact me at:

Sincerely,

Name  
Title

## Resolution/Proclamation

### In Support of “Veterans Treatment Court”

**WHEREAS**, November 11, 2015 marks Veterans Day and there are now more than 21 million U.S. veterans including 2.6 million from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; **and**

**WHEREAS**, the men and women of our military shoulder the burden of safeguarding our freedom; **and**

**WHEREAS**, the United States military instills a sense of honor, duty, leadership, commitment and respect, evident in the millions of veterans who have returned home to their communities as productive citizens, strengthened by their military experience; **and**

**WHEREAS**, one in five veterans has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment,<sup>1</sup> one in six veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffers from a substance abuse issue,<sup>2</sup> and research continues to draw a link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness;<sup>3</sup> **and**

**WHEREAS**, increasing numbers of veterans nationwide are appearing in the courts to face charges stemming directly from these issues; **and**

**WHEREAS**, Veterans Treatment Court was our communities response to the growing need for an alternative to incarceration specifically for justice-involved veterans; **and**

**WHEREAS**, many veterans have access to exclusive economic benefits and health services through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, State Departments of Veterans Affairs, County Departments of Veterans Affairs, and a variety of additional programs for veterans operated through Veterans Service Organizations at federal, state and local levels; **and**

**WHEREAS**, grouping justice-involved veterans into a specific court docket significantly expedites access to veteran-specific resources, including benefits and treatment, earned through military service; **and**

**WHEREAS**, veterans deeply value their military experience and share an inimitable bond among their peers; **and**

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<sup>1</sup> RAND Ctr. For Military Health Policy and Research, *invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery* iii (Terri Tanielan & Lisa H. Jaycox eds., 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (November 1, 2007). *The NSDUH Report: Serious Psychological Distress and Substance Use Disorder among Veterans*. Rockville, MD.

<sup>3</sup> Dep't of Def. Task Force on Mental Health, *An Achievable Vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health*, at ES-1 (2007)

**WHEREAS**, Veterans Treatment Courts build upon this camaraderie by allowing participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences; **and**

**WHEREAS**, Veterans Treatment Courts have captured national attention as a critical tool for ensuring veterans in the criminal justice system do not fall through the cracks:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that \_\_\_\_\_ declares that a “Veterans Treatment Court” be recognized as a critical solution for saving the lives, families and futures of our nation’s veterans.

## Veterans Treatment Courts Talking Points

Most veterans return home strengthened by their military service. But the combat experience has unfortunately left a growing number of veterans suffering from substance abuse, mental health disorders, and trauma.

One in five veterans has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment.<sup>4</sup>

One in six veterans from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffers from a substance abuse issue,<sup>5</sup> and research continues to draw a link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness.<sup>6</sup>

Since 2004, the number of veterans being treated for mental illness and substance-use disorders has increased 38%.<sup>7</sup>

Left untreated, mental health disorders common among veterans, such as Traumatic Brain Injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, can directly lead to homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system.

The first Veterans Treatment Court launched in January, 2008 in Buffalo, NY following increasing numbers of veterans on city court dockets with substance abuse and mental health issues.

There are 220 operational Veterans Treatment Courts in the United States.

Approximately 11,000 veterans are currently participating in Veterans Treatment Courts.

In Veterans Treatment Courts the judge, prosecutor, defense council, probation department, and law enforcement work together with treatment providers, the VA/VBA and volunteer veteran mentors. This team works with the veterans to address their needs, ranging from treatment to housing, employment and family counseling. Veterans appear regularly in court for the team to review their progress and to meet with volunteer veteran mentors.

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<sup>4</sup> RAND Ctr. For Military Health Policy and Research, *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery* (Terri Tanielan & Lisa H. Jaycox eds., 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. (November 1, 2007). *The NSDUH Report: Serious Psychological Distress and Substance Use Disorder among Veterans*. Rockville, MD.

<sup>6</sup> Dep't of Def. Task Force on Mental Health, *An Achievable Vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health*, at ES-1 (2007)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

The structure of the program appeals to veterans who have experienced a loss of structure upon coming home. And there is strong camaraderie among the participants because everyone is a veteran. The courtroom truly becomes a place of hope and healing. And Veterans Treatment Courts are a much more effective and efficient system.

Veterans Treatment Courts evolved out of the growing need for a treatment court model designed specifically for justice-involved veterans with diagnosed substance abuse and/or mental health issues.

Veterans Treatment Courts build upon military camaraderie by allowing participants to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences and through the use of volunteer veteran mentors.

Recently, the *Community Mental Health Journal* released the first published study on Veterans Treatment Court and the results are outstanding. Researchers concluded that veterans participating in Veterans Treatment Court experienced significant improvement with depression, PTSD and substance abuse as well as with critical social issues including housing, emotional well-being, relationships, and overall functioning.

The study also found that mentoring from volunteer veterans is particularly effective. Veterans who receive mentoring not only experience better clinical outcomes, they report feeling more socially connected.

## Media Tools

- **Press Release** A press release provides news about an organization and is distributed widely to media as well as provided onsite during events.

**Media Alert** A media advisory, or media alert, is much shorter than a press release and its purpose is to invite the media to an event, such as a news conference, grand opening of a new VTC or a graduation.

Since the media advisory is an invitation, it is sent to those members of the press likely to attend. A press release is sent to a wider audience. For example, Justice For Vets might send a media advisory to members of the media in Washington, DC for an event being held on Capitol Hill, but we would send out a press release regarding new VTC initiatives to media throughout the country. However, a press release may also be used to invite media to an event.

- **Justice For Vets Fact Sheet** on Veterans Treatment Courts
- **Additional Outreach Materials** such as brochures and newsletters providing information about Veterans Treatment Courts or your particular Veterans Treatment Court. But please keep in mind that too much information can confuse your message.
- **News Reports** If available, it's always helpful to include in press kits positive news reports that have already been printed or were in the news.

## **Develop Your Press Kit**

What is a Press Kit? It is a package of information to present to the media. The press kit is usually a standard two-pocket folder that could display your county or Veterans Treatment Court logo and include a place for your business card. Your press kit can include a one-page press release describing your event; a fact sheet about your court and/or a national fact sheet from Justice For Vets. It can also include any prior positive newspaper reports or media coverage on your court, a graduation or graduate, or an event. Your kit does not need to be glossy or expensive.

You can give a press packet to reporters who are covering your event, or you can provide some of the information in attachments in an email. Some reporters may prefer the information to be sent electronically or in advance.

At Justice For Vets, we send out a press release or media advisory in the body of an email a few weeks prior to an event. We include a Justice For Vets Fact Sheet in an attachment. Our communications department follows up with a phone call to make sure the release was received at each media organization, which also gives us an opportunity to speak to the media to hopefully build up relationships and to understand how that particular media organization operates.

We usually send out a reminder to the media the day before our event, and follow up with phone calls, when time permits.

At the event, we make sure we have plenty of press kits available to pass out to the media in attendance. Often news personnel do not RSVP to an event, and instead make last minute decisions to send reporters. It's also helpful to have a sign-in sheet at an event to keep track of the media in attendance and to gather their contact information.

**For help with media outreach or for contact information for media in your state, contact Rhonda Pence at [rpence@nadcp.org](mailto:rpence@nadcp.org).**



## **Making the Right Contacts**

Before you send a press release or media advisory, please take a half-hour to find out the email addresses and phone numbers of the appropriate contacts in news organizations:

- Do a search on the internet for media in your area. Create a list to include each newspaper, magazine, periodical, TV station, or radio station that you believe might be interested in covering your event.
- Call each media organization on your list and ask for the name of the assignment desk editor, assignment planner, or reporter to whom your material should be directed and for his or her email address and phone number.
- If you live in a smaller area, you may already personally know a newspaper editor or television reporter. Or there may be reporters you have noticed who are already covering criminal justice issues and you may want to reach out to them personally.

## How to Format a Press Release & Media Advisory

### Press Release

- Type it on your Veterans Treatment Court letterhead (8 1/2" x 11") or if you are sending a release electronically, include a logo, if appropriate.
- List a contact person and his or her phone number and e-mail address in the upper right corner of the page.
- Write "IMMEDIATE RELEASE" in the upper left-hand corner of the page.
- Come down almost a third of a page and center the title of the release; use a brief and catchy headline to describe the story.
- Be brief—one to two typed, double-spaced pages, with wide margins. Avoid printing on the front and back.
- Use a "dateline" that includes the date, time, and location.
- Write in an active voice, and use short sentences and paragraphs. (In sentences written in an active voice, the subject performs the action expressed in the verb.)
- If your release is longer than one page, type "-MORE-" at the bottom of every page that continues.
- Identify subsequent pages with a "slug," *i.e.*, a one-word description from the headline followed by the page number in the upper, left-hand corner. (Pages can easily get separated in a newsroom.)
- Indicate the end of the release by typing "###" at the end of the final page.
- Carefully proofread your release.

### Content

- Include at least two to three of the five W's (Who, What, Where, When, and Why) in the lead (first) paragraph. Summarize the climax in the lead. It should be interesting enough or "hook" the reporter into reading the rest of your release.
- Include the remaining Ws in the second paragraph.
- Identify your Veterans Treatment Court spokesperson no later than in the third paragraph.
- Use quotes to make an emotional point or to state an opinion. A good release usually contains at least one or two quotes (including at least one that appears within the first four paragraphs).
- Include background information about your Veterans Treatment Court in the last paragraph.
- Double-check names, dates, places, numbers, and quotes for accuracy.

### Media Advisory

- Type it on 8½" x 11" letterhead.

- List a contact person and a phone number.
- Create an eye-catching, informative headline.
- Type “Media Advisory” at the top.
- Include a release date.
- List the date, time, and location of the event.
- Describe the event and any photo opportunities.
- Limit the advisory to one page.
- Type “###” centered at the bottom of the page to show its end.

#### Content

- Include who, what, where, when, and why.
- Double-check names, dates, places, numbers, and quotes for accuracy.

## Sample Press Release

[Local Veterans Treatment Court Letterhead]

### For Immediate Release

Contact:      Name of Contact  
                    Contact Title  
                    Phone Number  
                    E-mail

## Veterans Treatment Court Holds Special Graduation Ceremony to Honor Veterans Completing the Program

*“XXX Delivers Keynote Address”*

CITY, STATE, DATE—The [NAME OF VETERANS TREATMENT COURT] held a graduation ceremony on [DATE] at [LOCATION] to honor XX veterans who have completed an intensive program designed to connect veterans suffering from substance abuse and/or mental health disorders with the benefits and treatment they have earned. XXX delivered the keynote address. This is the court’s Xth ceremony since it was founded in XXXX.

The uplifting commencement ceremony is evidence of the tremendous impact the [NAME OF COURT] has had on the community and sends a powerful message that Veterans Treatment Courts are a proven budget solution that saves lives and money.

[QUOTE FROM YOUR JUDGE, LOCAL OFFICIAL, OR KEYNOTE SPEAKER]

Like nearly 220 operational Veterans Treatment Courts in the United States, the [NAME OF COURT] is a judicially-supervised court docket that reduces correctional costs, protects community safety, and improves public welfare. Veterans Treatment Courts combine rigorous treatment and accountability for veterans facing

incarceration due to charges stemming from substance abuse and/or mental health issues. They promote sobriety, recovery, and stability through a coordinated response and the understanding that the bonds of military service and combat run deep. Veterans Treatment Courts not only allow veterans to go through the treatment court process with other veterans who are similarly situated and have common past experiences, but links them with Veterans Affairs services uniquely designed for the distinct needs that arise from that experience. Veterans Treatment Courts expedite access to veteran-specific resources, including benefits and treatment earned through military service, by involving the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care networks, the Veterans Benefits Administration, State Departments of Veterans Affairs, volunteer veteran mentors and veterans and veterans family support organizations.

[QUOTE FROM A GRADUATE]

[PROVIDE SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON YOUR COURT]

####

## Sample Media Advisory

### MEDIA ADVISORY

(Date of Release)

For Immediate Release  
Contact: Name/Phone

## Veterans Treatment Court Holds 1<sup>st</sup> Graduation on Veterans Day *(Your Local Court Name) Celebrates by Honoring 10 Program Graduates*

- WHO: *The name of your Veterans Treatment Courts and all VIP attendees*
- WHAT: Graduation of *(provide number of graduates)* Veterans Treatment Court participants in conjunction with Veterans Day.
- WHERE: Location of graduation ceremony
- WHEN: Date and time of graduation ceremony  
*Put details of ceremony in bullets, include all invited guests*
- WHY: Showcase the accomplishments of the Veterans Treatment Court participants and the successes of the Veterans Treatment Court program since its establishment in *(your city, state)*. All members of the Veterans Treatment Court team - the judge, the prosecutor, the public defender, law enforcement and treatment professionals, as well as the graduates' families, who will be in attendance celebrating the graduation of this session's participants and Veterans Day.
- Media Opp: Media are invited to attend the event and interview speakers.

**If a VIP is providing a keynote address, be sure to let the press know!**

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## How to Write an OpEd

An OpEd is a newspaper article that expresses the opinions of a writer usually unaffiliated with the newspaper's editorial board, and it is one of the best ways to disseminate your message through the media because you have complete control over the content. This Veterans Day, please consider writing an OpEd to your local paper highlighting the success of your Veterans Treatment Court.

*Here are tips for getting your OpEd published:*

**Choose a media target.** Identify the newspapers in your area. Check out their website and determine the email address for their opinion page and submission protocol.

**Find a news hook.** The media traditionally highlight stories about veterans on Veterans Day and print OpEds on subjects pertaining to veterans, so this is an opportunity for you to raise awareness about your Veterans Treatment Court.

**Know the word limit.** Newspapers have limited space, and editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. OpEds that are excessively lengthy may automatically be eliminated from printing. 750 to 800 words will do, but check the paper's Op-Ed page to find out their criteria. . Stick to a single theme and make several points to support your theme clearly and persuasively.

**“Humanize” your OpEd.** Illustrations, anecdotes, and personal stories help explain and bring complicated issues to life. Think about your personal experiences in Veterans Treatment Court or the story of an outstanding graduate and use those examples in the OpEd.

**Make a specific recommendation.** This is an opinion piece. State your opinion on what is needed to ensure your Veterans Treatment Court can continue to operate effectively.

**Draw the reader in, but get to the point.** Your first paragraph should draw the reader in by using a dramatic vignette or a well-stated argument. If you open with an anecdote or other device, make sure you quickly get to the point.

**End with a bang.** Your final paragraph and your last line are as important as your opening paragraph. Summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph.

**Email your OpEd in the body of the email.** Include a short note of introduction. Your paper may request a photograph of the author, a few lines summarizing your credentials, and a contact phone number.

## Veterans Day Sample OpEd Template

### SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

We ask much of our men and women in uniform, and they ask little in return. As a nation, we are ultimately responsible for ensuring whatever effects veterans suffer in the mission of defending our nation will be treated here at home. So on this Veterans Day, the question we must ask ourselves is: If veterans fought for our freedom, shouldn't we fight for theirs?

In (YOUR LOCATION) I am proud to say that we are fighting for the freedom of our veterans. While most who serve are strengthened by the military experience, some struggle to reengage with life at home. Too many veterans are winding up in the criminal justice system suffering from mental illness, cognitive impairment, and substance abuse. They are unable to cope with the invisible wounds of war on their own. These veterans have earned the opportunity for treatment and restoration.

The (YOUR PROGRAM NAME) Veterans Treatment Court was created in response to the growing number of veterans appearing on dockets who were addicted to drugs and alcohol and/or suffering from mental impairment or trauma. By operating a Veterans Treatment Court, our community is at the forefront of a national movement to give justice-involved veterans the treatment, benefits, and services they have earned. According to Justice For Vets, the only national organization committed to the expansion of Veterans Treatment Courts, there are now nearly 220 Veterans Treatment Court programs in the United States with hundreds more being planned.

REPORT SUCCESS RATES (Use Anecdotes!) - Since we launched our Veterans Treatment Court XXXX individuals have been admitted and XXX have completed it successfully. With the assistance of the Department of Veterans Affairs, we connect them to treatment and disability compensation. We encourage veterans from the community to volunteer as mentors to offer peer-to-peer support to their fellow veterans in our program. We get them back to school and find them jobs. We keep them out of jail so they can remain connected with their families and communities. These veterans complete the program with a renewed sense of service, dignity and honor.

Our community has made great strides by being one of the first in the nation to recognize the need for a Veterans Treatment Court. Let's continue to work together to maintain funding for these courts and to raise awareness of the needs of our Veterans. As we observe Veteran's Day, let's make a commitment that no Veteran in our community will be left behind.



## Tell us what you're planning on Veterans Day

Justice For Vets will be highlighting Veterans Day on our AllRise Facebook page, our website, and on Twitter. We may even create an Instagram highlighting your court. Please send us information and photos about your event.

Below you will find a form for you to fill out and return to us, as well as a photo release for pictures of Veterans Treatment Court participants and graduates. You can also submit information online by clicking here:

<http://www.justiceforvets.org/node/157>

If you would like to see your court highlighted, make sure you send your material and information to [cdeutsch@allrise.org](mailto:cdeutsch@allrise.org).

These can be very short. Here are some examples:

*"Veterans Treatment Court in Camden, New Jersey graduates 17 on Veterans Day"*

*"Colorado Springs Mayor signs special Veterans Day Proclamation"*

*"Big Island Veterans Treatment Court participates in community cleanup as part of Veterans Day celebration in Hawaii"*

*"Veterans Treatment Court hosts ceremony with local VFW in honor of Veterans Day"*

## Photo Release

For valuable consideration received, I hereby grant to Justice For Vets and the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and its legal representatives, licensees, and assigns the irrevocable and unrestricted right to use and publish photographs of me, or photographs in which I may be included, for editorial trade, advertising, and any other purpose and in any manner and medium; and to alter the same without restriction. I hereby release Justice For Vets and the National Association of Drug Court Professionals and its legal representatives, licensees, and assigns from all claims and liability relating to said photograph.

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Name\*

---

Signature\*

---

Date\*

---

Name of Drug Court\*

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Address

---

Email

## Social Media

Social Media has become an important tool for Justice For Vets to utilize for messaging, communication, interacting with members of Congress and reporters and to keep abreast of the latest news on Veterans Treatment Courts. There are hundreds of social media sites, but Justice For Vets focuses primarily on Facebook and Twitter.

### Facebook

Facebook has more than a billion active users around the world and at this point many people have their own personal accounts and are very familiar with how Facebook operates. **But does your court have a Facebook page?** If not, it may be something to consider as it is a rewarding way to promote the success of your Veterans Treatment Court. You can highlight graduates and graduations, post news reports about your court or graduation as well as inspiring messages. It's also a great way to keep an on-line connection with your alumni, court professionals and supporters.

If you do not have a facebook page for your court, here are a few basic tips to help you get started. The process is pretty straightforward but slightly differently than setting up a personal page.

- After registering to use the site, add a few people as administrators.
- When given the option to choose between an official page and a community page, choose the official page as it allows for more facebook followers.
- Add the name of your organization to create your profile page.
- You can post a “profile” photo and a “cover” photo so that others can easily identify your Veterans Treatment Court.
- Encourage your court participants, staff and others to “like” your page.

### The Justice For Vets [Facebook Page](#)



Here are some tips to make the most of your Facebook page.

- Write engaging content
- Use open-ended questions that will solicit comments from your followers
- Use amazing photos
- Post Inspiring Messages
- Create Instagrams or Memes
- Post at least once a day
- Have Fun

Justice For Vets has an interactive and popular Facebook page. On a daily basis, we post news about Veterans Treatment Courts and success stories of graduates. We encourage courts to send Justice For Vets photos of graduations and other successful events so that we may share your story on our facebook page.



In the above example, Justice For Vets captured why Veterans Treatment Courts are necessary. The URL to the story was shortened and posted so readers who want to read more of the details of the graduate's journey can find the news report by clicking the link. We used an attention-grabbing photo. This post was very popular and so far has received 23 shares.

## Twitter

Please follow Justice For Vets on Twitter accounts: [@Justice4Vets](https://twitter.com/Justice4Vets)

Twitter is a free on-line social networking service that allows subscribers to broadcast short 140 character messages called *tweets*. You can post your own personal messages and news on twitter and follow breaking news and messages posted by subscribers you follow. You can share or *retweet* messages posted by others. Here's an example of a few tweets on the Justice For Vets Twitter feed.



When you choose to follow another Twitter user, the most recent tweet posted by you or your followers will appear first on your main Twitter page.

Tweets are public and searchable and may include hyperlinks, photos, videos and hashtags—words or phrases prefixed with a "#" sign. Long URL links can be shorted on <http://tinyurl.com/> or <https://hootsuite.com> to fit into 140 messaging allowed by Twitter.

Twitter has become a popular way to communicate on-line, as you can send a message directly to another subscriber on twitter by using their handle.

Here's an example of a tweet posted by The Michigan Supreme Court.



The tweet consists of a personal message and also highlights a news story. The link was shortened so it could fit into the 140 character limit. The Michigan Supreme Court included @Justice4Vets in the message to ensure that Justice For Vets receives notification of the tweet. This tweet is also part of an archive of all stories on twitter that include the #veterans. Use of a # preceding a word or subject also gives subscribers the opportunity to weave tweets into a conversation thread. Justice For Vets responded to this tweet by retweeting this post to share with our followers. We could have also responded directly to the Michigan Supreme Court.

Tweets are commonly sent by cell phone text message or by posting at the [Twitter.com](https://twitter.com) website. If you wish to schedule tweets to go out throughout the day, a popular and user friendly site is [hootsuite.com](https://hootsuite.com) which also provides a tool to shorten URL links.

A Twitter language of abbreviations and symbols has evolved to work within the 140 character constraint per message. The 140 character limit includes links to photos, videos, news reports or blogs.

Examples of abbreviations:

- YW-You're Welcome
- U-You
- PPL -People
- EM-Email
- BTW -By the Way
- IDK-I don't know
- TY-Thank You
- RT-Retweet
- DM-Direct Message
- MT-Modified Tweet

While there are many lists of Twitter slang on the internet, here is a short article from [Business Insider on Twitter Abbreviations and Acronyms.](#)

## How Justice For Vets Utilizes Twitter



Justice For Vets utilizes twitter to broadcast positive news reports of graduations across the country, industry news and to grow our base of followers who support Drug Courts, DWI Courts, Mental Health Courts, Tribal Courts and Veterans Treatment Courts.

\*On a daily basis we schedule tweets to promote positive news throughout the day and retweet when appropriate

\*We tweet live during events using #hashtags to be part of archives so that others can learn about Veterans Treatment Courts. We currently use the #CJReform hashtag to build momentum for Veterans Treatment Courts as criminal justice reform.

\*We use twitter to communicate directly with elected officials, reporters and Veterans Treatment Court professionals.

Here are other examples of Justice For Vets tweets:



**Top Tweet** earned 19K impressions

Heartwarming. Dogs help #Vets in Bernalillo County's #NM #VeteransTreatmentCourt TY @KOB4 ow.ly/MRjju pic.twitter.com/CBNdlcqdKW



15 23

Take 5 min to ask the Senate to vote for #VeteransTreatmentCourt funding passed by the House! ow.ly/NSMc1 pic.twitter.com/WoaOmwcH10



2 1

## **How You Can Utilize Twitter**

1. We encourage you to set-up your own accounts and follow us on Twitter [@Justice4Vets](https://twitter.com/Justice4Vets).
2. Post news about your court and news about veterans and veterans issues.
3. In November, incorporate the hashtags #VeteransDay, #CJReform and/or #AllRise, this will increase the visibility of your tweets.

For questions about the use of social media, please contact Rhonda Pence at [rpence@allrise.org](mailto:rpence@allrise.org).