Veterans Day:
Preparation, Events, & Media

November 2017
Dear colleagues,

This November, our country will once again pause to honor the men and women who served in the United States Armed Forces. Veterans Day—Saturday, November 11, 2017—is our annual opportunity to thank our veterans for their service and acknowledge their sacrifices on our behalf. Remember, Veterans Day honors our living veterans for the sacrifice they have made for our country. It is a day to celebrate those who stood the line to protect all of us. Currently, only 2 million active duty, reserve and guard service members, protect over 330 million of us every day. With 21.6 million Veterans in our country, Veterans Day is your opportunity to find a way to say ‘thank you’.

The holidays are an ideal time for veterans treatment courts to engage their community. This Veterans Day: Preparation, Events, & Media toolkit contains a wealth of resources to help you plan and execute events as well as educate your elected officials and the media at any time, with an emphasis on November. For veterans like myself, Veterans Day can bring up mixed emotions, and for some it can usher in a difficult holiday season. For these reasons, we have also included tips on ensuring your staff, participants, and mentors have the support they need.

In this kit, you’ll find:
- Creative event ideas to honor your local veterans
- Ways to educate your community about and foster support for your court
- Instructions on how to contact your local and regional media outlets
- A sample press release and newspaper opinion editorial
- A sample invitation for Members of Congress
- Guidance on how social media can help spread your message, enhance your events, and foster community support for your court
- Guidance on how to prepare and support your veteran participants through what may be a difficult month and holiday

We will actively highlight the news and photos you send us all month long on our Justice For Vets Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Thank you for your service to this country and your commitment to ensuring that all veterans are shown the honor and dignity they have earned.

Sincerely,

Scott Swaim, USAFV, MA, LMHC
Director, Justice For Vets
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Veterans Day Significance & Small Acts of Honor

President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed November 11, 1919 as the first commemoration of Armistice Day—the day when the Allied nations and Germany ceased hostilities in World War I—exactly one year before in 1918. In 1938, Congress made Armistice Day an official US holiday to recognize WWI veterans, but after WWII and the Korean War, and at the urging of veterans service organizations, the act was amended in 1954 to replace the word “Armistice” with “Veterans.” We now celebrate Veterans Day to recognize all American veterans, those who served during wartime and peacetime.

How much we truly value the members of our armed forces is demonstrated by our actions. Here are some small acts of honor—five simple ways you can recognize members of the military in your own personal life, your community, and our country:

1) Say “thank you.” Say “happy Veterans Day.” These are small words and phrases, but they can mean a lot to someone who has served.

2) Take a moment of silence during the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month. This represents the official signing of the armistice, but also demonstrates respect for the service of all United States Armed Forces veterans.

3) Patronize businesses that hire and otherwise support military members and veterans. Go out of your way to support businesses recognizing Veterans Day or offering discounts or free items to those who have served—check out http://www.military.com/discounts for a full list.

4) Teach the children in your life about the importance of military service. Take them to a parade. Bring them with you to visit your local VA or military hospital. Show them that they are never too young to help others.

5) Support a military spouse or a family. Take them a meal, or flowers, or offer to babysit if they have children. Helping in practical ways honors their loved one's service and sacrifice and makes them feel supported. This is a great opportunity to serve Gold Star families.

6) Volunteer with or donate to a local veteran service organization. There are more than 35,000 veterans service organizations in the US. Find a local organization doing great work for veterans and their families in your community and support them with your time and your finances. Check out http://www.defense.gov/Resources and look under “Community Support for the Military” for Department of Defense–approved organizations.
For even more ways to show appreciation on Veterans Day, visit military.com. Event Ideas to Honor Veterans in November

Below are several event ideas for your veterans treatment court to hold or participate in to recognize local veterans and foster community support for your program. Remember, elected officials can and should be invited to attend these events!

1) **Graduation ceremony**: If possible, schedule a graduation ceremony during the month of November, and invite local and state officials and the media to attend.

2) **District meeting with Member(s) of Congress**: Both House and Senate Members of Congress will be in their districts November 10 – 12. In addition, House Members will be in their districts again from November 17 – 27, and Senate Members from November 18 – 26. Have your court’s judge and a graduate attend the meeting to educate the Member(s) on why they should support or continue to support veterans treatment courts. (see pages 8-12)

3) **School assembly**: Many veterans groups conduct outreach in local schools. This is a great way for your participants, graduates, or veteran court staff to give back to the community and spread a positive message to local youth.

4) **Community clean-up project**: Invite your community to join your court in cleaning up a local park, street, highway, or school. Invite past program graduates and their families to participate, and encourage all court staff, law enforcement, probation, etc. to join in.

5) **Parade**: Communities often hold parades for Veterans Day. Not only can your court staff and participants attend, but consider representing the veterans treatment court together as part of the parade itself, whether through a float, color guard, or other contribution.

6) **5K run or motorcycle ride**: These fun community events can be turned into an annual tradition and can be a great fundraising opportunity.

7) **Softball, basketball, or volleyball game**: Courts across the country hold sports games or tournaments to bring the community together. These events are often popular with both the community and the media.

8) **Donation drive or fundraiser**: A donation drive for a local food bank or veterans charity can be held throughout the entire month of November leading up to the holiday season. Or, hold a fundraiser specifically for your court program to encourage local businesses and nonprofits to support your efforts through donated funds, services, or time. Here’s a great example from Michigan.

[Image] JusticeForVets.org
Example Event: All Rise for Exercise – “PT for PTSD”

The Montgomery County Veterans Treatment Court in Clarksville, Tennessee has created an annual event called All Rise for Exercise, where veteran participants, court staff, and even the judge come together at a local gym to do a workout together. Last year they came together under the motto “PT for PTSD.”

During the event, guest speakers provide information on healthy lifestyle choices involving nutrition and fitness. After an instructional warm-up session, each person uses the gym equipment at his or her own pace and level for the next hour.

Not only does this event allow the participants to spend time with each other, the court team, and judge in a more casual environment, it provides a positive outlet for stress and enables veterans to work toward better physical and mental fitness. It also gives the court an opportunity to engage the local media, educate the community on the purpose and importance of the court’s work, and invite the community to support the program. Read the full article from Clarksville Now.
Invite Members of Congress to Your Event & Schedule District Meetings

Nothing educates a Member of Congress better than seeing a veterans treatment court in action. Help us educate them by inviting them to your court graduation or community event. Members often visit their home districts and are eager to meet with their constituents. It’s easy to forget that your Members of Congress work for you, the constituent, but they do!

Community events are important to Members, particularly those covered by the media. We encourage every court program to reach out to their Senators and Representatives, and invite them to attend a graduation ceremony, regular court session, or special event, and to schedule a district meeting if possible. Keep in mind that the best way to communicate the purpose and effectiveness of veterans treatment courts is a graduation ceremony.

Veterans Day is one of the best opportunities we have all year to encourage your Members of Congress to become lifelong veterans treatment court supporters. Both House and Senate Members of Congress will be in their districts November 10 – 12. In addition, House Members will be in their districts again from November 17 – 27, and Senate Members from November 18 – 26.

In addition to inviting Members of Congress, you can also invite your governor, mayor, state legislators, sheriff or chief of police, and local media to your events.

Pages 8-11 contain step-by-step instructions for contacting and inviting your Members of Congress to attend your event(s) or to schedule a district meeting, as well as sample invitation and meeting request letters for you to adapt and use.
Step 1: Call your Member of Congress’s office in Washington, DC.

a) Click here to get your Member's contact information by entering your zip code.

b) In your initial call, ask for the staff member responsible for handling judicial/treatment court issues in that Member's office (this is usually the judicial legislative assistant). Each Member of Congress also has someone on staff called the “scheduler.” It is best to speak with both the staff member and scheduler.

c) When you speak with the staff member/scheduler:
   - Introduce yourself;
   - Explain that you would like to invite your Member of Congress to a special veterans treatment court event/district meeting, and that you would be honored if the Member would attend and provide keynote remarks;
   - Share that you would like to update the Member on the veterans treatment court work in his/her community and discuss federal and state funding; and
   - If press will be attending the event/district meeting, make this clear.

d) Within 24 hours of this initial contact, send a formal invitation or meeting request letter (use the samples provide on pages 10-11 as appropriate) via email to both the staff member and scheduler, summarizing the details of the event/district meeting. If the scheduler sends you any specific forms, complete these forms and include them in your email.

Step 2: Make a follow-up phone call.
A few days after you email the invitation or meeting request letter (see step 1), follow up with a phone call to the scheduler to confirm that s/he received the request form.
   - If s/he says your Member of Congress has not made a decision on the invitation request yet, ask for a good time to call back to confirm.
   - If s/he says the Member will not be able to attend, ask if there is a staff member who would be able to attend in the Member's place.
   - If s/he says the Member will be able to attend, confirm the date, time, and duration of the event/district meeting, as well as the Member's role, particularly if the Member has agreed to serve as the keynote speaker. Be sure to provide your contact information, including email address and cell phone number, in case the scheduler needs to advise you of any last-minute changes.

Step 3: Notify Justice For Vets as soon as you have confirmed attendance.
This information is included in the response form on page 28, but it is important that you contact our Director of Legislative Affairs as soon as possible after confirming your Member's attendance (or the attendance of your governor) so that we can assist in any way possible to ensure s/he attends your event/meeting. Use the contact information below, and provide the following information:
• Name of Member(s) of Congress, governor, and/or staff person attending
• Date, time, and location of graduation ceremony/event/meeting

Contact Tonya Voelker, Director of Legislative Affairs, at 571-384-1863 or tvoelker@allrise.org.

Step 4: Re-confirm attendance.
A few days before the graduation ceremony, event, or district meeting, contact your Congressional Member’s scheduler to confirm the date, time, and location details. Life moves pretty quickly for Members, and their staff often have to rearrange schedules at the last minute. They will appreciate if you take the time to confirm the appointment with them.

Step 5: Hold your graduation ceremony, event, or District Meeting.
Expect that staff may accompany Members of Congress, even if their attendance was not explicitly mentioned. Consider appointing a person to greet and/or escort the Member(s) during the event.

Provide materials about veterans treatment courts to the Member(s), including the fact sheet provided on page 13, and any other relevant state or local veterans information, data, or research.

Ensure that media representatives in attendance know that elected official(s) are present. Likewise, ensure that the Member(s) of Congress and staff know that the media is present.

Step 6: Thank your Member of Congress for attending.
Following your event, be sure to send a personalized letter of thanks to each Member for attending. It is important for them to understand how much you appreciate their visit, and this will help build a lasting relationship with your Member.
Sample Invitation Letter

Fill out the sample letter below with the specific details pertaining to your court graduation ceremony or other event, and email it to each Member of Congress’s staff and scheduler within 24 hours of your initial contact with them.

To: [Your Senator or Representative]  
   Attn: [Scheduler]  
   CC: [Judiciary Legislative Assistant/Staff Member]  
From: [Your name, city, state]  
Subject: Visit with Constituents  
Date: [Current date]

Dear [Congressman/Congresswoman/Senator] [name]:

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

This [graduation ceremony/event] will occur during November as a way to recognize Veterans Day, when, as a nation, we acknowledge and celebrate our veterans, their contributions to our national security, and the sacrifices they have made on our behalf. The event will honor the veterans who have completed the requirements of the court and are graduating as productive members of society.

The [name] Veterans Treatment Court represents a proven solution for [location] veterans. Our court is truly making a difference, connecting justice-involved veterans with the benefits they have earned and the support they deserve. By providing treatment, accountability, and mentoring, we are transforming the lives of our veterans, returning them as an invaluable asset to our families, communities, and country. As our [Representative/Senator] for [location], it would be an honor to have you address our [graduates/participants/alumni/families/etc.]. We have also invited [other invitees] and are working with local media to cover the event.

[Add basic information/statistics on your program.]

Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, or to confirm the event details, please feel free to contact me at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

[Your name]  
[Your title]
Sample District Meeting Request Letter

Fill out the sample letter below with the specific details pertaining to your district meeting, and email it to each Member of Congress's staff and scheduler within 24 hours of your initial contact with them.

To: [Your Senator or Representative]
   Attn: [In-District Scheduler]
   CC: [Judiciary Legislative Assistant/Staff Member]
   From: [Your name, city, state]
   Subject: Visit with Constituents
   Date: [Current date]

Dear [Congressman/Congresswoman/Senator] [name]:

As a [veterans treatment court professional/graduate/concerned citizen] and your constituent, I am writing to request an opportunity to meet with you while congress is in recess on [date]. The purpose of the meeting will be to discuss how the veterans treatment court in our community is saving veterans’ lives, reuniting them with their families, and restoring them to their communities. I would also like to discuss federal and state funding for veterans treatment courts.

The [name] Veterans Treatment Court represents a proven solution for [location] veterans. Our court is truly making a difference, connecting justice-involved veterans with the benefits they have earned and the support they deserve. By providing treatment, accountability, and mentoring, we are transforming the lives of our veterans, returning them as an invaluable asset to our families, communities, and country. As our [Representative/Senator] for [location], it would be an honor to meet with you.

I am including a veterans treatment court fact sheet from Justice For Vets, which provides a national perspective on the veterans treatment court movement and the various issues facing some of our returning service men and women that these court programs effectively address.

Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, or to confirm the meeting details, please feel free to contact me at [phone number] or [email address].

Sincerely,

[Your name]
[Your title]
Veterans Treatment Court Fact Sheet

On the following page is the Justice For Vets veterans treatment court fact sheet. This fact sheet provides national-level information and statistics to help the public and media understand the service-related issues facing our veterans that these courts effectively address, including mental health and substance use conditions, as well as veteran incarceration, homelessness, and social reintegration.

We encourage you to use this fact sheet in a variety of ways:

- Email it to your Members of Congress when requesting their attendance at an event or district meeting (see pages 10-11).
- Include it in your press kit (see page 21).
- Make it available at your events, such as graduation ceremonies and fundraisers, to educate and engage community attendees.
- Make it available in your court for observers or potential local business partners who may be looking for additional information.
- Use it as a template to develop a fact sheet about your specific veterans treatment court (see page 21 for what information to include).
The majority of our veterans return home strengthened by their military service, but many struggle with trauma, mental illness (such as PTSD), and substance use disorders. These issues can be exacerbated by the loss of structure and camaraderie found in the military. Veterans treatment courts (VTCs) provide treatment, accountability, and mentoring, and they help connect justice-involved veterans with the benefits they’ve earned. VTCs save the lives, families, and futures of our veterans while also saving taxpayer dollars.

The most recent study, published by the *Community Mental Health Journal*, found that *veterans who participate in veterans treatment courts experience significant improvement* in:

- Depression
- PTSD
- Substance use
- Mental and emotional health
- Housing
- Relationships and social connection
- Overall functioning and well-being

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Positive media coverage is critical to the growth and success of veterans treatment courts. At a time when resources are scarce, media coverage can help build public support and educate policymakers. Justice For Vets encourages programs to use the tools in this kit to reach out to your local, regional, and even national media outlets, and build lasting relationships that will produce press coverage for your program for years to come.

Before working with the media, however, it is important to remember the following: veteran participants should never be pressured to participate in a media story. Often, media outlets will want to profile an individual's success in veterans treatment court. These types of stories can be powerful and generate significant public support for the program. But keep in mind that for the veteran profiled, it means elements of their military, medical, and legal history will be made public. Therefore, we ask that you consider the following before requesting any of your veterans to participate in a media story:

- New participants are in a vulnerable stage and should never be considered for media coverage. When possible, ask successful graduates or participants who are nearing program completion to tell their story to the media.
- Always prioritize a veteran's treatment, stability, and recovery over publicity.
- Make sure that any veteran considering participating in a media story is fully aware of the potential long-term consequences of making his or her story public.
- Consult your team's treatment providers to help determine whether a participant is ready for public attention.

This media kit covers:

- How to determine and target preferred media coverage (see page 16)
- How to contact and provide information to print media outlets, including:
  - Writing and publishing a press release (see page 17)
  - Writing and publishing an opinion editorial (OpEd) (see page 19)
  - Building a reusable press kit (see page 21)
- How to contact and provide information to television and radio outlets (see page 22), including:
  - Broadcasting public service announcements (PSAs) produced by Justice For Vets
  - Preparing your spokesperson for interviews
- How to best use social media (see pages 23-26) to spread your message and enhance your events, including:
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - YouTube

For your media interaction and coverage during November, it will be important to designate individuals to serve in two key roles:

1. **Designate a media coordinator.** The media coordinator will be responsible for identifying and contacting all strategic media opportunities for your court (see page 16). This could be the same person coordinating your court program's activities during November (e.g.,
planning the graduation ceremony, organizing community events, setting up meetings with Members of Congress). The media coordinator could be a member of the court team, community representative, or volunteer who has experience in event coordination; this person should be trusted by the court to capably perform such responsibilities.

2. **Designate a media spokesperson.** The spokesperson will be the primary individual providing quotes and interviews to the media. S/he may also be the person delivering the keynote address at your graduation ceremony or other event. The spokesperson should be knowledgeable about your court and how it relates to the national criminal justice reform movement. S/he must be able to speak from a position of authority; for this reason, it’s preferred that your treatment court judge serve as the spokesperson for your program; however, other members of the court team may also fill this role as appropriate.
Tips for Contacting the Media

Why is media coverage important to the continued success of your veterans treatment court? The media help to influence public perception of your program, and public perception informs political support and funding. Veterans Day and the entire month of November are the perfect opportunity to highlight the many ways your court positively affects your local veterans, their families, and the community. Media coverage of your event(s) will be more positive and more effective if you take three simple steps in advance.

**Step 1:** Determine and create a list of the right types of media to cover your event, including print and/or broadcast.

**Print media** can include:
- Daily/weekly city or community newspapers
- Local university press
- Regional and trade magazines
- Legal journals, newsletters, magazines, and other publications with a special interest in or focus on court-based intervention programs
- Special-interest (e.g., non-English-language) publications
- For veterans treatment courts, newspapers and newsletters published by local military bases or large companies (if they cover local events/news)

**Broadcast media** can include:
- Television stations (news, community interest programs, etc.)
- Radio stations
- Podcasts

**Step 2:** Identify which specific organizations/media outlets you feel will be most effective at covering your events. Don’t feel as though you must limit your list to local media; regional, state, and national media outlets may also be interested in covering your story. Think carefully about which outlets are most likely to reach the audience you need.

**Step 3:** Contact each media outlet on your list and ask for the name of the assignment desk editor, planner, or reporter to whom your materials should be directed, and obtain his/her phone number and email address.
- If you’ve noticed certain reporters or journalists in your area already covering veterans and/or justice reform issues, you may want to reach out to them directly.
- If you live in a smaller or more rural area, you may already personally know a local media person (such as a television reporter or news editor); it is acceptable to use these personal contacts.
Print Media: Press Release

A press release provides news about an organization or event. For Veterans Day, a press release should be used primarily to invite the media to your event(s), such as a news conference, grand opening of a new court, or a graduation ceremony. Such events may or may not be open to the public.

Single-page releases are preferred, with a maximum length of two pages. If your press release is more than one page, it is important that the bottom of the first page includes the “-MORE-” indicator, and that the final page includes “###” to indicate the end of the release (as in the sample press release on the following pages).

Press releases are usually emailed to media contacts, but they can also be faxed if necessary. **When emailing a press release, always send it in the body of the email—never send it as an attachment!** If sending the press release via email, insert your court’s logo in the upper right-hand corner; if sending via fax, type the release on your court’s letterhead. Be sure to include your contact information so that you can respond to any media inquiries.

Similar to the instructions for inviting Members of Congress to attend your event (see page 7), you should send out your press release to the appropriate media outlets a few weeks to a few days prior to the event. Include the Justice For Vets veterans treatment court fact sheet (see page 13), as well as a fact sheet about your particular treatment court (see page 21 for instructions on what to include).

Follow up with a phone call to each media organization to make sure the press release was received; this call also gives you the opportunity to speak to the outlet directly, which will help you to build relationships and better understand how that particular outlet operates. You should send final email reminders to the media the day before your event, and follow up with phone calls, if time permits.

Use the sample provided on page 18 to ensure your press release is formatted correctly.
Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

Contact:
[Your name]
[Your title]
[Your phone number and email address]

Veterans Treatment Court to Honor Local Veterans

[Name] Slated to Deliver Keynote Address

[CITY, STATE, DATE]— In honor of Veterans Day, the [name] Veterans Treatment Court will hold a [graduation ceremony/event] on [date] at [location]. [Name (judge, Member of Congress, etc.)] will deliver the keynote address.

[If graduation: This is the court’s [#] ceremony since it was founded in [year]. [#] veterans are expected to be among this year’s graduates. The ceremony marks their completion of an intensive program of comprehensive treatment, close supervision, and full accountability.]

According to Justice For Vets, the [name] Veterans Treatment Court is one of 306 in operation in the United States. Veterans treatment courts provide justice-involved veterans with the structure, accountability, treatment, and mentoring needed to repair their lives. By keeping veterans out of jail and prison, veterans treatment courts save their lives, families, and futures, all while reducing costs to tax-payers. Next week’s uplifting [graduation ceremony/event] is evidence of the tremendous impact the [name] Veterans Treatment Court has had on our community.

[If you have a quote from your judge or a local official, add it here.]

“Veterans treatment courts are transforming the way veterans are identified, assessed and diverted when they come into contact with the justice system due to substance use, mental health or trauma related to their service,” said Justice For Vets Director Scott Swaim. “These programs are on the front lines of justice reform in our country.”

[If you have brief biographical information on graduates, include it here.]

[Provide specific information/statistics on your court here.]

###
Print Media: OpEd

Veterans Day typically receives significant media attention, and one way to enhance this attention locally and regionally to ensure our message gets out across the country is to write an opinion editorial (OpEd).

There is a clear, renewed interest in justice reform in the US; veterans advocates, treatment court professionals, and concerned citizens alike recognize that by changing the way we think about veterans and enact justice in our judicial and prison systems, we can save lives and put the money our courts save to better use in our communities. An OpEd is a great way to remind your legislators that veterans treatment courts save lives.

We’ve provided a sample OpEd for you to adapt and use as appropriate (see page 20). Here are some general tips to help ensure that any OpEd you write gets published:

- **Find a news hook.** Your court’s graduation ceremony or other event is newsworthy; give it an extra hook by relating it to the broader discussion of veterans’ issues, justice reform, and finding proven solutions for your community. If your court is in jeopardy of losing funding, say so!

- **Know the word limit.** In general, 750-800 words is sufficient for an OpEd, but check the specific newspaper’s OpEd page to find out their preferred length.

- **Humanize your piece.** Anecdotes and personal stories help illustrate and bring clarity to complicated issues. Think about personal experiences in your court, and use them as examples in the OpEd (but only use names with permission).

- **Stick to a single point.** You only have so much space; make a single, strong point clearly and persuasively. Your first paragraph should draw the reader in, but if you choose to open with an anecdote, make sure you get to the point quickly.

- **Make a specific recommendation.** This is an opinion piece: state your opinion on what is needed to ensure your court can continue to operate effectively.

- **End with a bang.** Your final paragraph is as important as your opening paragraph. Be sure to summarize your argument in one strong final paragraph and include a poignant quote from a key stakeholder or participant, if you have one.

- **Follow up.** Most OpEd editors will respond to you or publish the piece within 1-2 weeks. If you haven’t had a response in that timeframe, or if your piece is particularly time-sensitive, you can make a follow-up phone call to be sure it was received and ask about its status.
Sample OpEd

_Veterans Treatment Courts Honor Those Who Served_

This Veterans Day, as we pause to pay tribute to the men and women who bear the burden of safeguarding our freedom, we must ensure our gratitude is extended to all veterans, even those who struggle to cope on the home front. Most veterans return home strengthened by their service and become vital members of the community. In fact, research shows veterans are more likely than non-veterans to be civically engaged: more likely to vote, volunteer, give to charity, work with neighbors to fix problems in the community, and attend public meetings.

But we also know that some veterans have difficulty adjusting. It’s estimated that one in five veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder or major depression, and one in six has a substance use problem. When these issues lead to involvement in the justice system, our [name] Veterans Treatment Court ensures they receive the treatment, structure, and mentoring needed to get their lives back on track.

Traditionally, justice-involved veterans have been scattered throughout the justice system, making it difficult to coordinate effective treatment interventions. Our veterans treatment court solves this problem by clustering veterans onto a single docket and linking them with resources uniquely designed for the distinct needs that can arise from military service. Through this approach, we can bring to bear the myriad of local, state, and federal resources exclusive to veterans, including representatives from Veterans Affairs as well as State Department/Commission of Veterans Affairs, Vet Centers, Veterans Service Organizations, volunteer veteran mentors, and other support organizations.

From the camaraderie during military service to the isolation many veterans experience in the transition home, veterans experience a dramatic change in environment than can magnify mental health issues and result in unhealthy substance use. Without the support of other veterans, some struggle to accept help. In veterans treatment court, those who served in our nation’s Armed Forces participate in the treatment court process with their fellow veterans, re-instilling the sense of solidarity they experienced while in the military.

One of the keys to veterans treatment court success has been volunteer veterans from the community who serve as mentors to veterans involved in the program. By pairing struggling veterans with a volunteer veteran mentor, our court gives both parties the chance to reclaim a sense of honor, duty, and leadership—values that make our veterans the backbone of American society. In serving as mentors, volunteer veterans find a sense of fulfillment and empowerment that can only be achieved when one veteran comes to the aid of another.

Honoring our veterans means ensuring they have stable housing, employment, and education opportunities. It means treating their invisible wounds of war just as earnestly as we would treat their physical wounds. When substance use and mental health disorders lead veterans into the justice system, the proper response should be to determine whether justice would be best served by diverting them into a veterans treatment court where they can receive the appropriate treatment and supervision.

After all, veterans fought for our freedom. Shouldn’t we fight for theirs?

_JUSTICEFORVETS.ORG_
Print Media: Reusable Press Kit

A press kit is a package of information to present to the reporters/journalists covering your event. It’s typically a standard two-pocket folder that can display your county or veterans treatment court logo and include a place for your business card. If a printed press kit is not desirable, you can also produce a digital press kit by placing all of the electronic versions of the contents on a flash drive (which can also be branded with your county or court logo). Some media outlets may prefer the information be sent in advance via email.

Your press kit should include the following:

- A press release describing your court’s graduation ceremony or other event (see page 17);
- The Justice For Vets veterans treatment court fact sheet (see page 13);
- A fact sheet about your particular treatment court – you should include such information as the court’s history, presiding judge and stakeholders on the court team, numbers of participants and graduates, effect on local crime and recidivism rates, other positive community improvements, and amount of money saved by the program; and
- Any prior, positive newspaper articles, television reports, or other media coverage on your court, such as published stories about a graduation, graduate, or event.

On the day of the event, make sure you have plenty of press kits available to pass out to the media and other important public officials in attendance. Often news personnel do not RSVP to an event, but instead make last-minute decisions about whether to send reporters. It’s also helpful to have a sign-in sheet to keep track of the media in attendance and to gather their contact information.

Your kit does not need to be glossy or expensive, though it will require some resources. However, consider the press kit an investment: it’s easily made reusable for other purposes and audiences. With a few simple adjustments, it can serve as a general information kit for speaker bureau pitches, potential program investors (e.g., local business owners or veterans service organizations), volunteers, events/conferences, and other important purposes.
Broadcast Media

Broadcast media can include television stations (news, community interest programs, etc.), radio stations, and podcasts.

**PSAs**

Justice For Vets recently produced an immensely popular Public Service Announcement (PSA) featuring the cast of the hit television show “The West Wing.” This PSA is available for you to run on local television during the month of November and to use as educational material during special events and commencement ceremonies. [Download it here.](#)

![Justice For Vets PSA feat. West Wing Cast (Launch)](image)

Once you download the PSA, contact your local television station(s) and ask them to run it during the month of November in recognition of Veterans Day. If you’re familiar with video editing software and would like to add a special image or message to the end of the PSA, please do so.

**Interviews**

Your identified media outlets may want to conduct an interview with your media spokesperson (see page 14). It’s important that your spokesperson be well prepared for these interviews and have practiced how to respond to questions that may be asked about the veterans treatment court model and other relevant veterans’ issues, such as PTSD, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, substance use/addiction, treatment, recovery, and justice reform. S/he should be familiar with the various media outlets (their format, questioning techniques, etc.). S/he may also want to have talking points and/or fact sheets available to guide the conversation as necessary (see page 13 for the Justice For Vets veterans treatment court fact sheet).

Remember that the goal of your interaction with the media is to increase positive awareness and solicit public and political support for your court program, veterans’ needs, and the national justice reform movement.

For assistance with media outreach or for contact information for media in your state, contact: Brooke Prokopchak, Associate Director of Communications, at bprokopchak@allrise.org.
Social Media Overview

Justice For Vets encourages veterans treatment court programs to use social media to their advantage. Not only can social media help engage and educate your participants, graduates, and community, it has proven to be one of the most effective ways to get the attention of Members of Congress, even better than email. The vast majority of Members of Congress have official social media accounts, and on average, they’ll take notice of somewhere between just 10-30 topical comments on Facebook or Twitter.

Remember that anything you post on social media (words, photos, videos, etc.) is considered public content. As with any public content, it is critical that a system be put in place to ensure that content posted or shared on behalf of your court program is 1) appropriate, 2) factual, and 3) in accordance with the principles and responsibilities of your court and the US judicial system.

If you choose to feature a success story from your court, remember that new participants are in a vulnerable stage and should never be profiled on social media. Ask successful graduates or participants who are nearing program completion if you can share their story. Remember to always prioritize a veteran’s treatment, stability, and recovery over publicity, and make sure that any veteran profiled on social media is fully aware of the potential long-term consequences of making his or her story public.

We encourage you to like and follow our Facebook and Twitter accounts and share the inspiring stories, news, photos, and videos we post about supporting our veterans when they return from service. On the following page, we’ve also provided sample Facebook posts and tweets that you can use during the month of November and related to Veterans Day. Content that includes photos, images, and videos is much more successful, so we encourage you to include them where possible.

If you would like to see your court highlighted on our social media accounts, send your stories, photos, links to any news media, and contact information to bprokopchak@allrise.org.
Sample Facebook Posts

If you need instructions on how to set up and use a Facebook account, check out this free, online Facebook tutorial. Once your account is set up, here are some posts you can share with followers on Facebook. Remember to include photos and videos whenever possible! You can also share relevant posts from our Facebook page to your own page.

You can also find great veteran-related stories and materials to share with your social network through the Department of Veterans Affairs website, their VAntage Point blog, and news sources such as Military Times, Task & Purpose, and Stars and Stripes.

Veterans Day is coming up soon, when we will once again pause to honor the men and women who have served in our country’s Armed Forces. This month, we’re celebrating the life-saving work that veterans treatment courts all over the US do through a combination of treatment, accountability, and mentoring. Veterans treatment courts make sure we #LeaveNoVeteranBehind. [Link]

November is a month where we honor the men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces, during both wartime and peacetime. The [name] Veterans Treatment Court is proud to serve our local veterans by providing them with treatment, accountability, and mentoring to address mental health, substance use, and trauma needs. Together, we can make sure we #LeaveNoVeteranBehind. Learn more at [Link].

Veterans Day is November 11. As we pause to honor the men and women who have served our nation through its Armed Forces, the [name] Veterans Treatment Court is proud to serve our local veterans by providing those who struggle with the transition home and need support, treatment, and mentoring. Veterans are one of our greatest civic assets, and we thank them for the sacrifices they’ve made to protect this country. #LeaveNoVeteranBehind

The [name] Veterans Treatment Court will be celebrating Veterans Day and honoring our service men and women on [date] with [event]. By providing treatment, accountability, and mentoring, our court program leads veterans out of the justice system and back into productive lives of service, honor, and commitment. Our veterans are one of our nation’s greatest assets, and we must #LeaveNoVeteranBehind. Learn more: [Link]
Sample Tweets

If you need instructions on how to set up and use a Twitter account, check out this free, online Twitter tutorial. Once your account is set up, here are some tweets you can share with followers on Twitter. Remember to include photos and videos whenever possible, and keep your tweets at or below 140 characters. You can also retweet our Twitter account.

November 11 is Veterans Day! Learn how veterans treatment courts help make sure we #LeaveNoVeteranBehind: http://bit.ly/2cNRgat

This November, [name] Veterans Court is honoring the men and women we serve who first served us. Learn how: http://bit.ly/2cNRgat

What is true #Justice4Vets? [Name] Veterans Court is working to ensure we #LeaveNoVeteranBehind. Learn more: http://justiceforyourvets.org/


This Veterans Day, [name] Veterans Court would like to recognize and thank our participants and volunteer mentors. #LeaveNoVeteranBehind

November 11 is Veterans Day. How will you honor our service men and women for their sacrifice and commitment? #LeaveNoVeteranBehind

[Name] Veterans Court is honored to serve our veterans every day. Learn how we work to #LeaveNoVeteranBehind: http://justiceforyourvets.org/

Most veterans are strengthened by their service. For those who struggle, veterans treatment courts help heal: http://bit.ly/2cNRgat
We encourage you to share on your social media accounts some of the videos available on our YouTube channel, including:

- What Is A Veterans Treatment Court?
- Justice For Vets PSA feat. West Wing Cast
- Veterans Treatment Courts in the News
- Veterans Treatment Courts Save Lives
- The Nation's First Veterans Treatment Court Graduate
- Justice For Vets National Veteran Mentor Corps Boot Camp
- VA Secretary Robert McDonald Speaks at Vet Court Con
- Justice For Vets Walk and Talk

...and much more.

You do not need a YouTube account to view and share videos. However, if you would like instructions on how to set up and use an account to upload your own videos, check out this free, online YouTube tutorial.
Preparing Your Court Team & Veteran Participants

We must not forget that "veteran" is not a word; it’s a person. Each veteran has a unique military experience, and for some, Veterans Day can be difficult. As veterans treatment court professionals and volunteer mentors, it is critical to recognize this fact and be prepared to support your veteran participants throughout the month of November and, in particular, the weeks leading up to Veterans Day.

Preparation for your court team should begin weeks in advance. The efforts of your team to understand Veterans Day and how veterans might be affected and should be recognized during this holiday will go a long way with your veteran participants. During your court staffing meetings prior to the holiday, discuss the following with your team:

- Ensure each team member receives, reads, and understands the Veterans Day Significance & Small Acts of Honor page from this toolkit (see page 4).
- Ensure each team member understands and can discuss the difference between Veterans Day (when we honor all veterans) and Memorial Day (when we specifically honor military members who have passed, both during and after their service).
- Ask each team member what s/he plans to do on Veterans Day and to honor local veterans.
- Discuss what your team will do during the court sessions immediately before or after the holiday for special recognition of military service. Some ideas include:
  - Have the judge read from the bench the Veterans Day Significance page from this toolkit or a proclamation about Veterans Day.
  - Ask all veterans in the courtroom to stand, and ask all in attendance to applaud them for their service.
  - Distribute service branch pins to each veteran participant.
  - Fill the incentives/rewards “fishbowl” with compliments and encouragements, and have each veteran participant draw from the bowl.

Preparation for your veteran participants should also begin weeks in advance. Be aware of the date closest to Veterans Day when each participant will come before the judge, and address the following:

- Ask, "What are your plans for Veterans Day and over the holiday weekend?"
- Ask, "How do you plan to maintain your sobriety over the holiday?" You can also give them some specific tips for staying sober through the holiday season.
- Encourage them to understand their triggers and to remember that some of these triggers (e.g., fireworks) may occur on Veterans Day. They should have a plan in place to deal with these triggers.
- Instruct them to schedule and keep appointments with their therapist, counselor, and/or case manager before and after the holiday.
- Encourage them to choose their activities and company wisely.

Please tell us how your court decides to prepare for, celebrate, and support your veteran participants over Veterans Day! Email your ideas, stories, and photos to Brooke Prokopchak, Associate Director of Communications, at bprokopchak@allrise.org.
Response Form & Photo Release

Please complete and submit this form to bprokopchak@allrise.org as soon as possible.

Organization: ____________________________________________________________

Address: ________________________________________________________________

City, State, Zip: __________________________________________________________

Coordinator/Point of Contact: _____________________________________________

Phone Number: __________________________________________________________

Email Address: __________________________________________________________

Date of Graduation Ceremony: _____________________________________________

Expected Number of Graduates: _____________________________________________

Event Keynote Speaker(s) (Name, Title/Position): _______________________________

Invited Members of Congress: _____________________________________________

Additional Information: ___________________________________________________

**Photo Release:** For valuable consideration received, I hereby grant to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, its division Justice For Vets, 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 the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, its division Justice For Vets, and its legal representatives, licensees, and assigns from all claims and liability relating to said photograph.

Printed Name* ___________________________ Signature*

Date* ___________________________ Veterans Treatment Court Name*

*Indicates required field for photo release
Thank You

We at Justice For Vets would like to express our profound gratitude to you, the individuals doing the most difficult, important, rewarding work we can think of on a day-to-day basis. Without your belief in the effectiveness of veterans treatment courts and your unwavering dedication to ensuring that your court provides real solutions to veterans in real need in your communities, there would not be more than 15,000 veterans currently working toward lives of long-term health and stability today. And the impact of your efforts doesn’t stop there: it reaches every veteran participant’s family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Because of you, millions of lives have seen a level of restoration that would not have been possible otherwise.

Veterans treatment courts are justice reform in action. You’re transforming the US justice system for the better every day. You’re taking a bold stance by declaring that we can do better for the service men and women who have sacrificed so much to safeguard our individual and national freedom, safety, and security. We could not be more proud to stand with you.