

American Bar Association  
Law Student Division  
Work-A-Day Community Service Program

**“Veterans Advocacy”**  
**Serving Those Who Have Served Us**



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**WHAT IS WORK-A-DAY?**

Work-A-Day is the annual public service project of the ABA Law Student Division which brings law students from across the country together to participate in a one day public service project in their community.

2008-2009 Work-A-Day theme: "***Veterans' Advocacy: Serving Those Who Served Us***"

Law schools and students are encouraged to create activities and events during the month of October (or any other day/week/or month that is convenient to your law school) to address the legal needs and social advocacy of veterans, both recent and established.

This Work-A-Day **Tool Kit** will help get you started, but please feel free to be creative in designing programs that target the specific issues confronting veterans and their families in your community.

This is a meaningful way for **law students to give back** to the community and raise awareness about issues that veterans face in accessing the support network set-up for a smooth transition to civilian life. The Law Student Division encourages all law students and law schools to get involved by implementing a Work-A-Day initiative this year. Your community will be benefit from your efforts.

If you have any questions, please contact one of the ABA Law Student Division Public Interest Committee members:

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**GETTING STARTED**

**Create a Committee**

- The first step in developing a successful Work-A-Day initiative is to create a planning committee, comprised of faculty, staff, and students which is charged by your school organization or administration with developing and implementing a plan for a successful "*Veterans' Advocacy: Serving Those Who Have Served Us*" campaign.
- It is important that you put together a diverse team, council, or committee of the proper size. Some experts say that more than 10 or 15 members can be counterproductive. Remember that inclusion is better than exclusion. Find a way for willing individuals to participate. It is important to create a broad base of participation.

**Determine the Objective**

- The committee should define its overall objective. Do you want to reach out to the students in your school, the community, families in the community or a combination of all three?
- Consider whether your main objective is to disseminate information, fund-raise or hands-on contact through an organization. It could be a combination of all these things or something we haven't even mentioned.
- Support for your public interest initiatives from all levels of the law school is important, but support from administration is critical. If you are interested in accomplishing multiple tasks, consider creating teams co-chaired by members of the administration. This allows the committee to have authority and legitimacy while serving as an advisory role for the administration.

**Measurability and Accountability**

For a public interest plan to be successful it must have two components: (1) it must be measurable and (2) there must be accountability. Committees help create accountability. The committee should develop a scorecard that helps track their progress and aids in reporting to school administrators. The committee might also want to consider the use of personnel evaluations to reflect and refine the school's future short and long-term public interest goals.

An example of a reporting device or scorecard can be found on the ABA Law Student Division website, [www.abanet.org/lstd/work-a-day](http://www.abanet.org/lstd/work-a-day).

## **Make a Plan**

- If your goal is to incorporate public service at your law school on a long-term basis, the length of your committee's plan will be critical. Although it is important to develop a plan that will provide long-term sustainable change, it is also important to have some short-term accomplishment to create momentum. In this case, a plan could be designed for 12 to 18 months. You could then create quarterly checkpoints for consistent follow-up.
- If your objective is to create a campaign for only the short term, then your plan should include those goals that you decide are most important for your current Work-A-Day project. Again, developing a plan that will include achievable goals is important to entice momentum for future campaigns. Create a time line to include checkpoints for reviewing your progress throughout the planning process.
- Education is critical for the success of any initiative. The committee might want to develop a "*Veterans' Advocacy Handbook*" or PowerPoint presentation for faculty, staff, and students to review.
- For any Public Interest Committee to be successful, its champions must be recognized. Give out awards and show how serious the law school considers the furtherance of public interest within its walls and in the communities surrounding your institution.

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**TIPS FOR SUCCESS**

When planning your event, here are some ideas to keep in mind that will help your hard work pay off and ensure that your attendees will leave the program appreciating a unique experience.

- When seeking presenters (faculty, staff or practitioners) for your educational programs, try to bring in individuals who represent different ethnic groups, gender, and lifestyles. This can help your school to make contact with people who represent diverse backgrounds.
- When advertising your "*Veterans' Advocacy: Serving Those Who Have Served Us*" initiatives, use creative, quality publicity. Try to use titles that students can easily understand and that specifically identify the topic of the program.
- Use bulletin boards to demonstrate the legal issues associated with veterans' advocacy. While the issues you have selected are being highlighted on the board, offer programs or study breaks that highlight the messages you are attempting to convey.
- When planning activities make a commitment not to "*mask*" the issues or bury your initial intent by focusing on entertaining attendees. Bring the issues to the forefront of your event.
- There is a fine line between providing the facts and initiating a shock effect, which is something you want to avoid. Remember, your objective is to create a life-long passion for your cause not shocking your audience into short-term action.
- Plan early. Promote your event in the law school and in the community in order to provide maximum attendance and create a link between the law school and the community it occupies.
- When sponsoring a symposium or roundtable, provide time at the end for attendees to meet and mingle. Having the opportunity to speak casually with featured speakers is important to students.
- Consider contacting local VA hospitals or other organizations that focus on veterans' advocacy. One way to institute a meaningful and sustainable project is to offer your school's help to these organizations.

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**AVOIDING THE PITFALLS**

In constructing a Work-A-Day event, it is important to develop your programs in a way that makes everyone feel included. There are many common mistakes that student leaders inadvertently make which could hinder their hard work. Here are a few tips to keep in mind as you plan your event.

- Check the calendar to prevent scheduling your event to coincide with any religious observance that may exclude some members of your school or community.
- Be sure to be inclusive. Provide means and accessibility to community members with disabilities. Include a diverse mixture of individuals as speakers and invited guests in your activities and publicity.
- The scope and publicity of your event should convey an open invitation to all and create interest in your cause. If you are planning a fund-raiser in the evening, consider a family event. If it is a luncheon in the afternoon to debate the issues, consider creating an atmosphere that will entice a lively forum instead of talking-heads.
- Avoid mottos or program titles that may be misconstrued as insensitive.
- In your publicity, you want to encourage interest. Don't guilt your audience into attending. While you want to bring your cause to the forefront of your event, you also want to generate genuine enthusiasm and give your audience a sense of being part of the solution. This can be accomplished whether you are having a community fair to raise money or a forum to debate the issues.
- Attempt to have things donated by your local bar associations, community groups, law firms, businesses, etc. In addition to thank you letters, be sure to give them credit for their support of your event by acknowledging them in a program or with signs thanking them publicly for the amenities they have so graciously provided.
- Don't be afraid to ask other organizations at your institution to participate even if they're not part of your law school.

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**ISSUES FACING VETERANS**

The following is a sample of the obstacles that veterans face in their daily lives. This is not meant as an exhaustive list – some of these obstacles will be more or less relevant to your community. Feel free to use these suggestions or other issues you may come across in your research veterans advocacy and in developing a specific Work-A-Day program that fits the needs of your community.

***Health Care***

Affordable health care is a nationwide problem that affects many citizens. Many veterans return home either permanently physically disabled or suffering from some form of mental illness. Since veterans suffer from so many health and psychological problems, health care becomes an increasingly important issue.

***Benefits***

Many veterans are disabled, which entitles them to a number of benefits. The problem is that many veterans don't know that they are entitled or if they do know, they don't know how to get the benefits. Receiving these benefits is crucial for many veterans struggling to work or find housing.

***Homelessness***

Many veterans become homeless after returning from war. In fact approximately 30% of homeless men are veterans. This is a problem that grows out of other issues that veterans face. Because many veterans return home disabled or with poor psychological health, they have a hard time finding work and managing their life in the way that they used to do. This often leads to homelessness, which carries with it its own set of burdens and problems.

***Psychological***

Making the transition from military life to civilian life can be extremely psychologically taxing. A surprising number of veterans suffer from psychological illnesses, many with post traumatic stress disorder.

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**STATISTICS**

The following statistics can be used in marketing to your law student population as well as working with local partners in order to finalize your 2008 Work-a-Day programming.

**General Statistics:**

There are approximately 26 million veterans in the United States (US Census Data, 2000).

***Homelessness***

- Veterans account for 23% of all homeless people in America.
- The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says the nation's homeless veterans are mostly males (4% are females). The vast majority are single, most come from poor, disadvantaged communities, 45% suffer from mental illness, and half have substance abuse problems.
- The VA estimates that nearly 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. And nearly 400,000 experience homelessness over the course of a year.
- Of all homeless veterans, 76% suffer from drug, alcohol, or mental health problems (*National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, 1999*).
- The VA has already identified 1,500 homeless veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ("*AP, Veterans Make up 1 in 4 Homeless,*" November 7, 2008).
- With an estimated 400,000 veterans homeless at some time during the year, the VA reaches 25% of those in need ... leaving 300,000 veterans who must seek assistance from local government agencies and service organizations in their communities.
- Fighting homelessness among veterans:
  - ◆ 45% seek assistance finding job
  - ◆ 37% seek assistance finding housing

***Age Groups***

- 47% Vietnam Era
- 17% post Vietnam
- 15% pre Vietnam

***Residential Areas***

- 79% reside in central cities
- 16% reside in suburban areas
- 5% reside in rural areas

***Service***

- 67% served three or more years
- 33% stationed in war zone
- 85% completed high school/GED compared to 56% of non-veterans
- 85% of veterans have annual incomes of less than \$15,000.

## **Medical Needs**

- 76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems.
- The number of veterans, family members, and survivors who are potentially eligible for VA benefits and services exceeds 74 million (*USDVA Fact Sheet*, July 2008).
- The VA provides medical care to 5.5 million (7%), and distributes benefits to 3.5 million of these eligible beneficiaries each year (*USDVA Fact Sheet*, July 2008).
- In 2005, the USDVA forecasted a \$2.6 billion shortfall for meeting the growing health care needs of US Veterans. The VA's patient to doctor ratio has grown from 335 to 1, to 531 to 1, between 2000 and September 2004.

## **VA Benefits**

- In January of 2008 the VA Benefits system's caseload was 2.7 million, with a backlog of more than 600,000 claims—and growing. The average processing time for a VA Claim now stands at 177 days (Brian Friel, "*Hurry Up and Wait*," Government Executive, 5/1/07).
- The Government Accountability Office reports the average wait time for the first VA Primary Care appointment currently stands at 1 year (GAO-03-756T, "*Department of Veterans Affairs: Key Management Challenges in Health and Disability Programs*" May 8, 2003).
- The Backlog of Claims at the US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims was at 5,800 at the end of the last fiscal year. This is double the number of two years ago, and could hit 10,000 within the next 5 years ("*Veterans' Battle for Benefits Can Take Years*," Lakeland, FL Ledger, August 13, 2006, Cory Weiss).
- According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics 225,000 veterans were incarcerated as of 1998. The Bureau reported that number had fallen to 127,000 by 2004, but added that more than 57% incarcerated veterans were imprisoned for violent offenses, compared to just 47% among civilians.

## **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

- The National Center for PTSD estimates that one of every 20 WW II veterans has suffered symptoms such as bad dreams, irritability, and flashbacks.
- The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Survey (1986-1988) found that more than 30% of Vietnam Veterans (more than 1 million) have suffered from symptoms of PTSD.
- The VA Reports that in 2005, only 215,871 Veterans received disability payments for PTSD. However statistics suggest that due to the stigmas and barriers associated with getting help, these numbers likely represent only a small fraction of the total number of vets with PTSD.
- According to a recent study in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, veterans are twice as likely as non-veterans to commit suicide (JECH, June 11, 2008).
- PTSD remains an ongoing challenge for veterans of all eras, and their families. The images from the current war are causing many older veterans (WWII, Korea, Vietnam) to experience recurring PTSD symptoms from their own combat experiences.

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**PROJECT IDEAS FOR YOUR CAMPUS**

The Public Interest Committee is pleased to provide you with some suggestions and quick ideas for student leaders at law schools to organize on your campus. We encourage you to read more on our website ([www.abanet.org/lzd/work-a-day/](http://www.abanet.org/lzd/work-a-day/)).

- Create literature or informational materials on how to receive veterans' benefits and distribute it at local homeless shelters.
- Put on a workshop about how to apply for veterans' benefits, and make it available to the community.
- Work with local attorneys or law enforcement to sponsor talks on the legal system and how it affects veterans
- Hold a symposium on the unmet legal needs veterans face by inviting local counsel specializing in veterans' affairs
- Raise money or do a volunteer drive for a community assistance group or program
- Distribute informational materials to schools on legal issues and how to contact local programs
- Team up with a local legal aid center and ask how law students can contribute
- Plan a benefit party with all proceeds going to a VA hospital or non-profit organization benefiting veterans
- Hold a symposium on issues of veterans in the legal system
- Conduct a skills building course on effective communication with veterans depending on whether they are recent veterans or if they served our country in the past
- Invite a speaker to talk about mental health issues and how it affects veterans and their adjustment to society
- Contact your local bar association and assist in creating and organizing a CLE program on lawyers and students for veterans advocacy
- Assist a local organization in recruiting professionals to serve as companions to veterans by visiting them and helping them with their needs
- Create a public awareness campaign on concerns surrounding veterans
- Author an article for your school newsletter addressing the concerns veterans face in the legal system
- Display articles written by faculty and students highlighting issues of veterans in America
- Hold a writing contest on issues facing veterans in the legal system
- Create and sponsor an award given to local attorneys striving to address the plight of veterans
- Present a PowerPoint on legal issues involving veterans to students of all ages
- Join forces with a bar association or other organization to find out how law students can assist in advocating for veterans rights
- Provide legal consultation (if your state allows it) and notary services to veterans

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**HELPFUL WEBSITES AND RESOURCES**

- The ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel
  - ◆ <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/lamp/>
  - ◆ Many state bar associations have similar organizations as well.
- US Armed Forces Legal Assistance:  
<http://legalassistance.law.af.mil/content/afla.php?view=topics>
- Disabled American Veterans:  
<http://www.dav.org/google/Default.aspx?gclid=C1fI6qrRmpQCFQcmIgod0S0etA>
- Department of Veteran Affairs Volunteer: <http://www.volunteer.va.gov/>
- Wills for Heroes: <http://www.willsforheroes.org/>
- Paralyzed Veterans of America:  
<http://www.pva.org/site/PageServer?pagename=homepage>
- Legal Issues Facing Veterans: [http://www.pva.org/site/PageServer?pagename=rights\\_gc](http://www.pva.org/site/PageServer?pagename=rights_gc)
- Veteran's Health Volunteer Portal: <http://www.volunteer.gov/health.cfm>
- Department of Veteran Affairs-Homeless Veterans Program:  
<http://www1.va.gov/homeless/>
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Foundation: <http://www.vfwfoundation.org/>
- USO, United Service Organization: <http://www.uso.org/howtohelp/becomeavolunteer/>
- National Coalition of Homeless Veterans-Opportunities to Help:  
<http://www.nchv.org/howtohelp.cfm>
- Directory of *Stand Downs*
  - ◆ <http://www.nchv.org/standdownevents.cfm>
  - ◆ <http://www.nchv.org/standdown.cfm>
- Dignity Memorial:  
<http://www.dignitymemorial.com/DignityMemorial/HomelessVets.aspx?id=COR>

**Note:** *The organizations listed above are not endorsed by the ABA Law Student Division, but merely provided as a resource for students when planning Work-A-Day activities.*

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**EXISTING PROGRAMS AND MODELS**

The following is a list of programs and models that may assist you in creating and implementing your 2008 Work-a-Day program plan. The following is not meant to be a complete list and should be used for a point of reference only.

- ***The Veteran's Consortium Pro Bono Program –***  
The VCPBP's mission: "[T]o recruit and train attorneys in the fledgling field of veterans law; and to provide assistance to unrepresented appellants at the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims" <http://www.vetsprobono.org/>
- ***Lawyers Serving Warriors –***  
LSW's Mission: "Through a network of volunteer attorneys, Lawyers Serving Warriors provides free legal services to U.S. Military personnel and veterans who have served in OIF or OEF." <http://lawyersforwarriors.blogspot.com/>
- ***Bill Smith Homeless Veterans Project –***  
BSHVP's Mission: With the Inner City Law Center, LAFLA's Bill Smith Homeless Veterans Project helps to: 1) secure government benefits for veterans, 2) stabilize their living situation and 3) get homeless veterans back on their feet and permanently improve their lives. <http://www.lafla.org/clientservices/specialprojects/vets.asp>
- ***The John Marshall Law School Veteran Legal Support Center –***  
"The Veterans Legal Support Center & Clinic is one of the nation's first law school clinics dedicated solely to addressing the legal needs of veterans seeking their benefits from the Veterans Administration (VA)". <http://www.jmls.edu/veterans/>
- ***Veterans Law Project –***  
"Working with veteran service organizations, commissions and councils, the Veterans Law Project works to network, create and fund law clinics throughout the country to provide pro bono legal services to pro se veterans"  
<http://www.veteranslawproject.org/home/54/About+The+Veterans+Law+Project.html>
- ***Veterans Law Center –***  
VLC's Mission: "We provide support and counsel to America's Honorably Discharged Military Veterans, wherever they may be, and we do this free of charge to them."  
<http://veteranslawcenter.org/index.html>
- ***SALUTE (Students and Lawyers Assisting US Troops Everywhere) –***  
Project SALUTE is sponsored by the University of Detroit-Mercy School of Law. The clinic is mobile and has traveled across the country providing legal aid to veterans in cities ranging from San Antonio, Texas to Baltimore, Maryland.  
[http://www.law.udmercy.edu/academics/vetclinic/nat\\_tour.php](http://www.law.udmercy.edu/academics/vetclinic/nat_tour.php)

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**SOURCES OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

In addition to your law school and affiliated organizations, there are sources within the ABA that can provide funding and support for your program

- ***ABA Law Student Division***

Grant Program– [www.abanet.org/lzd/grant](http://www.abanet.org/lzd/grant)

The ABA Law Student Division, through its Grant Program, provides financial and program support to student organizations of ABA-approved law schools to establish programs and other activities that emphasize diversity, ethics, professionalism training and public interest/service activities. The Grant program is designed to assist law school groups that implement *new* programs. The Grant Fund is not intended to support fundraisers, to be used as a source for donating to charitable organizations or to be a source for funding student travel.

Any entity or individual at an ABA-approved law school is eligible to submit a grant application. A school may submit more than one application a year. Due to the limited resources of the Grant Program, the maximum possible award is \$500. However, the amount requested is not necessarily the amount granted by the review committee.

- ***ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance For Military Personnel (LAMP)***

<http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/lamp/home.html>

- ***Standing Committee on Armed Forces Law***

Dedicated to working with various military/civilian liaisons and advisors to ensure that the military justice system, the environment for the practice of law, and the protection of service member's rights, remain the best it can be. <http://www.abanet.org/scafl/>

- ***Judicial Division-National Conference of Specialized Court Judges-  
Military Courts Committee***

<http://www.abanet.org/jd/ncscj/committees.html>

- ***Section of Family Law – Military Committee***

Studies issues relating to clients in the military and their families, including procedural issues unique to the military. Reviews state and federal legislation and initiatives where ABA policy is affected, and teaches lawyers how to deal with military matters affecting state court legal disputes. <http://www.abanet.org/dch/committee.cfm?com=FL115277>

- ***General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division – Military Lawyers Committee***

Addresses military justice issues such as the law of armed conflict, homeland security, environmental law, legal assistance, and contracts.  
<http://www.abanet.org/genpractice/military/index.html>