

Town Hall Meeting Guide



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

The attached Town Hall Meeting Kit is designed to help DAV Chapters and Departments organize and conduct successful Town Hall meetings. Suggested topics for discussion are: the current level of federal funding for VA, the proposed VA budget level, local issues important to veterans, budgetary shortfalls currently impacting VA Medical Centers in your Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), or other issues of relevance to wounded and injured veterans in your state or local area. The kit includes:

- 1. Guidelines for Town Hall Meetings:** Carefully read this material and follow the guidelines for planning and executing a Town Hall meeting. This packet includes a sample agenda, a sample public service announcement, a sample media advisory, and a Town Hall Planning Team Checklist.
- 2. Invitation Letter to Elected Officials:** Send to your elected officials (federal, state, and local), inviting them to attend the Town Hall meeting. Attach a copy of the meeting agenda.
- 3. Invitation Letter to Local VA Officials:** Send to the VA Medical Center Directors within your VISN, and/or to VISN Directors, and other VA officials, inviting them to speak at the Town Hall meeting.
- 4. Effective Letters to the Editor:** Guidelines for composing an effective letter to the Editor of your local or regional newspapers.
- 5. Sample Letter to the Editor:** Send to the editors of state and local publications in your area at least one week prior to the date of the Veterans' Town Hall meeting.
- 6. Veterans' Town Hall Meeting Flyer:** Coordinate the creation and distribution of your flyer with fellow veterans and other veterans and military service organizations' chapters and posts throughout your city or state.
- 7. Miscellaneous Handouts:** Several documents can be employed as handouts at your Town Hall Meeting, depending on the focus of the event. Examples are:
 - Issue briefs on DAV's annual national issues, which can be found [here](#);
 - National Resolutions from the legislative program (available at DAV.org, or you can request additional copies from DAV National Service and Legislative Headquarters);
 - DAV's brochure on PTSD;
 - DAV special-issue magazine on women veterans;
 - contact information on how to reach your local DAV chapter and the DAV department of your state;
 - Names and contact information of your representatives in the state legislature and in Congress;
 - Handout(s) on availability of DAV assistance in helping veterans file claims for VA benefits.

Encourage members of veterans' and military service organizations to wear their service caps during the meeting.

Guidelines for Town Hall Meetings:

The purpose of the Town Hall meeting is to provide veterans the opportunity to discuss local issues important to veterans, including budgetary shortfalls currently impacting VA Medical Centers in your VISN. But other important issues, such as a proposal to change the mission of a VA facility or to close it, could warrant a Town Hall meeting. Schedule, set up, and conduct the meetings in a way that makes participants feel comfortable in attending and expressing their opinions. Be sure that agency and other organizational representatives understand that their role is to listen and support the open discussion of VA health care funding issues and perspectives (or other issues as appropriate). In all planning and activities, strive to keep a consistent focus on identifying and hearing the voice of the veteran community that uses the VA health care system or the VA benefits system.

Recommended Format for a Town Hall Meeting

Background information:

Background information should be distributed to participants as they enter (white papers, DAV brochures, etc.)

Introduction:

A representative of the DAV host organization should act as moderator. The introduction for the meeting should include identifying the purpose of the meeting, recognizing elected representatives, other veterans service organizations present, and VA officials. Explain the protocol for the meeting.

Facility Set-up:

1. Make sure that entrance to the meeting room is clearly identified with signage.
2. You may want to have a few greeters who welcome people as they enter and answer the inevitable questions about logistics (e.g., where to sit, location of restrooms, etc.). Greeters may be asked to direct participants to a specific table, e.g. the hearing impaired or those needing wheelchair accommodation.
3. Have a table where people can pick up materials you have collected for the Town Hall, including the agenda and background information.

Meeting Moderator

The role of the Meeting Moderator is to serve as discussion leader and to maintain the flow of the meeting as planned. Begin by welcoming people to the meeting and explaining its purpose, such as:

My name is [name and title] from [DAV Chapter/Department]. As moderator of this meeting, and on behalf of DAV, we welcome all of you here today. [Introduce distinguished guests] [Make a brief statement to set the stage and tone of the discussion, such as the example below]:

“We are also concerned about the proposed budget for FY ____ and whether that budget, if enacted, will support all of the needs of veterans for their health care and other benefits next year. This information, the ideas and recommendations discussed here today will serve as the basis for a local advocacy agenda. If the issues identified here today are important to you, we strongly encourage you to become involved with us as well as (list other entities present at the meeting i.e. Veterans Assistance Council, etc., federal union representatives, consumer councils, etc.). Working together, we can solve this problem.”

The responsibilities of the moderator are:

1. Review the agenda and the process you will use.
2. Explain the background information.
It will provide a more detailed and systematic identification of issues, which will help to further explain the issues raised during the discussion.
3. Introduce guest speakers
4. Controlled question and answer period

Some Tips for Controlled Q & A period:

- Identify the topic and the timeframe for discussion
- Encourage everyone's participation and remind the group this is a discussion on specific issues, ***not a forum to resolve individual issues with disability claims or "pet" problems that might not be of interest to the majority of attendees***
- Open the discussion by identifying someone who wishes to speak or by asking a pertinent question
- Redirect attention from participants who begin to monopolize the discussion.
 - Direct a question to other members or the panel
 - Encourage people wishing to engage in continuing discussion about personal needs, pet peeves, or side issues to delay until after the discussion groups are concluded

- Moderator should refrain from entering into a discussion to provide information to address an individual's issue. (This can be done during break time or after the session. If NSOs are available, individuals can be referred to them for assistance.)

5. Conclusion:

- Moderator will thank everyone for participating and will encourage all participants to become active by making their voices heard at the VA, and in Washington: write letters, fax, phone calls, etc., to your Congressman or Senator. Explain DAV internet advocacy through DAV's website, through DAV's Twitter and Facebook pages, and use the Commander's Action Network (DAV CAN).

Sample Agenda:

FREDONIA COUNTY TOWN HALL MEETING
MAY **, ____
AGENDA

12:30 Coffee and Fellowship

1:00 Welcome, Introductions, and Pledge of Allegiance

1:15 Topic Discussion

3:00 Adjournment

Sample Public Service Announcement for Local Radio/Blogs and Facebook:

FROM:

FOR USE:

Contact Person:

Name of Organization:

Address:

Telephone:

Date: (Give dates including day of week)

For Example Only

TOWN HALL MEETING ON _____

TIME: 50 seconds

NUMBER OF WORDS: 142 words

ANNOUNCER:

Funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system will be on center stage at a Town Hall meeting, which will be held Friday, May 12, from 1:00 until 3:30 p.m. at the Fredonia Community Center, 920 Marx Street.

Veterans, family members, friends, and citizens concerned about the needs of our veterans are invited to discuss _____.

Hosts of the Town Hall meeting are Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and _____ . Your voice matters! Join us on November 9 for the Fredonia Town Hall Meeting. For more information, call Eric Stratton at 555-5555.

Sample Media Advisory:

MEDIA ADVISORY

WHAT: Leaders in Fredonia's veterans community will hold a news conference to discuss the current budget shortfalls for veterans health care and the proposed budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. They will also discuss DAV's legislative priorities in health care for today's veterans, as well as the needs of the men and women now at war in Iraq, Afghanistan and other dangerous assignments throughout the world.

WHEN: 1:00 p.m., Friday, May 12, _____

WHERE: Fredonia Community Center
920 Marx Street
Fredonia, Ill

CONTACT: Eric Stratton; (312) 555 -- 5555

DAV is an organization of 1.2 million wounded and injured veterans, and is dedicated to empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity; ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them; fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

Scheduled Speakers Include:

Disabled American Veterans Department of Illinois – Smitty Smith, Department Adjutant – (312) 555-4444

Disabled American Veterans Chapter 99 – James “Dude” Axman, Chapter Commander – (312) 545-3434

Veteran of Iraq Combat – Private First Class (Promotable) Merrill Lynch, US Marine Corps (Ret.)

Veteran of Afghanistan Combat – Major Jeremiah Dogface, US Army (Ret.)

###

Town Hall Planning Team Checklist:

No.	Completed Activity	Person Responsible	Cost Consideration
1	Notify DAV National Communications and Legislative staff at NSLH both before (and after) the event		
2	Choose Speakers		
3	Make sure there is a bipartisan/balanced panel		
4	Choose DAV Leader		
5	Create list for: Representative Panel (elected representatives at local, state, and federal levels, and a VA Rep) Moderator		
6	Locate an accessible site		
7	Identify a date		
8	Develop Budget (if needed)		
9	Liability insurance/waiver (if needed)		
10	Meeting agenda		
11	Refreshments/Lunch (optional)		
12	<u>Volunteers:</u> Photographer Recorder (if any) Registration Set-up Clean-up		
13	<u>Outreach and PR activities:</u> Radio/news spots Newspaper articles Flyers		
14	<u>Results:</u> Collect and compile comments. Send results to participants. Publicize results in newsletters or other media. Use conclusions for letters/emails to Congress, VA and President		

Sample Invitation Letters

Month __, ____

The Honorable (Full Name)
Address of District Office
City, State Zip

Dear Senator _____:

I am writing on behalf of Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and the [number] of wounded and injured veterans in [state], to invite you to participate in a Town Hall Meeting on issues impacting the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care system. The meeting, to be attended by local area veterans and families, will be held on [day of week], [month] [day], [year], from _____ to _____, at [Location].

[Example of subject for Town Hall]:

Sick and disabled veterans need your help. Continued funding shortfalls for veterans' health care, combined with rising costs for care and increased demand for services, have resulted in unprecedented waiting times for routine and specialized medical services nationwide. I am especially concerned about how this has hampered timely access to quality health care for the nation's service-connected veterans, including those most severely disabled, including our DAV members.

Serious shortfalls have been reported for fiscal year (FY) ____ in nearly every Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN). We are concerned about the impact of these shortfalls on the local facilities in our VISN. Additionally, Congress has started its work in creating a budget and spending program for the federal government for fiscal year _____. Unfortunately, there are no assurances that health care programs for veterans will be funded or sustained at levels necessary for the VA to meet its mission. A funding shortfall would seriously jeopardize the quality of health care provided to our nation's sick and disabled veterans.

We believe the best recourse is to bring veterans, families, and friends of the veterans community together to discuss this matter. The Town Hall meeting at [Location] will focus public attention on the need to sustain strong veterans' health care budget support, even as our overseas wars wind down.

As their elected voice on Capitol Hill, the veterans of [state] and our DAV members are counting on your presence and your participation at the meeting. We appreciate your favorable consideration in this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Month __, 2005

Mr./Ms./Dr. **[Full Name]**
Address of VA Medical Center/Regional Office
City, State Zip

Dear **[Title] [Last Name]**:

I am writing on behalf of the **[number]** wounded and injured veterans of **[state]**, to invite you to be a guest speaker at a Town Hall Meeting to inform veterans about challenges that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) faces. The meeting, to be attended by local area veterans and families, will be held on **[day of week]**, **[month] [day]**, **[year]**, from _____ to _____, at **[Location]**.

[Example of subject for Town Hall]:

As you know, serious shortfalls have been reported this year in every VISN, including your facility. We are concerned about the impact of these shortfalls. Additionally, Congress has started its work in creating a budget and spending program for the federal government for next year. Unfortunately, there are no assurances that health care programs for veterans will be funded or sustained at levels necessary for the VA to meet its mission. A funding shortfall would seriously jeopardize the quality of health care provided to our nation's sick and disabled veterans.

We believe the best recourse is to bring veterans, families, and friends of the veterans community together to discuss this matter. The Town Hall meeting at **[Location]** will focus public attention on the need for sustained support for the veterans' health care budget, even as our overseas wars come to an end.

Given your knowledge of current local challenges, the veterans of **[state]** and our DAV members would very much appreciate your presence and your participation at the meeting. We appreciate your favorable consideration in this important matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Effective Letters to the Editor

Have you ever read a news story or editorial and disagreed with the point-of-view it expresses? Or heard your elected officials on the news and felt they were misinformed? When this frustrating situation occurs, you can do something: write a letter to the newspaper.

On occasion, NSLH may request Departments and Chapters to write news outlets supporting or opposing legislation in Washington.

Letters printed in the newspaper educate thousands, sometimes millions, of readers and those who represent them in Washington. Some letters, of course, are more effective than others. The following are tips for writing effective letters.

- **Be succinct.** Develop one or two points to make in your letter and limit yourself to those points, but make them well.
- **Be brief.** Short letters are much more likely to be printed than long letters. Keep your letter less than 300 words in length. Some newspapers have word limits.
- **Local impact.** Tell how the situation impacts (positive or negative) on the local community.
- **Sign your letters.** Letter to the Editor must be signed, with an address and day telephone number to verify authenticity. Use your professional title only if your position is related to the subject matter at hand.
- **Type or print.** If the editor cannot read your letter, he or she cannot and will not print it.
- **Reinforce the message.** Encourage others in your community to write letters-to-the-editor, especially if there are more than one or two message points that need to be addressed.

Sample Letter to the Editor

Tailor letter to your specific issues, including personal details and experiences with VA

Have signed by DAV leadership

Hand Deliver to Local Newspaper

Editor:

As we pause during this Memorial Day* period to honor the memory of those brave Americans who paid the ultimate price for freedom and democracy, let us also honor the national commitment to America's sick and disabled veterans.

While this nation is asking more from its active and reserve military, many are returning visible and invisible injuries and wounds. This is the cost of war paid for over the lifetime of the service member. The Federal government has an ongoing moral responsibility to provide top-quality health care to those men and women who bear the deepest wounds and scars of war. Yet, the proposed federal budget for veterans' health care is wholly inadequate and would seriously erode and undermine the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.

As a veteran in [state], and a member of Disabled American Veterans, I find it disappointing that any elected representatives in Washington would even consider these funding levels as living up to this nation's obligation to veterans.

Every day we are reminded that service members risk their lives for America, yet when veterans turn to VA for their health care needs, their access to care by VA is often threatened by budgetary shortfalls. The citizens of [state] must remind their Members of Congress that they were elected to meet the nation's obligation to provide sufficient Federal funding to properly meet the health care needs of sick and disabled veterans. Not to do so would be immoral.

Name

Title & Organization

Address

Telephone number

*Also, letters can be tailored to Veterans Day, Independence Day, or a local event honoring military or veterans.

**Disabled American Veterans invites you to attend
a
Veterans' Town Hall Meeting**

**(Date)
(Time)
(Place)**

DAV of Fredonia to hold Town Hall Meeting.

Find out how you can help ensure that all eligible veterans from World War II to Afghanistan gain and keep access to timely, quality health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Contact: Name, Title
Phone Number (daytime and night)

Be There To Protect Veterans Rights!