



# Ending Veteran Homelessness Highlights:

## *Outreach/Rural Tips & Tricks*

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This resource was developed through community efforts across the country to end homelessness among Veterans and reflects practices that local communities have successfully implemented toward achieving that goal. *It is focused on strategies for Community Veteran Leadership committees to implement locally.*

Ending homelessness among Veterans is a challenging undertaking that requires an all-out community effort across multiple varied partners, along with comprehensive, coordinated outreach needed across large and rural geographies.

### Tips for Community Partnerships

#### Identifying Veterans Experiencing Homelessness

Be visible in the community: **attend community events** such as Stand Downs and Community Connect events that are focused on engaging people experiencing homelessness. Seek out local community activities such as fairs, festivals, or farmers markets where the target population may frequent.

Connect with **other outreach teams** from the Veteran Affairs (VA), Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), or Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) to work together. The *WV Coalition* partners with **Universities** (medical, nursing schools) and street medicine outreach efforts to share information on encounters with people experiencing homelessness.

Form relationships with **local churches and faith based organizations**; they are often supporting people experiencing homelessness or at risk. (Idea from *Cruz, Stevens County, WA*) Go to food banks or pantries, or **eat at soup kitchens** to discover who is frequently there and may be experiencing homelessness. Form relationships with staff and volunteers there; leave agency contact info with them to help connect to services.

**Coordinate outreach team efforts** in the same geography with agency and municipal partners (regardless of how they are funded) and link to the Active List effort in a way that makes sense for your community. **Map out the territory** that each outreach team covers, hours of engagement, processes for referrals, linkage with coordinated entry, determinations of homeless status, and Veteran eligibility. Develop a **'Hard to Engage' outreach protocol** for Veterans experiencing homelessness who may be reticent to get involved with the VA and/or outreach and service providers. Require a certain number of staff attempts at engagement over a defined period of time (such as 8 attempts over 2 months). Include protocols for switching staff and provider agencies if needed.

## Law Enforcement

Develop deep, lasting coordination with **local law enforcement agencies** to participate in ‘ride-alongs’, if allowed, to partner with them to visit known areas where Veterans experiencing homelessness hang out and engage them. Connect with **wildland firefighters** to alert you to people in remote areas. (Idea from *Jo Zimmer, ROCC, BOS COC, OR*) Law enforcement has broad community coverage and is a great resource to help locate people- link up with **police that use helicopters** so that they will alert you to people they locate in encampments. (Idea from *Cal State*) Connect with Federal/state park rangers and US Geological Survey staff that may encounter people living outside through the course of their work. Provide education to law enforcement and other first responder partners on ways to connect with Veterans, and guidance in asking ‘have you served in the military?’ rather than ‘are you a Veteran?’ to cast a wider net for those that may be eligible for a range of supports depending upon their service.

## Properties

Keep tabs on **local mobile home communities** and easiest to access or affordable housing options (such as weekly motel rentals, monthly rental apartments, boarding houses, etc.). Develop and sustain relationships with **property managers** to maintain an awareness of families doubled up, recently or soon to be exiting into homelessness.

### Ideas for communicating with people experiencing homelessness:

- **Short note** in church bulletins and community newsletters
- **Websites** of all kinds- SSVF/provider agencies, human service collaboratives, community action agencies, local human services and mental health agencies, Veteran service organizations (AmVets, VFW, VVA), cities/towns and villages, dedicated social media pages
- **Cards and flyers** left in waiting rooms of Federally Qualified Health Centers, state and county human services local branches, Veteran service organizations, National Guard Family and Yellow Ribbon Programs, county Veteran offices, or posted on community bulletin boards in hardware stores, groceries, human services agencies, food commodity distribution centers

## Tips for Locating Those Experiencing Homelessness

Use **Google Earth** during the fall and winter seasons to locate tents or blue tarps, indicating encampments. (Idea from *NY Long Island*) Develop strategies with the Veteran leadership team/CoC to engage with Veterans in encampments and to build trust with any Veterans residing there. Take a data driven approach: use **local data to determine “hot spot” locations** where vulnerable people experiencing homelessness often show up and can be located, such as emergency rooms, jails, clinics, detox, etc.

Visit places where people experiencing homelessness may go:

### Natural

- Interstate exits
- Canyons/hollows
- Rest areas
- Campgrounds
- National and State Parks or Nature Refuges
- Department of Natural Resources properties
- Sites with outdoor toilet facilities
- Construction sites
- Dumpsters
- Beaches, riverbeds
- Farm Buildings

### Community

- Stores open 24 hours
- Diners/Fast Food Restaurants
- Convenience stores/Tobacco store/Gas stations
- 7am liquor store openings
- Grocery stores
- Recycling Centers
- Laundromat
- Rundown or budget m/hotel With formerly homeless individuals already housed
- Churches
- Storage unit centers
- Parking garages
- Truck stops
- Car impound lot

### Institutional

- Social Security
- Post Office
- Small community colleges
- Library
- National Guard Armories
- City and long distance bus /train stations
- Law enforcement
- Jails
- Rural health centers
- VA CBOCs
- Health clinics
- Hospital/Emergency rooms
- Plasma Centers
- Food pantries/ Federal food assistance offices (SNAP, WIC, and TEFAP)



*“Homelessness won’t be solved from your desk.*

*It is imperative to get out in the community.”*

*- WV Coalition*

Disclaimer: This tool provides examples from communities without any edits from HUD. They are included only as useful examples or templates. HUD has not reviewed them to determine if they meet all funding requirements, including whether all costs depicted are eligible. HUD is not endorsing the examples as strategies that all communities should adopt. These are not official HUD documents.