

Stand Down Guide

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Section I: Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Stand Down?

In times of war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. At secure base camp areas, troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, mail and receive letters, and enjoy the camaraderie of friends in a safe environment.

Today, Stand Down refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's estimated 107,000 homeless veterans on any given night "combat" life on the streets. Homeless veterans are brought together in a single location for one to three days and are provided access to the community resources needed to begin addressing their individual problems and rebuilding their lives. In the military, Stand Down afforded battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health and overall sense of well-being. Today's Stand Down affords the same opportunity to homeless veterans.

What is the history of Stand Down?

The concept of Stand Down, as related specifically to the homeless veteran crisis, was the brainchild of two Vietnam Veterans, Robert Van Keuren and Dr. Jon Nachison, with the support of Vietnam Veterans of San Diego. The first Stand Down was held in San Diego during the summer of 1988. The popularity of the event has steadily grown from the original in 1988 to 190 throughout the nation each year. It is estimated that in 2009 alone more than 42,000 homeless veterans received assistance at Stand Downs.

What happens at a Stand Down?

Hundreds of homeless veterans are provided with a broad range of necessities including food, clothing, medical, legal and mental health assistance, job counseling and referral, and most importantly, companionship and camaraderie. It is a time for the community to connect with the homeless veteran population and address this crisis that affects each and every town, city and state in this country. The hand up -- not a handout -- philosophy of Stand Down is carried out through the work of hundreds of volunteers and



NCHV co-founder Robert Van Keuren (left) of Canandaigua, NY, and Dr. Jon Nachison of San Diego created the Stand Down program in 1988 with Vietnam Veterans of San Diego.

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organizations throughout the nation.

Why this unique approach?

Many homeless veterans have suffered years of chronic or recurring readjustment issues since ending their military service, issues often inadequately addressed by traditional services to assist veterans. This is due in part to a lack of structured and effective collaboration among agencies, forcing veterans to go from one agency to another in efforts to access the various resources they need.

This lack of efficient support from traditional veteran services has led to homeless veterans' mistrust of the very government agencies and large institutions created to help them. A Stand Down brings together various agencies and service providers to provide a comprehensive system that encourages and assists homeless veterans to overcome their distrust and feelings of isolation with the knowledge that this event promises to address multiple problems at one time and place. It provides a safe environment in which they can connect with people who have shared experiences and cultivate hope that they can rebuild their lives.

Who organizes and delivers these services?

Hundreds of caring volunteers and professionals give of their time and expertise to address the unique needs of homeless veterans. Committees formed specifically to put on the event stage most Stand Downs. Veteran service organizations, National Guard and Reserve units, homeless shelter programs, health care providers, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Labor staffs, veteran-helping-veteran programs, and concerned citizens from the community organize and stage the events.

Where are Stand Downs held?

Stand Downs most often occur over a two- or three-day period, although there are an increasing number of one-day events. Some are held indoors, but the majority are held on football fields, in parks or other wide-open spaces. There is a [list of upcoming Stand Downs](#) on this site.

What does it take to stage a Stand Down?

There is no specific formula to plan and hold a Stand Down. In fact, each community adds its own uniqueness to a Stand Down. Some offer basic services, while others offer more by including entertainment and cultural activities to their programs. Some Stand Downs are re-created to follow a regimented, military-style program, which is familiar and comforting to the veteran, while others create an atmosphere of empowerment to the extent of electing officers among the homeless veterans.

All it really takes for a community to organize a Stand Down is a group of dedicated volunteers committed to helping homeless veterans improve their situation.

What can I do to help?

Your contribution or volunteer time would be greatly appreciated by the local Stand Down committee. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans maintains an active list of scheduled Stand Downs across the nation, including contact information.

If there is not a Stand Down scheduled in a community near you, you might want to help organize a planning committee to assist the homeless veterans in your area. Please contact us for information concerning homeless veteran providers and advocates in your area.

Section II: Classification of Stand Down Events

In July 2002, the founders of Stand Down, Robert Van Keuren, Dr. Jon Nachison and Vietnam Veterans of San Diego, asked the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) to become the "keeper of the flame" and

provide national leadership for the Stand Down movement. Since the first Stand Down in San Diego in 1988, the program has become recognized as the most valuable outreach tool to help homeless veterans in the nation today.

NCHV has developed standards for classification of Stand Down events based on the different models currently in practice. Variations from the original program concept – in terms of duration and the range of support services available – shape the developed program guidelines.

Stand Down program guidelines can be a valuable planning tool for event organizers. Though not every event will include all of the service elements required for official designation as a “Stand Down,” it is generally agreed that all outreach and assistance programs provide much needed support for homeless veterans. The hope is that event coordinators will endeavor to include more services as their programs evolve.

Classifications

Homeless veterans outreach assistance events are classified based on comparison to the original, three-day comprehensive Stand Down program concept. Event organizers have the latitude to name their own events. NCHV’s classifications will be used to inform potential investors and collect information about types of services offered to homeless veterans. Guidelines for classifying homeless veteran assistance programs follow.

Stand Down

- Time period:** 3-day event (minimum)
- Participants:** Homeless veterans and their families/significant others only
- Services provided:** Shelter provided throughout event; food; personal care (haircuts, personal care supplies, clothing); picture ID services; health care screening (HIV/AIDS, TB, Hepatitis C, etc.); health care services (actual health care professionals will provide services); eye care; dental care; VA benefits counseling; general benefits counseling (Social Security, Food Stamps, local health and human services); substance abuse counseling/recovery groups; mental health counseling; legal services; employment services (job referrals, employment counseling); housing services (referrals to programs); spiritual services; activities to empower homeless veterans and create a “community” (town meetings, tent leaders, open mike, entertainment, graduation)

Homeless Veterans Resource Fair (Modified Stand Down model)

- Time period:** 1- or 2-day events
- Participants:** Homeless veterans and their families/significant others only
- Services provided:** Shelter provided throughout event; food; personal care (haircuts, personal care supplies, clothing); picture ID services; health care screening (HIV/AIDS, TB, Hepatitis C, etc.); health care services (actual health care professionals will provide services); eye care; dental care; VA benefits counseling; general benefits counseling (Social Security, Food Stamps, local health and human services); substance abuse counseling/recovery groups; mental health

counseling; legal services; employment services (job referrals, employment counseling); housing services (referrals to programs)

Homeless Veteran Health Fair

- Time period:** 1-day events
- Participants:** Homeless veterans
- Services provided:** Health care screening (HIV/AIDS, TB, Hepatitis C, etc.); health care services (actual health care professionals will provide services); eye care services or referral; dental care services or referral; VA benefits counseling or referral; general benefits counseling or referral (Social Security, Food Stamps, local health and human services); substance abuse counseling/recovery groups; mental health counseling or referral; housing services (referrals to programs)

Homeless Veteran Job Fair

- Time period:** 1-day events
- Participants:** Homeless veterans
- Services provided:** VA benefits counseling; general benefits counseling (Social Security, Food Stamps, local health and human services); employment services (job referrals, employment counseling); housing services (referrals to programs)

Other events

Events targeting all veterans are really benefit or health screening fairs and do not fit the Stand Down model criteria.

Some communities have used the Stand Down model to offer services to all homeless individuals and/or low income at-risk individuals. Since these are not veteran specific, they do not fit the Stand Down model.

Section III: Organizing a Stand Down

Veteran service organizations and homeless veteran activists around the country have organized over a thousand Stand Downs since 1988, implemented with the assistance of hundreds of service providers and thousands of volunteers. The success of your Stand Down hinges upon its effective organization, built around the practice of a coordinated community effort. In this effort, individuals, organizations and government agencies create and strengthen community partnerships to maximize homeless veterans' access to a variety of resources to address identified needs.

Vietnam Veterans of San Diego has identified six goals to organizing and implementing a successful Stand Down:

1. Provide homeless veterans immediate relief from the trauma and isolation of homelessness. Create an environment where basic necessities are provided and participants can come together in a safe and relaxed atmosphere.
2. Provide homeless veterans access to short-term resources. Ensure that participants have easy access to basic needs during the event, including shelter, beds, food, showers, clothing and haircuts.
3. Provide homeless veterans access to long-term resources and providers. Give participants the opportunity to begin drug and alcohol recovery, get medical and dental treatment, receive employment counseling and referrals, access social services information, deal with legal matters, etc.
4. Raise community awareness about homelessness (particularly homeless veterans). Encourage participation of elected officials in Stand Down. Increase media coverage and dialogue on homeless veteran issues.
5. Replicate the Stand Down event in other areas. Bring in service providers from other areas to observe and participate in a Stand Down so they can use that experience to launch a program in their communities.
6. Develop longer-term solutions to address the needs of homeless veterans. Involve as many service providers and volunteers in your Stand Down event as possible, and use that collaboration to develop an assistance network in your community.

Ingredients Critical to Stand Down Success

Planning your first Stand Down can take a year or longer. Don't be discouraged if you encounter difficulties along the way. Perseverance is key to raising the level of community awareness and building a foundation of community support for this event. You also need to be flexible. Planning volunteer-organized events often involves facing unanticipated obstacles or challenges, and you may need to do some quick thinking or make changes along the way.

A high level of community awareness and commitment is vital to the success of a Stand Down and should be identified as a principal goal throughout the planning process. Strong leadership from the initial planning stages is essential to achieving this objective. Grassroots veterans groups or service organizations often serve in leadership roles during the planning process. Local Department of Veterans Affairs and other government agencies also successfully provide leadership.

Raising community awareness and commitment requires an accurate needs assessment for homeless veterans within the community, as well as an assessment of community capacity and available resources. This information will help you determine the appropriate length and service demands of your event (refer to "Section II: Classification of Stand Down Events").

Effective planning should be based on the completed needs assessment. Effective planning includes organization of the event, coordination of efforts, and creation of an information clearinghouse that serves as a liaison to the public and that can help ensure delivery of a consistent message for the project.

10 Steps to Organizing Stand Down Events

The steps outlined below provide a brief introduction to the fundamentals of organizing an event. (See Vietnam Veterans of San Diego's "Stand Down Guide" for detailed guidance on organizing and implementing a Stand Down). Note that these steps often overlap or are undertaken simultaneously. Also, certain steps are meant to be initiated early and carried out throughout the organization process.

1. Begin by identifying leadership for the planning process. Efforts to plan an event generally begin with individuals who are familiar with Stand Down, whether through observing a Stand Down elsewhere or by watching a VVSD Stand Down video. It is important that one or two people are selected to be involved in a leadership role throughout the planning stages and event implementation. Think about targeting community-based veteran service providers, local VVA chapter or other veteran service organizations in your area, or your local DVA office to identify individuals who could fill this role. You could also consult your local County Veterans Service Officer to identify strong, active veteran advocates in the area.
2. Once leadership has been established, assess the need for a Stand Down in your community. Assess the number and needs of homeless veterans in your area. Check with County Veterans Service Officer, your local DVA and other local government agencies for statistical information. Check with local shelters and homeless service providers to determine the resources most frequently accessed or requested. Do outreach to homeless veterans on the street to get their input to determine the services that are accessed and desired.
3. Gauge community support for a Stand Down. It is necessary that a community understand what a Stand Down is before you ask for support. Organize group briefings or Stand Down video screenings for broad community representation, including elected officials, service providers, media and others. You may find that these events also provide an opportunity for you to identify individuals who are interested in participating on the steering committee (see step 4).
4. Identify major service providers and other community leaders and form a Steering Committee that meets regularly to provide direction and oversight throughout the planning process. The committee typically includes leaders of important local organizations, businesses and key players who have personal connections that may assist in accessing resources and building community support. The steering committee works closely with the lead agency (see step 6) and regularly conducts general service provider meetings. Stand Down has been declared a priority by many Veteran Service Organizations, so consider tapping these agencies for advocates who are eager to participate and who understand veterans' issues.
5. Determine the scope of the event and set the date. Determine number of days, service providers, volunteers needed, what food and housing will be provided, and the number of homeless veterans and their families that you can accommodate. You will have to consider local government restrictions, fire and health codes, site capacity, accessibility, security, and the resources available to support the event. When setting the date, consider weather (the mild season is best), availability of volunteers and service providers, and the needs of site owners, service providers and volunteers.
6. Establish a lead agency and information center at least six months before you would like to hold the event. Ideally, this agency is one that works directly with homeless veterans on a daily basis and has an understanding of homeless veterans' issues. Although the lead agency will work closely with the steering committee (agency personnel may serve as key committee members), the agency holds primary responsibility for organizing and implementing the Stand Down. An information center should be organized early on, through which personnel will prepare and distribute print materials, respond to questions and keep records of participating service providers and volunteers.
7. Once you have completed an assessment of services needed, understand what resources will be available for the event, and have established leadership, you can begin working to locate potential Stand Down sites. The type of event to be held is the first factor to consider in determining an appropriate site. Many other factors must also be considered, including site accessibility, security, identification controls, acceptance by surrounding community, indoor or outdoor location and costs.
8. Develop a preliminary budget and think about materials needed, based on the services you want to provide. Remember, your goal is to plan and implement this event through donations of time, goods and services. Fundraising and donation solicitation are crucial to offsetting certain core costs. Military

organizations often provide much of the necessary equipment (tents, cots, trucks, medical equipment, etc.). They may also provide the core labor for site set-up and tear-down, as well as ensure site security. Think about contacting veteran service organizations and government agencies for donations and assistance. Be creative. Get ideas by talking to individuals who have raised funds and donations for Stand Downs in other areas.

9. Coordinate program and logistics planning and consider key services to be provided at the event. Strategize the planning of the event program and logistics. This can be done in a variety of ways. VVSD in San Diego has identified two individuals from the steering committee to serve as program and logistics directors. The two positions work closely to plan each day's events. A program director designs a program of events, including scheduling and coordination of services, and selecting and training leaders. A logistics director assesses overall Stand Down needs and coordinates all material acquisition and distribution, site preparedness and security.

Services will include both basic services and program services. Basic services are those that provide personal hygiene and safety -- food, clothes, showers, haircuts, shelter and site security. Program services include medical care (treatment for chronic conditions, screening for TB and STDs); dental care; mental health and substance abuse counseling; legal aid (such as the Homeless Court Program); assistance with benefits; and employment assistance.

10. Raise awareness about the event. Select a public relations director from the steering committee or lead agency and organize a publicity campaign several months prior to the event. You will need to begin outreach to homeless veterans about six weeks before the Stand Down. Homeless veterans should be pre-registered for the event, if possible, to evaluate potential attendance and services needed as well as allow time for court files to be pulled for participation in the Homeless Court program, if offered.

[The Homeless Court is a special court session held outside of the courtroom, often in a shelter or at a Stand Down site, through which homeless defendants can resolve misdemeanor offenses and warrants with a plea structure adapted to their involvement in homeless assistance and recovery programs.]

Section IV: Additional Resources Available

Stand Down Manual

Written by Dr. Jon Nachison, co-founder of the National Stand Down Movement. Request a hard copy by email at info@nchv.org, or call 202-546-1969.

Taking the Court to Stand Down

Prepared by the ABA Commission on Homelessness and Poverty and NCHV. Send requests for hard copies to info@nchv.org or call 202-546-1969.

Homeless Veteran Program Coordinator

Contact your local VA medical center or call the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 1-877-424-3838. To find the nearest VA facility, [click here](#).

Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), Department of Labor

The U.S. Department of Labor-Veterans Employment and Training Service provides grants to community-based organizations that conduct Stand Down events. In FY 2006 the amount of these grants was increased to \$8,000 for 3-day programs. As a general guideline, VETS funding may be used to purchase food items, prepared meals, bottled water, clothing (cold weather type, shoes, boots, underwear, socks), sleeping bags, hygiene care kits, facility and tent rentals, equipment rentals, advertising costs, event posters, portable bathrooms, janitorial/kitchen

supplies, dedicated phone lines (if absolutely necessary), security costs, and other items and services deemed necessary. Funds may not be used to purchase special T-shirts, pen sets, specialty hats (unless for cold weather use), military and veteran type patches, or gifts for staff members, visitors or volunteers. Funding must be used to enhance employment and training opportunities for or promote self-sufficiency of homeless veterans. Proposals are submitted for review by the VETS Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) lead through the regional Director for Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DVET) offices. The DVET will assist or provide technical assistance and guidance to the entity submitting an application for funds in support of Stand Down events.

Department of Defense Surplus Property

May be used for Stand Down events. Check with your local VA Medical Center homeless coordinator for available sites and permit requirements.