Leading with Voices of Veterans with Lived Experiences and Expertise in Homelessness
Session Length: 90 Minutes

Slides & handouts are in the CHAT Section

Recording, Handouts & Slides will be sent via email

Submit questions in the question box or any time at ssvf@va.gov
• Welcome & Introductions
• Setting the Stage
• Meaningful Inclusion & What Does That Mean?
• Meaningful hiring and retention in all staff roles
• Service Partners
• Partnerships in Action - SSVF Grantees
• Q&A
SSVF Program Office
Sahirah Hobes (she/her), SSVF Regional Coordinator

Technical Assistance
Nastacia’ Moore (she/her), Senior Associate - TAC
LaMont Green (he/they), Senior Associate - TAC

Panelist
Sheila Sebron (she/her), Veteran/Community Advocate
Chris Lopez (he/him), Veteran/Lived Experience Coalition

Grantee
LaTonya Murray (she/her), Director, Emergency Housing Services, FrontLine Service
Luke Drotar, (he/him), SSVF Program Manager, FrontLine Service
Timothy Kelly (he/him), Veteran Stability Coordinator, FrontLine Service
Objectives

1. Participants will identify key considerations for building authentic partnerships with Veterans with lived experiences and lived expertise that truly share power and decision making.

2. Participants will identify potential regional and local Veteran service partners to embed Veteran voice.
Meaningful Inclusion
and What Does that Actually Mean?
“Those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, but furthest from resources and power.”

-JustLead WA
Inclusion of Veterans in Equity Impact

The Veterans that are most impacted by the decision, process, or policy should be part of the process of developing it. Specifically, Black people, Indigenous people, people of color (BIPOC), those with lived experience of homelessness, and other marginalized populations should be part of the teams making funding allocation decisions, developing rehousing processes, refining prioritization protocols, and developing policy guidelines.
The Importance of Meaningful Inclusion

- Engaging Veterans with lived experiences of homelessness helps communities access an untapped source of leadership and resources.

- Having BIPOC Veterans with lived experiences for the full life cycle of the process helps us to understand the causes of disparities so as to actively address.

- This approach shifts the work on equity, from a deficit view of people with resources giving things up to help others in need, to an interconnected view, in which everyone has something to offer and something to gain.

- Partnerships with Veterans with lived experiences of homelessness and BIPOC Veterans is racial equity and social justice work.

Meaningful Inclusion in Practice

• Elevate the voices of Veterans with lived experiences. Ensure that Veterans are reflective of the population served in diversity of experiences and race/ethnicity, gender, gender identity, and other intersectional characteristics.

• Make meaningful inclusion with BIPOC Veterans with lived experience an urgent priority.

• Value and acknowledge Veterans with lived experiences’ resourcefulness and strengths in the full scope of work—e.g., design of services and policy making.

• Be supportive of the emotional labor and resources this support requires.

Includes adapted content from: https://ighhub.org/solutions/strategy-planning/expertise-lived-experience
Meaningful Inclusion in Practice

- Allow Veterans to be their authentic selves by supporting their voices, and not policing their presentation styles. Focus on the message of what people are saying rather than their communication styles or “polish”.

- Ensure your structure and organizational climate provide for open feedback and meaningful participation in the decision-making process, not tokenizing.

- Devote the necessary resources to make the partnership successful (i.e. budget, staff time, space). Ensure reminder calls, and adequate staff support.

- Prioritize
  - Meeting outside of regular business hours, if needed.
  - Ensuring documents and communications are written in plain language while avoiding acronyms and professional jargon
  - Leaving professional titles out of introductions.

• Create shared group agreements for accountability to ensure spaces where people feel respected, valued, and where people care for each other.

• Foster healthy relationships and group dynamics to cultivate a safe and supportive environment for everyone.

• Prioritize the emotional climate and wellbeing over the need to complete an agenda. Make sure you allocate enough time so that everyone
  • Can participate and share
  • Is on the same page with the issue at hand
  • Can work together to develop solutions.

• Have Cultural Humility, be vulnerable, be transparent about mistakes and challenges, and check/mitigate your power, positionality, and privilege.

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<tr>
<th>Avoid</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transactional Only relationships</td>
<td>Create meaningful partnerships based on mutual respect</td>
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<td>Tokenism</td>
<td>Include people of different experiences and backgrounds</td>
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<td>Having decision making conversations in silos</td>
<td>Engage in transparency</td>
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<td>Making decisions about how, when, and where conversations will be had without consultation</td>
<td>Create safe, trusting spaces that involve inclusion from the start</td>
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<td>Limiting participation to only parts of the process</td>
<td>Support meaningful, inclusive participation throughout the full life cycle of the project/process</td>
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Meaningful Inclusion in All Staff Roles
The Benefits of Hiring/Retaining staff with Lived Experiences include:

- Staff with lived experiences have perspective that deeply relates to the communities served, e.g., Veteran Culture

- Veterans experiencing homelessness may be more willing to engage with a peer, who has had shared experiences

- Improves program design, evaluation, and service delivery
Recruitment

Review recruitment strategy
- Expand locations/sites for posting
- Leverage partners to help get the word out
- Monitor the effectiveness of your strategies and adjust as needed

Review job posting
- Identify required versus preferred qualifications, e.g., bachelor’s degree versus experience
- Identify the core competencies needed to truly be effective in the role, e.g., understanding of the local homeless response system
- Highlight your agency commitment to hiring those with lived experiences
- If possible, share the compensation and benefit information
Recruitment Considerations

Recruitment continued

• Hiring Process
  ● Have a diverse hiring panel, if possible. Include Veterans as a part of the process
  ● Standardize questions and, if possible, share them ahead of time
  ● Create a scoring tool based on the core job competencies as identified during recruitment/job posting reviews
  ● When hired (and before start date),
    ○ Identify staff supports as buddies for onboarding - separate from supervisors
    ○ Create onboarding and training process that provides orientation to the job, position expectations, and supports
Retention Considerations

Create a work environment inclusive of staff with Lived Experiences

- Create mission and value statements about commitment to inclusion
- Hold staff accountable to a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Create and maintain culturally trauma informed spaces
- Partner with lived expertise and equity advisory groups to establish Employee Resource group
Consider staffing needs, skill level, and ongoing training and education needs

- Cultivate peer and mentor programs
- Encourage staff to engage in training and skill building opportunities - and make them accessible
- Enhance professional development resources
- Monitor for growth opportunities
- Consistently provide supervision support
- Regularly assess your compensation and benefits package against local competitors so as to remain competitive
- Use employee feedback channels to inform recruitment and retention process improvement, e.g., benefit expansion opportunities

Engage local community through peer support networks, CoC Listserv and other veteran specific groups (I.e. VPAN)
The Wisdom of Our Veterans: Dialogue with Lived Expertise
Panelists

• Sheila Sebron  
  Air Force Veteran, Co-Founder of the WA Lived Experience Coalition

• Chris Lopez  
  Marine Corp. Veteran, Co-Founder of the WA Lived Experience Coalition

• LaMont Green  
  Navy Veteran, Co-Founder of the WA Lived Experience Coalition; Technical Assistance Collaborative

• Nastacia’ Moore  
  Moderator, Technical Assistance Collaborative
Partnerships in Action
SSVF Grantees
LaTonya Murray, Director of Emergency Housing Services, FrontLine Service
Luke Drotar, SSVF Program Manager, FrontLine Service
Timothy Kelly, Veteran Stability Coordinator, FrontLine Service
VA Resources

- Peer Support Specialists' Unique Contribution to Veterans' Health
- Community Veterans Engagement Boards

HUD Resources

COVID-19 Homeless System Response Guidance:
- Lived Expertise
- Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise
- Guidance for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining People With Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness

Community Resources

- Peer Support Specialist - Job Description
- Veterans Peer Corps | WDVA