



NATIONAL VETERANS
CREATIVE ARTS
COMPETITION

2024 Competition Handbook

Presented by



VA

U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

 **AMERICAN
LEGION**
AUXILIARY

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National Veterans Creative Arts Competition Highlights

Local Competition Branding

When hosting your local competition be sure to explain to media outlets that you are hosting a local competition. This is different than hosting the Festival event.

Example: National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, St. Cloud VA Health Care System

Local Competitions

This program begins with VA medical facilities holding their own local creative arts competition. Local competitions across the country may look different with some facilities having many entries in their local competition while other VA facilities may only have a few entries moving on to the national level. Both are acceptable.

Each VA facility sets their own deadline dates and expectations for their local competitions. Be advised, Veterans may need to submit their own images, videos, and text documents to the local staff contact persons. There may not be an in-person art, writing, or performance show at the local level competition due to a limited number of entries.

CBOCs and Vet Centers

VA Staff at Community Based Outpatient Clinics and Vet Centers may host their own local competitions. Veterans must be eligible for VA health care and enrolled in the VA health care system **prior** to entering the competition.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should be made aware of leave approval procedures and rules in the event they win first place and are invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Category Changes within Each Division

Review each division's rules and categories carefully. Revisions have been made in each division.

VA Required Veteran Consent Forms for Participation

The VA required Veteran consent forms are no longer included in this handbook. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the filled-in forms ready for Veteran and VA staff signature in the Microsoft Teams channel - VA Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

VA Facilities Send Top Three Finalists in Each Category to National Level

The top three finalists in each category at each VA facility local competition will advance to the national level to compete in the National Veterans Creative Arts - National Competition. First place winners at the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

National Competition Deadline Date – October 1, 2024

VA Local Staff Contacts: All entries submitted to the national level of competition **must be received on or before October 1, 2024 via the Arts4Vets App**. Contact Arts4Vets@va.gov to receive access to the app.

Local Level Veteran Participation

VA Local Staff Contacts: When you have finished entering all entries from your local level into the Arts4Vets app, you will need to submit a Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet to Arts4Vets@va.gov. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel - VA Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

On the worksheet, indicate each Veteran who submitted entries into the creative arts competition through your VA facility. This Excel sheet should be completed and submitted regardless of whether you had a local competition. This information collected is used for national Veteran participation data collection.

Judging Process

It is recommended that staff meet with the Veterans to explain the judging process at the local and national level. As with other juried competitions the results are based on subjective reviews by a panel of judges. The scores are not shared publicly, and the judges' decisions are final. The judges do not send critiques or explanations due to the volume of work they review in a short amount of time.

National Competition Results

National competition results will be ready for distribution to the local staff contact persons in January 2024.

Funding for Travel

Funding support and arrangements for travel to and from the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival for Veterans invited to attend the NVCAF is the responsibility of the Veteran and/or local VA facility. Lodging, meals and ground transportation during the Festival week will be provided through national Festival funds. These expenses will be provided for up to **5 eligible Veterans** invited in any group entry.

National Rules – The Competition

1. **ELIGIBILITY:** Veterans must be eligible for VA health care and enrolled in the VA health care system **PRIOR** to entering the competition. Veterans with a dishonorably discharged status and/or humanitarian status may not participate in the competition.
2. Veterans must work with a VA staff person to submit their entries into the competition. The Veteran may work with the facility where they enrolled for care, are currently receiving care, or closest VA holding a local competition to their current residence.
3. Veterans are only permitted to enter through one VA facility competition each year. They may submit an entry in art, creative writing, dance, drama or music categories with a Veteran or group from another VA facility however the group entry may only represent one VA facility's competition each year.
4. VA staff must submit their local facility top three finalists in each category to the Arts4Vets App no later than October 1, 2024, for Veterans to be eligible to compete at the national level.
5. The entry forms in this handbook should be used to gather the necessary information for each entry. Staff should retain the entry forms and the necessary consent forms for reference and verification purposes as needed. Each division has entry forms that are specific for their division.
6. A 10-3203 form (Consent for Production and Use of Verbal or Written Statements, Photographs, Digital Images, and/or Video or Audio Recordings by VA) must be completed and signed by every Veteran entering the local and national level of competition. These forms should not be sent to the Arts4Vets app. VA staff contact persons should safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.
7. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
8. Veterans may submit entries in up to three different art categories and one group category in the art division. Veteran may submit entries in up to three creative writing categories and one group entry in the special recognition category of the creative writing division. Veteran may submit entries in up to three solo categories and three group categories in the dance, drama, and music divisions.
9. Veterans may not expand the number of their entries in any one division using a different name (for example: pen names, stage names, different artist names, etc.).
10. A single entry may not be submitted into two or more categories within the same division. It is acceptable however for an entry to be submitted into multiple divisions if the rules are followed for each division.

National Rules – The Competition (continued)

11. VA facilities may submit their top three finalists in each category to the national level of the competition. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.
12. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
13. Veterans may not enter the same art, creative writing, dance, drama and music entry again after it has won first-place nationally. Failure to comply with this rule will result in disqualification of the entry.
14. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into one of the Special Recognition categories.
15. Veterans in national first, second and third place groups of up to five in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music will each be presented a medal. Groups of six or more will be presented a medal if possible or will be provided an award certificate. Non-Veterans and Veterans serving as accompanists, or dance partners, or dramatic readers that enhance an entry will not receive medals or certificates.
16. VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.
17. The VA's Office of National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events is committed to providing the best possible care to Veterans. Information collected through participation in the competition helps the office better understand and serve Veteran needs throughout the competition and Festival planning processes. Only information provided by the Veteran is collected. Please take a moment to review the VA Privacy, policies and legal information webpage. <https://www.va.gov/privacy-policy/>
18. Results of the national competition will be sent via E-mail to VA staff contact persons in January. They will be posted to the www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov website in February.

National Rules – The Festival

1. Following the national judging, Veterans invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival will be notified by their VA staff contact person.
2. **Funding support and arrangements for travel to and from the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival for Veterans invited to attend is the responsibility of the Veteran and local VA facility.** Lodging, meals and ground transportation during the Festival will be provided through national Festival funds. These expenses will be provided for up to 5 Veterans in any group entry.
3. Veterans who are actively enrolled in the VA health care system and live abroad who win first place at the national level will be required to fund their own travel expenses to/from the Festival location.
4. Stage show performance costumes for winning acts invited to the Festival will be the responsibility of the Veterans. Veteran participants will be asked to either bring black pants, black shoes, black belt, and a white collared, long-sleeve dress shirt. Or they may choose to wear concert apparel from our Festival inventory: A concert dress or blouse/dress pants, and will be asked to bring black shoes. Other choral production number costumes such as vests, ties, etc., will be provided.
5. Veterans who are invited to the Festival must be prepared (either themselves or through their VA staff contact person) to send an E-mail including the lyrics for music and dance and words/narration for drama entries in order for this text to be placed in the show script. E-mails can be sent to Suzanne.Anderson4@va.gov.
6. **NO GLASS PROTECTIVE LAYER (on flat art) MAY BE USED WHEN SHIPPING NATIONAL FIRST PLACE ARTWORK TO THE FESTIVAL. PLEXIGLAS MUST BE USED INSTEAD.** Artwork placed under protective glass and shipped to the NVCAF host VA facility **will forfeit their placement in the national competition** due to the risk of potential injury to persons unpacking the piece and potential damage to the artwork.
7. Veterans who are invited to the Festival and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there is some downtime, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

National Chairpersons

ART DIVISION CHAIRPERSONS	Nadene Stillings, ATR-BC, LMHC National Art Chairperson VA Bedford Health Care System Bedford, MA Nadene.Stillings@va.gov	Sarah El Hage, CTRS National Art Chairperson VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System Aurora, CO Sarah.ElHage@va.gov
CREATIVE WRITING DIVISION CHAIRPERSON	Madge Scherer, MT-BC National Creative Writing Chairperson St. Cloud VA Health Care System Madge.Scherer@va.gov	
DANCE DIVISION CHAIRPERSON	Thomas Petterson, MM, MT-BC National Dance Chairperson Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System Thomas.Petterson@va.gov	
DRAMA DIVISION CHAIRPERSON	Dana Castanier, MT-BC National Drama Chairperson Battle Creek VA Medical Center Dana.Castanier@va.gov	
MUSIC DIVISION CHAIRPERSONS	Jillian Thompson, MT-BC National Music Chairperson Vocal Categories Durham VA Medical Center Jillian.Thompson3@va.gov	Erin Todd, MT-BC National Music Chairperson Instrumental, Band/Ensemble, & Special Recognition Categories Bay Pines VA Healthcare System Erin.Todd@va.gov

Therapeutic Arts Scholarship

Shirley Jefferies and Muriel Barbour Memorial

Shirley Jefferies, a recreation therapist at the Waco, Texas, VA Medical Center, and former chief of recreation therapy at the Knoxville, Iowa VA medical facility, initiated the performing arts competition, The National Music Competition for Veterans, in 1981 as part of the International Year of Disabled Persons.

Muriel Barbour, former chief of recreation therapy at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center in Richmond, Virginia, created the visual arts competition, VET ARTS, in 1981, as an observance of the International Year of Disabled Persons.

The Music Festival and VET ARTS merged and drama and dance divisions were added, to create the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in 1989. In 2005, the creative writing division was added to the Festival roster. Shirley Jefferies passed away in 1994. Muriel Barbour passed away in 2009. The Therapeutic Arts Scholarship is presented in their memory.

The Therapeutic Arts Scholarship is a unique opportunity for Veterans entering the Creative Arts Competition. VA staff persons may nominate **one** Veteran from their facility for consideration to attend the Festival based on a therapeutic objective. Selected recipients will receive an invitation to participate in the Festival with lodging and meals provided via national Festival funds. Scholarship recipients will be notified via their VA staff contact person.

Nomination Criteria:

- Only one Veteran may be nominated for a scholarship from each facility
- Veteran must be a first-place winner in the local level of competition in any of the competition divisions
- Veterans who have attended a National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in a prior year are not eligible to be nominated for a scholarship
- Consent form 10-3203 and 10-5345 must be signed and dated by the Veteran and staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran

Link to a form fillable VA 10-3203 form: [VA Form 10-3203 Fill.pdf](#)

Link to a form fillable VA 10-5345 form: [VA Form 10-5345 Fillable.pdf](#)

How do I nominate a Veteran from my VA?

VA staff must select the Veteran as their Therapeutic Arts Scholarship nominee during the entry submission process in the Arts4Vets App. VA staff must include the written statement/narrative as part of the entry submission.

Staff Contact Person: Submit a scanned copy of this page and/or additional write-up when submitting the Veteran entry into the competition via the Arts4 Vets App. The narrative may also be typed directly into the Arts4Vets App. Each facility may only nominate one Veteran per competition year.

VA Facility Representing:		
Facility Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Staff Contact:		Routing Number:
Phone:	E-mail (Required):	

[illegible]

VA Required Veteran Consent Forms for Participation

VA FORM 10-3203	VA FORM 10-5345
CONSENT FOR PRODUCTION AND USE OF VERBAL OR WRITTEN STATEMENTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, DIGITAL IMAGES, AND/OR VIDEO OR AUDIO RECORDINGS BY VA	REQUEST FOR AND AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE HEALTH INFORMATION
Required to be signed by each Veteran to participate in the local and national level creative arts competition and Festival event.	This form is only necessary to be completed for Veteran entries that require a write-up: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Military Combat Experience• Group Art• Special Recognition categories• Nomination for Therapeutic Arts Scholarship
VA facilities should KEEP THIS FORM at the Veteran's VA facility. This form should not be submitted to the Arts4Vets app for national competition judging.	VA facilities should KEEP THIS FORM at the Veteran's VA facility. This form should not be submitted to the Arts4Vets app for national competition judging.
Link to a form fillable VA 10-3203 form: VA Form 10-3203 Fill.pdf	Link to a form fillable VA 10-5345 form: VA Form 10-5345 Fillable.pdf

The VA required Veteran consent forms are no longer included in this handbook. VA staff may access the filled-in forms ready for Veteran and VA staff signature in the Microsoft Teams channel - VA Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Local Level Veteran Participation

VA Local Staff Contacts: When you have finished entering all entries from your local level into the Arts4Vets app, you will need to submit a Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet to Arts4Vets@va.gov.

VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

On the worksheet, indicate each Veteran who submitted entries into the creative arts competition through your VA facility. This Excel sheet should be completed and submitted regardless of whether you had a local competition. This information collected is used for national Veteran participation data collection.

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Art Division

Local Level Veteran Participation - VA Local Staff Contacts should keep track of all Veterans who enter through their facility and enter Veteran information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Submit Top Three Finalists in Each Category - Facilities may submit the top three finalists in each category. A formal competition is not required at the local level but is strongly encouraged. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.

National Judging and Results - The national judging will occur in October-December via the digital image judging process with results being announced in January. VA Local Staff Contacts at each facility will be notified of the competition results via E-mail and through Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts. All first-place winners from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Shipping Artwork - Following the national judging, most first-place pieces from each art division category should be shipped to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival host VA facility location. Entries that are fragile/delicate and dioramas should not be shipped and will instead be displayed in the Festival art exhibit as a poster image or on a banner display. Entries **MUST** be fully assembled when shipped.

***IMPORTANT – When shipping national first place artwork to the Festival it is required that NO GLASS be used.** The artwork can be left without a protect layer or if a protective layer is needed, **Plexiglas, (not glass) must be used.** This requirement is in place due to the risk of potential damage to the artwork and for the safety of those who will be unpacking the artwork.

First-Place National Winning Veterans Invited to the Festival - Veterans invited to the Festival and who accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Tips for Taking Better Digital Art Images

- **Two-dimensional pieces may submit two images** – One image as the total presentation and one image showing more detail.
- **Three-dimensional pieces may submit three images** – One image from the front, one image from the back or side and one in more detail.
- **The art piece should fill the photo** – Be as close as possible so the piece fills the viewfinder of the camera. **Do not include the title card, show exhibit card, art award ribbon, etc. in the photo.**
- **Include the framing and matting of pictures** – These items are part of the total presentation. Pedestals or bases that are part of the artwork should also be included in the digital image.
- **Frame the piece using a neutral background** – Colorful backgrounds can alter the color of your piece by reflecting color onto it.
- **Watch for shadows on the background** – Move the item being photographed away from the background to eliminate shadows.
- **Be alert for glare** – Try changing the direction and location of the lighting or soften the light by bouncing it off a wall or screen. You can also try removing the plexiglass to reduce glare.

***Note: NO GLASS PROTECTIVE LAYER (on flat art) MAY BE USED WHEN SHIPPING NATIONAL FIRST PLACE ARTWORK TO THE FESTIVAL. PLEXIGLAS MUST BE USED INSTEAD.** Artwork placed under protective glass and shipped to the NVCAF host VA facility **will forfeit their placement in the national competition** due to the risk of potential injury to persons unpacking the piece and potential damage to the artwork.

Art Division Rules

1. All artwork entered (except for the Military Combat Experience) must have been **completed/photographed after October 1, 2023**. Artwork submitted in a prior year in any form of completion may not be entered again.
2. Veterans need to communicate (as early as January 2024) with their local VA facility to find out their local competition deadline date.
3. No one Veteran will be allowed to enter more than three art categories and one group category in the art division. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.**
4. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
5. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
6. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that requires a write-up.
7. Complete the art entry form with detail about the mediums and techniques used. This information is crucial to the judging process and is shared with the judges.
8. All art entries must be created solely by the Veteran and/or Veterans submitting the art entry.
9. Entries that contain a combination of art and writing should be entered into the Mixed Arts category in the Drama division – see page 46, Category #13.
10. Reproductions of another artist's original two-dimensional artwork, photographs, or computer-generated art (including inkjet, Giclee and other types of reproduction methods) will not be accepted. The use of Giclee is only acceptable in the following categories: Printmaking, Black and White Photography, Color Photography and Digital Art.
11. All two-dimensional artwork must be exhibition ready (ready to hang for display).
12. If an entry contains a craft kit, it must go into a craft kit category. All materials needed to complete the project are supplied in the kit. Embellishments may be made to the assembled kit using non-kit items. Entries containing more than one kit will be disqualified (with the exception of the combined kit category).
13. GUNS, BLADES, KNIVES or other WEAPONS will **not** be accepted due to VA regulations banning these items from VA facilities.

14. Chess sets, dipped art, and puzzles (including puzzle kits) will not be accepted.
15. Entries that include personal collections such as spoons, medals, or coins (where the content of the entry is not created by the Veteran) will not be accepted.
16. Two electronic jpeg images may be submitted for each two-dimensional entry. Please include one image of the art entry in its entirety and one image of the art entry in more detail. **(Optimal image file size is 1 MB or greater but no larger than 10 MB.)**
17. Three electronic jpeg images for each three-dimensional entry will be accepted. Please include one image from the front of the art entry in its entirety, one image from the back or side of the art entry in its entirety, and one image of the art entry close up in more detail. **(Optimal image file size is 1 MB or greater but no larger than 10 MB.)**
18. Sets in the fine arts and applied arts may contain **no more than three pieces**. The pieces must relate to one another in an obvious way for the judges to classify as a set. **No sets** are allowed in the kit categories, unless a single kit contains a set such as a set of suncatcher Christmas ornaments in which case, no more than 3 pieces may be submitted for judging.

Further clarification of sets:

- Examples of two-dimensional sets are diptychs, triptychs, or series—no more than three separate pieces of artwork that are clearly intended to be displayed together as ONE PIECE with equal size and framing. Imagery/content must relate to each other in clear and obvious way.
 - Three-dimensional sets must relate to each other in an obvious way and may contain no more than three pieces for judging purposes.
19. **Artwork Size Restrictions** - Each national art entry must be able to fit into **one box**. The box can be up to 150 lbs., up to 165 inches in length and girth combined. Length cannot exceed 108 inches. To measure packages, use the following formula: **length + 2x width + 2x height**.
Step 1. Determining Length - Measure the longest side of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. This is your length.
Step 2. Determining Girth (2x Width + 2x Height). Measure the width of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. Multiply this number by 2. Measure the height of the package, rounding to the nearest inch. Multiply this number by 2. Add these two numbers together. This is your girth.
Step 3. Add the length and the girth together. This is your package measurement.

***Entries that exceed the weight and measurements indicated above will be disqualified.**

20. Veterans who are invited to the Festival and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

NEW – Art Division Category List

There are changes to categories in the Art Division. Please read the definitions carefully. There are no longer three subdivisions (Fine Art, Applied Art, and Kits). Like/similar categories have been grouped together.

GROUP A Categories 1-17		GROUP B Categories 18-34		GROUP C Categories 35-50	
Cat. #	Category Name	Cat. #	Category Name	Cat. #	Category Name
1	Acrylic Painting	18	Carving	35	Leather Carving/Tooling/Stamping
2	Oil Painting	19	Woodworking	36	Leather Kit
3	Watercolor	20	Wood Building Kit	37	Metalwork
4	Monochromatic Drawing	21	Collage	38	Glasswork
5	Colored Drawing	22	Assemblage	39	Scroll Saw/Fretwork
6	Pastels	23	Mosaic	40	Mixed Media
7	Sculpture	24	Mosaic Kit	41	Model Building (Plastic, Metal, Wood) Kit
8	Pottery	25	Crocheting/Knitting/Knotting	42	Diorama
9	Slip-Cast Ceramics	26	Original Design in Needlework	43	Craft Coloring Kit
10	Stained or Painted Figurines	27	Needlework Pattern	44	Color by Number Kit
11	Figurine Painting Kit	28	Needlework Kit	45	Suncatcher or Sand Art Kit
12	Pyrography	29	Original Design in Fiber Arts	46	Combined Kit
13	Transfer/Engraving Art Kit	30	Fiber Arts Pattern	Special Recognition Categories	
14	Printmaking	31	Fiber Arts Kit	47	Physical Health Recovery
15	Black & White Photography	32	Weaving Kit	48	Mental Health Recovery
16	Color Photography	33	Beadwork	49	Combat Experience
17	Digital Art	34	Jewelry (not beads)	50	Group Art

Group A – Categories 1-17

1. **Acrylic Painting** - The creation of original work by applying acrylic paint to a surface. The surface is not limited to canvas; it can be on wood, plaster, leather, metal, glass, etc.
2. **Oil Painting** - The creation of original work by applying oil paint, oil sticks, or oil pastels to a surface. The surface is not limited to canvas; it can be on wood, plaster, leather, metal, etc. Encaustic painting should be entered into this category.
3. **Watercolor** - The creation of work using watercolor paint. The surface is not limited to canvas; it can be on wood, plaster, leather, metal, etc.
4. **Monochromatic Drawing** - A monochromatic drawing consists of lines that use a single color and shades of that color that may be done using pencil, ink, charcoal, etc. Any use of additional color should be entered into colored drawing.
5. **Colored Drawing** - A colored drawing consists of lines of two or more colors and may be done using colored pencils, markers, etc.
6. **Pastels** - An art medium in the form of a stick, consisting of pure powder pigment and a binder. A pastel is usually a painting rather than drawing because the color is applied in masses rather than lines. Note: Oil pastels should be entered into the Oil Painting category.
7. **Sculpture** - Art created by shaping, combining, modeling, or casting materials such as plastic, clay, textiles, wax, or polymers into a work of art. They may be free standing or relief. Note: Slip-cast clay should be entered into the slip-cast category. Carved sculptures should be entered into the Carving category, metal sculptures should be entered into the Metalwork category, and glass sculptures should be entered in the Glasswork category.
8. **Pottery** - A functional piece of fired ceramic ware (bowl, vase, pot, etc.) The form must be wheel-thrown or hand-built, not slip cast in a mold. Poured ceramics belong in Slip-Cast ceramics categories. Sculptural clay pieces should be entered into the Sculpture category. Porcelain is included in this category.
9. **Slip-Cast Ceramics** - Clay pieces formed by pouring slip in a mold, fired, glazed, painted and/or stained. Note: Entries that contain premade bisque pieces that are painted and/or stained, as well as glazed, are to be entered into the painted ceramic category.
10. **Stained or Painted Figurines** (formerly known as Stained or Painted Ceramics) - Pre-made 3 dimensional figurines (ceramic, plaster, plastic, metal, or wood) stained or painted by the Veteran that did not come with diagrams or instructions. Judging is based solely on application of stain or paint.

- 11. Figurine Painting Kit** - Pre-made 3 dimensional figurines (ceramic, plaster, plastic, metal, or wood) stained or painted by the Veteran by following a diagram and/or instructions included in the kit.
- 12. Pyrography** - An original design burned into a surface by using wood burning tools. This process is typically done on wood but can also be done on leather and other surfaces. Reference images must be original to the Veteran. Any pre-made designs (including photo reference not original to the Veteran) must be entered in Transfer/Engraving Kit. Laser engravings are not accepted.
- 13. Transfer/Engraving Art Kit** - Copper tooling kits, foil scratch art kits and wood burning kits are included in this category which involves incising images, designs, or patterns onto a surface by rubbing, scratching, burnishing, cutting, or burning. Laser engravings are not accepted.
- 14. Printmaking** - Printmaking is the process in which an impression is made by any method involving transfer from one surface to another. It consists of an original print or proof from a master plate created by the Veteran through such processes as aquatint, drypoint, lithography, etching, woodcut, engraving, etching, Intaglio, monoprint, screen print, woodcut. Computer graphics must be entered into Digital Art category.
- 15. Black & White Photography** - A monochromatic photograph using black and white and varying shades of grey or sepia tones. Photographs can be printed on any surface but must be mounted and/or framed and ready to hang for display. This category includes both film and digital forms of photography. Sepia and other tonal prints such as cyanotypes (blueprints) should be submitted into this category. Photographs can be edited using apps.
- 16. Color Photography** - A color photograph. Photographs can be printed on any surface but must be mounted and/or framed and ready to hang for display. This category includes both film and digital forms of photography. Photographs can be edited using apps.
- 17. Digital Art** - 2D Art that was completely created using digital technology. The work is created entirely through software or applications. All original entries must be printed, mounted, and framed to qualify for this competition.

It is required that in addition to listing the software programs or applications used, techniques must also be detailed in the “mediums/techniques used” section of the entry form.

Note: 3D printed artwork will not be accepted. Photographs, animation, and videos will be disqualified. Digitally enhanced/edited photography should be entered into either the Black and White Photography or the Color Photography categories.

Group B – Categories 18-34

- 18. Carving** - Decorative art achieved by carving away unwanted materials from an original piece of material. It may be relief or in the round. Material used includes stone, wood, ivory, and other hard substances. Carved pieces that are embellished with paint or other materials will be judged on the quality of the carving only. Enter pieces in which embellishment is 50% or more of the design into the Mixed Media Category.
- 19. Woodworking** - This refers to pieces of constructed of wood that have a functional/useful purpose, such as a jewelry box, a clock, etc. Wood lathe work or wood turning is included in this category. Pieces that begin as pre-made "blanks" (i.e. pens, birds) should be entered into the kit category.
- 20. Wood Building Kit** - A wood building kit such as pens, birdhouses, carousels, cup racks, spice shelves, etc.
- 21. Collage** - A 2D work of art that may include newspaper clippings, ribbons, bits of colored or hand-made papers, portions of other artwork, photographs, etc., glued to a surface. Scrapbooks are not allowed.
- 22. Assemblage** - A 3D work of art made from combinations of found or purchased objects. Personal collections alone (for example: coin collections, medal collections, etc.) will not be accepted. 3D scenes should be entered into Diorama Category
- 23. Mosaic** - A work of art produced by arranging together small pieces of hard materials such as stone, tile, glass, etc. This category also includes quilling.
- 24. Mosaic Kit** - A work of art produced by arranging together small pieces of hard materials such as stone, tile, glass, etc., by following a diagram and/or instructions included in the kit. Woodscapes, diamond painting, and pixel art would be included in this category.
- 25. Crocheting/Knitting/Knotting** - The interlocking of fibers using a variety of techniques including, tatting, fly tying, macrame, etc., to create 2D or 3D pieces.
- 26. Original Design in Needlework** - **Original artwork** created solely by the Veteran, **NOT using a sourced pattern or kit materials provided by a manufacturer**, created entirely by the Veteran using needle and thread. This includes stitchery, needlepoint, quilting, sewing a garment, hand-sewn soft sculpture, embroidery, cross stitch, beaded embroidery, crewelwork, etc.
- 27. Needlework Pattern** - Artwork made by **following a sourced pattern or instructions while incorporating original design choices**, created entirely by the Veteran using needle and thread. This includes stitchery, needlepoint, quilting, sewing a garment, hand-sewn soft sculpture, embroidery, cross stitch, beaded embroidery, crewelwork, etc.

- 28. Needlework Kit** - Artwork made by **following a sourced pattern with materials included in a kit or outlined in the instructions**, created entirely by the Veteran using needle and thread. This includes stitchery, needlepoint, quilting, sewing a garment, hand-sewn soft sculpture, embroidery, cross stitch, beaded embroidery, crewelwork, etc.
- 29. Original Design in Fiber Arts** - **Original artwork** created solely by the Veteran, **NOT using a sourced pattern or materials** provided by a manufacturer, utilizing a substance that can be separated into threadlike parts to create a design. This includes felting, latch hook, rug punching, string art, basketry, or weaving.
- 30. Fiber Arts Pattern** - Artwork made by **following a sourced pattern or instructions while incorporating original design choices**, utilizing a substance that can be separated into threadlike parts to create a design. This includes felting, latch hook, rug punching, string art, basketry, or weaving.
- 31. Fiber Arts Kit** - Artwork made by **following a sourced pattern with materials included in a kit or outlined in the instructions**, utilizing a substance that can be separated into threadlike parts to create a design. This includes felting, latch hook, rug punching, string art, basketry, or weaving.
- 32. Weaving Kit** - A kit that uses string, wood, fiber, etc. to create a design. This category includes string art kits, basket weaving kits, dream catcher kits and bead weaving kits.
- 33. Beadwork** - Beads of any kind are used to create a design. Examples would include **jewelry that incorporates beads** and other items made on a beading loom, hand-woven, etc. Beaded embroidery should be entered into one of the Needlework Categories
- 34. Jewelry (not beads)** - Jewelry pieces made through casting, channeling, lost-wax, wire wrapping, etc. **Jewelry incorporating beads should be entered in the Beadwork category.**

Group C – Categories 35-50

- 35. Leather Carving/Tooling/Stamping** - Involves the use of shaped implements (stamps) or other leather carving tools, examples include Swivel knife, veiner, beveler, pear shader, etc. Pre-cut leather pieces may be used. Kits are not accepted in this category.
- 36. Leather Kit** - A kit that comes pre-cut, pre-punched, pre-embossed and ready to finish, stain and/or lace. Kits in which the Veteran adds **Carving/Tooling/Stamping will be judged in the Leather Carving/Tooling/Stamping category.**
- 37. Metalwork** - The primary material used is metal. Tooling or punching a design or transfer, or metal assembled into a three-dimensional piece for decorative purposes are included in this category. Lathe work using metal is included in this category. Copper tooling should be entered into Transfer/Engraving Art Kit category.
- 38. Glasswork** - Glass is used as the primary medium. Examples would include stained glass, hand-blown glass, fused glass and glass etching and enameling. Commercially shaped glass items that have been painted would be in one of the Fine Arts Painting categories.
- 39. Scroll Saw/Fretwork** - Decorative open patterns cut out of wood or metal using a scroll saw and/or files. Wood intarsia and marquetry are now included in this category. Laser cutting is not accepted here.
- 40. Mixed Media** - The use of two or more **distinct categories** in the creation of a single piece of art, however kits are not allowed in this category. Entries in this category must include a description detailing categories and mediums/techniques used. Pieces must be made up of equal parts of all categories used. Categories in the same technique family cannot be combined.
- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Acceptable Entry Examples: | Acrylic Painting and Monochromatic Drawing
Glasswork and Woodworking |
| Not Acceptable Entry Examples: | Acrylic Painting and Oil Painting
Pyrography and Carving |
- 41. Model Building (Plastic, Metal, Wood) Kit** - Snap together, glue together, or assembled plastic, metal, and/or wood model kits. Models depicting three-dimensional representation of a display or scene should be entered into the Diorama Category.
- 42. Diorama** - A model representing a three-dimensional scene. National winning entry will not be shipped to the Festival. Winning entry will be displayed via a poster board.
- 43. Craft Coloring Kit** - A pre-printed design on fabric, paper, wood, canvas, rugs, etc. that the Veteran fills in with colors of their choice using colored pencils, markers, paint, etc.

- 44. Color by Number Kit** - Involves applying paints, colored pencils, markers, etc., to the outlined numbered areas.
- 45. Suncatcher or Sand Art Kit** - Suncatchers involve the application of transparent glass stains on a pre-formed and outlined plastic shape. Sand art involves colored sand applied to pre-shaped adhesive areas.
- 46. Combined Kit** - The integration of two or more **distinctly different** kits to create a **single** work of art. Multiple model car kits combined or together to create a new model car is not an acceptable entry into this category.

Categories continued on next page

Art Division Special Recognition Categories

The intent of these categories is to reinforce the concept of the arts as therapy, where an individual uses artistic expression to facilitate successful treatment outcomes. Entries and their accompanying written statement/narrative should focus on how the arts are used by the individual(s) to rise above limitations. **Judging for the categories below equally take into consideration the written narrative as well as the skill involved in the artwork.**

Entries in all four of the categories below **MUST** also include:

- **A Word document containing a typed statement/narrative** (50 to 250 words) composed by the Veteran and/or their VA staff contact person explaining how art relates to the Veteran(s)' experience. **Entries submitted without a write-up will not be judged.**
- Consent forms 10-3203 **and** 10-5345 (links referenced on Page 10) must be signed and dated by the Veteran. The staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran should retain and safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.

47. Physical Health Recovery - Entries that recognize individuals who exhibit creative expression through the visual arts while possessing significant physical challenges. Entries must meet one of this competition's Art Division category definitions.

48. Mental Health Recovery - Entries that recognize individuals who exhibit creative expression through the visual arts while possessing significant emotional or mental health challenges. Entries must meet one of this competition's Art Division category definitions.

49. Combat Experience - The Veteran must have experienced combat duty during World War II, Korean War, Vietnam, Gulf War, Grenada, Panama, Kosovo, Somalia and other recognized combats or current combat operations. The artwork and narrative must relate to the Veteran's personal experience in that war or conflict but does not need to be a graphic representation of that combat experience.

Unlike the other art categories, there are NO restrictions as to when the Combat Experience artwork was created however entries submitted previously into this category are not eligible to compete again. Entries must meet one of this competition's Art Division category definitions however, kits are not accepted.

50. Group Art - A single art entry created by a group of Veterans. Entries must meet one of this competition's Art Division category definitions.

Narrative should explain the creative process, goals of the group, and other helpful information. Entries submitted without a write-up will not be judged. Judging for this category equally takes into consideration the typed narrative as well as the skill involved in the artwork.

Group size is not restricted however, only up to 5 eligible Veterans from the winning entry will be funded by the Festival. Veterans from multiple VA medical facilities can work together but the entry must be submitted by only one VA local staff contact person. All size and weight restrictions must be followed.

Sample Art Judging Criteria

- **Creativity/Originality** – Exhibits creativity and expression in the design.
- **Skill** – Use of materials and artistry.
- **Total Presentation** – Consider the elements of art: line, space, color, form, media, texture, composition, balance, and unity. Also consider title, mounting, and framing.

Point suggestion: 1 = poor/weak, 2 = moderate, 3 = good, 4 = strong, 5 = excellent

Sample Art Judging Score Sheet

Category Number and Name:
Title of Piece:

CRITERIA	POINTS				
Creativity/Originality	1	2	3	4	5
Skill	1	2	3	4	5
Total Presentation	1	2	3	4	5

TOTAL SCORE: _____

*Note: References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the entry or Veteran should not be communicated to the judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that required a write-up.

How to Submit Entries to the National Competition

Entries may be submitted **only by VA Local Staff Contacts** to the national level of the competition using the Arts4Vets App.

Non-VA Staff from other government Veteran medical facilities will not have upload access to the Arts4Vets App and may continue submit entries in other ways. Please reach out to the National Director or division chairpersons to coordinate.

Veterans will not be able to submit their own entries through to the national level of competition or directly into the Arts4Vets App. They must work with the VA facility where they are enrolled and meet the local competition deadline dates.

File Naming Convention: There is no required file naming convention. Files uploaded to the Arts4Vets App will automatically be renamed to coordinate with the entry data.

Art Division Entry Form (Categories 1-49)

Veteran Name:		Email:	
Gender:		Phone #:	

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Sub-Division:	Group A (Cat. 1-17)	Group B (Cat. 18-34)	Group C (Cat. 35-49)
Category # and Name:			
Title of Artwork:			
Size of artwork in inches:	Length:	Width:	Height:
Select One:	<input type="checkbox"/> Artwork is an original design <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork was created using a pre-printed pattern or kit pieces		

Mediums and Techniques Used – Requirement for ALL ENTRIES

Reminders: **Digital Art entries** – Software used must be indicated in this section

Kit entries – Be sure to describe enhancements/embellishments used

Combat Experience entries – Indicate the various art types/media used to create the piece

***Important:** *Do not include medical diagnosis information in this section. It will not be shared with the judges.*

Do not include additional attachments unrelated to mediums/techniques in this section. They will not be shared with the judges.

Mediums and Techniques Used - Information required for ALL ENTRIES submitted into the competition in all categories.

Mixed Media Entries – List the two or more distinct categories used in the creation of the piece.

Example: Glasswork and Woodworking (Kits are not allowed in this category.)

1.	2.	3.
----	----	----

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: *I confirm this artwork was completed entirely by me after October 1, 2023. I have read all the rules for the division in which I am entering and confirm that if my artwork is chosen as the national first-place winning entry, it will be exhibition ready when it is shipped to the Festival host site. I have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).*

Veteran Signature:

VA Staff Checklist:

- Meets the competition eligibility criteria
- Is approved to enter the NVCA Competition as a representative of this VA facility
- Has signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

Art Division - Group Art Entry Form (Category 50)

Veteran First and Last Name, Gender	Veteran Phone Number and Email

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Veteran Group Name:	
Number of Veterans in Group:	

Title of Artwork:			
Size of artwork in inches:	Length:	Width:	Height:
Select One: <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork is an original design <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork was created using a pre-printed pattern or kit pieces			

Mediums and Techniques Used – Requirement for ALL ENTRIES

***Important:** Do not include medical diagnosis information in this section. It will not be shared with the judges.

Do not include additional attachments unrelated to mediums/techniques in this section.

A separate write-up is required for all entries in this category. (See page 23, Category 50 definition)

Mediums and Techniques Used - Information required for ALL ENTRIES submitted into the competition in all categories.

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: We confirm this artwork was completed entirely by us after October 1, 2023. We have read all the rules for the division in which we are entering and confirm that if our artwork is chosen as the national first-place winning entry, it will be exhibition ready when it is shipped to the Festival host site. We have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).

Veteran Signatures:

VA Staff Checklist:

- Meet the competition eligibility criteria
- Are approved to enter the NVCA Competition as representatives of this VA facility
- Have signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

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Creative Writing Division

Local Level Veteran Participation - VA Local Staff Contacts should keep track of all Veterans who enter through their facility and enter Veteran information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Drama Entry vs. Creative Writing Entry - Veterans who wish to have their original work judged by **performance criteria** (stage presence, expressiveness, and interpretation) should submit the entry into the **DRAMA** division in one of the categories below that best fits the entry. Veterans who wish to have their **original work** judged by criteria based upon the **merit of the composition** (creative content, message clarity, use of language, and originality of topic or idea) should submit the entry into the **CREATIVE WRITING** division.

Submit Top Three Finalists in Each Category - Facilities may submit the top three finalists in each category. A formal competition is not required at the local level but is strongly encouraged. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.

National Judging and Results - The national judging will occur in October-December via the Word document judging process with results being announced in January. VA Local Staff Contacts at each facility will be notified of the competition results via E-mail and through Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts. All first-place winners from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

Creative Writing Booklet - First-place winning writing entries at the national level of the competition will be printed one-time in a 2025 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Creative Writing Booklet AND an excerpt of the piece will be printed one-time onto a banner for use during the Festival Writing Exhibition. This banner, excluding the display stand, will become the property of the Veteran post-event.

First-Place National Winning Veterans Invited to the Festival - Veterans invited to the Festival and who accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Creative Writing Division Rules

1. Entries in the creative writing division must have been completed after October 1, 2023.
2. Veterans need to communicate (as early as January 2024) with their local VA facility to find out their local competition deadline date.
3. Veterans may submit an entry (singular) in up to three creative writing categories and one group entry in the special recognition category.
4. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
5. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
6. Prior to submitting entries in the competition, eligible Veterans who are also VA employees should discuss leave options/restrictions with their supervisor in the event they might be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.
7. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that requires a write-up.
8. All entries submitted into the Creative Writing Division must be original compositions written solely by the eligible Veteran who is submitting the entry.
9. The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is not liable for any copyright infringement on the part of the entrant and will not become involved in copyright disputes.
10. Entries **must be** submitted as Microsoft Word documents in 12-point font. Do not send PDF attachments. **Entries submitted as file types other than Word documents will be disqualified.**
11. Creative Writing entries must be submitted as text only. Do not send documents with pictures or graphics. Only the text of the entry will be judged.
12. Entries that contain a combination of writing and art should be entered into the Mixed Arts category in the Drama division – see page 46, Category #13.
13. Judges reserve the right to move an entry to the appropriate category or disqualify the entry if rules are not followed.
14. Collections of poems, essays, stories, etc. submitted as one entry will not be allowed.
15. Veterans who are invited to the Festival and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Creative Writing Categories

Important Reminder: Entries **must be** submitted as **Microsoft Word** documents in **12-point font**. Do not send PDF attachments. **Entries submitted as file types other than Word documents will be disqualified.**

1. **Rhyming Poetry-Military Experience** – A verse composition related to military experience, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
2. **Rhyming Poetry-Inspirational** – An inspirational verse composition, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
3. **Rhyming Poetry-General Topic** – A general topic verse composition, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
4. **Non-Rhyming Poetry-Military Experience** – A composition related to military experience, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
5. **Non-Rhyming Poetry-Inspirational** – An inspirational composition, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
6. **Non-Rhyming Poetry-General Topic** – A general topic composition, **no longer than 48 lines** in length.
7. **Personal Essay-Military Experience** – A non-fiction essay, **no longer than 850 words**, written in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry) by one eligible Veteran that is a discussion of military experience from the author's personal point of view.
8. **Personal Essay-Inspirational** – A non-fiction essay, **no longer than 850 words**, written in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry) by one eligible Veteran that is an inspirational discussion from the author's personal point of view.
9. **Personal Essay-General Topic** – A non-fiction essay, **no longer than 850 words**, written in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry) by one eligible Veteran that is a general topic discussion from the author's personal point of view.
10. **Humor** – All types of works which employ humor as the primary component should be submitted in this category. **Poetry entries should be no longer than 48 lines and prose entries must not exceed 850 words.**
11. **Short, Short Story** – A short story, **no longer than 1,000 words**. The story must have a beginning, middle, and an end.

12. Short Script – Part of a script for one or more characters. Scripts should document the movement, scene descriptions, acting style instructions, and dialogue of the characters and should be written in a screenplay format and resemble the blueprint for a play, television show, or film. Short Script entries written in prose format (written language that follows the natural flow of speech, with words and phrases that build full sentences and paragraphs) will not be accepted. Entries in this category **must not exceed 850 words**.

13. Special Recognition - Individual or group. Entries by Veterans who exhibit creative expression through use of creative writing while possessing significant physical or psychological limitations. The intent of this category is to reinforce the concept of the arts as therapy, where individuals use artistic expression to facilitate successful treatment outcomes. **Poetry entries should be no longer than 48 lines and prose entries must not exceed 1,000 words.**

Entries in this category **MUST** also include:

- **A Word document containing a typed statement/narrative** (50 to 250 words) composed by a VA staff person or the Veteran explaining why the Veteran is deserving of special recognition. **Entries submitted without a write-up will not be judged.**
- Consent form 10-3203 and 10-5345 (included in this handbook) must be signed and dated by the Veteran. The staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran should safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.

Sample Creative Writing Judging Criteria

Sample Creative Writing Judging Score Sheet

Category Number:	Category Name:
Title of Entry:	

CRITERIA	POINTS									
Creative Content	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Message Clarity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Use of Language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Originality of Topic or Idea	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Strength of Composition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

How to Submit Entries to the National Competition

Entries may be submitted **only by VA Local Staff Contacts** to the national level of the competition using the Arts4Vets App.

Non-VA Staff from other government Veteran medical facilities will not have upload access to the Arts4Vets App and may continue submit entries in other ways. Please reach out to the National Director or division chairpersons to coordinate.

Veterans will not be able to submit their own entries through to the national level of competition or directly into the Arts4Vets App. They must work with the VA facility where they are enrolled and meet the local competition deadline dates.

File Naming Convention: There is no required file naming convention. Files uploaded to the Arts4Vets App will automatically be renamed to coordinate with the entry data.

Creative Writing Division Entry Form

Individual Entry – For an entry submitted by one Veteran

Veteran Name:		Email:	
Gender:		Phone #:	

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Entry – For an entry submitted by a group of Veterans into the Special Recognition category

Veteran Name and Gender

Veteran Phone Number and Email

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Name:	
Number of Veterans in Group:	

Category Number and Name:		
Title of Piece:		
Line count (for poetry entries only):		
Word count (for prose entries only):		
Veteran(s) give(s) permission for the entry to be included in a booklet if the entry wins first place at the national level of the competition.	Veteran Initials:	

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: *I/we confirm this piece was completed after October 1, 2023. I/we have read all the rules for the division in which I/we am/are entering. If this entry wins first place at the national level of the competition, I/we give permission for this writing piece to be printed in a compilation booklet and distributed at the at the 2025 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. I/we have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).*

Veteran(s) Signature(s):

VA Staff Checklist

- Meets the competition eligibility criteria
- Is approved to enter the NVCA Competition as a representative of this VA facility
- Has signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

Dance Division

Local Level Veteran Participation - VA Local Staff Contacts should keep track of all Veterans who enter through their facility and enter Veteran information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Submit Top Three Finalists in Each Category - Facilities may submit the top three finalists in each category. A formal competition is not required at the local level but is strongly encouraged. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.

National Judging and Results - The national judging will occur in October-December via the digital image judging process with results being announced in January. VA Local Staff Contacts at each facility will be notified of the competition results via E-mail and through Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts. All first-place winners from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend and participate as chorus members in the live stage show performance at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

***Note:** Not all first-place winners are selected to perform their solo/group entry in the show. Due to time constraints, the Festival show directors will choose approximately 25 dance, drama, and music first-place entries to perform in the show. The remaining first-place attendees will be invited to participate in the Festival chorus.

First-Place National Winning Veterans Invited to the Festival - Veterans invited to the Festival and who accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings

Please take a few extra minutes preparing a video correctly to give your Veteran the best chance possible during the judging process and to save hours of time with the judging process for our judges who donate their time.

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**
- **Focus on the performer.** Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.
- When video recording dance acts, it is necessary to include the whole-body in the entire recording, including the feet.
- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced. Be aware of the accompaniment being too loud. Oftentimes we see/hear the speaker/player is next to the video camera and it is difficult to see/hear the performer.
- Consider holding your local competition/show and then video recording ONLY the acts that will be sent forward for national judging.
- **Dance, drama, and music entries** will be accepted digitally (MP4, WMV, MOV, Unlisted Youtube link) through the Arts4Vets App.

Dance Division Rules

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must be recorded after October 1, 2023.
2. Veterans need to communicate (as early as January 2024) with their local VA facility to find out their local competition deadline date.
3. Veterans may submit entries in up to three solo categories and three group categories in the dance, drama and music divisions, however they may only submit/be a part of one entry per category. Each entry must be different. The same entry cannot be submitted into two categories within a division.
4. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
5. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
6. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that requires a write-up.
7. Suggested length of performance - no longer than three minutes.
8. Dance entries will be judged based on the style of dance and steps incorporated in the performance as opposed to the style/genre of music selected.
9. Entries that contain a combination of the creative arts (to include visual arts, design, film, literature, dance, dramatic and musical performance) should be entered into the Mixed Arts category in the Drama division – see page 46, Category #13.
10. Judges reserve the right to move an entry to the appropriate category or disqualify the entry if rules are not followed.
11. Whole-body (head to toe) video recording for dance entries is necessary. Video recording can include close-ups of the body and/or feet but whole-body view should be included as well.
12. It is considered a solo when one Veteran dances with a non-Veteran partner.
13. **Entries MAY NOT be expanded with non-eligible Veterans or any other individual unless it is a partner dance where the partner is necessary to perform the dance movements.** Although the National Veterans Creative Arts program recognizes the therapeutic value of participation of staff,

volunteers, and ineligible Veterans in groups, it is essential in keeping with the fairness of the competition that **only eligible Veterans** are competing against each other.

14. **Audio files** of the dance division entries are **NOT required to be sent to the dance chairperson**. However, should the entry place first in the national competition and the Veteran(s) be invited to perform their entry in the Festival stage show, the audio file must be sent to the NVCAF show planning team.
15. Veterans who are invited to the Festival and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Dance Categories

All categories include solo and group performances and are inclusive for Veterans who are ambulatory or use assistive devices for movement (i.e. wheelchair, crutches, walkers, etc.). Veterans may only submit one entry per category.

1. **Ballroom** - Pattern of movement in a choreographed routine. Structured ballroom dances such as the waltz, jitterbug/swing, hustle, disco, polka, lindy hop, fox-trot, quick step. Veteran(s) should maintain physical contact with partner for greater part of dance.
2. **Latin Ballroom** - Latin style structured ballroom dances such as samba, cha-cha, salsa, Meringue, Machida, rumba, tango, etc. Veteran(s) should maintain physical contact with partner for greater part of dance.
3. **Country/Western/Folk/Ethnic/Cultural** - Country/western dances such as: Two-step, cowboy or traveling cha-cha, polka, schottische, promenade dances, square dance. Choreographed wheelchair dances associated with various cultures or countries. Examples may include: Clogging, Jewish Hora, Jig, May Pole, Mexican Hat, etc.
4. **Modern/Contemporary** –Expressive dance that combines elements of several dance genres. Contemporary dance stresses versatility and improvisation.
5. **Tap, Jazz or Ballet** - Traditional tap, jazz, or ballet patterns of movement choreographed to music in a routine.
6. **Line Dance** - Set pattern of movements where the individuals end up facing 2 or 4 walls. Suggest a minimum number of 3 to form the line. **All group members must be Veterans unless the line dance requires a partner where the partner is necessary to perform the dance.**
7. **Interpretive Movement** - The movements tell a story or interpret feelings through hand movements or gestures. Wheelchair does not need to move. Examples may include sign language or other hand movement and dance meditation. Stretching to music does not qualify entry into this category.
8. **Freestyle/Hip-Hop** - Non-choreographed/non-patterned movements that can involve any style of dance. Movements are spontaneous/improvisational. Entries into this category may contain many diverse steps and movements allowing dancers to use freedom of expression to enhance their dance style. Example: Freestyle, hip-hop, popping, breaking, etc.
9. **Novelty** - A routine consisting of original, imaginative, or innovative dance movements that incorporate a theme concept or characterization throughout the entire performance.

10. Special Recognition - Entries that recognize individuals who exhibit creative expression through use of dance while possessing significant physical or psychological limitations. The intent of this category is to reinforce the concept of the arts as therapy, where an individual uses artistic expression to facilitate successful treatment outcomes.

Entries in this category **MUST** also include:

- **A written statement/narrative** (50 to 250 words) by a VA staff person or the Veteran of why the Veteran is deserving of special recognition.
- Consent form 10-3203 and 10-5345 (included in this handbook) must be signed and dated by the Veteran. The staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran should safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.

Sample Dance Judging Criteria

- **Technical Skills** - body placement, quality of movements
- **Musicality** - rhythm, timing/phrasing, movement related to music
- **Stage Presence** - confidence, focus, artistic expression, mastery of choreography

Sample Dance Judging Score Sheet

Category Number:	Category Name:
Title of Entry:	

CRITERIA	POINTS									
Technical Skills	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Musicality	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Stage Presence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

How to Submit Entries to the National Competition

Entries may be submitted **only by VA Local Staff Contacts** to the national level of the competition using the Arts4Vets App.

Non-VA Staff from other government Veteran medical facilities will not have upload access to the Arts4Vets App and may continue submit entries in other ways. Please reach out to the National Director or division chairpersons to coordinate.

Veterans will not be able to submit their own entries through to the national level of competition or directly into the Arts4Vets App. They must work with the VA facility where they are enrolled and meet the local competition deadline dates.

File Naming Convention: There is no required file naming convention. Files uploaded to the Arts4Vets App will automatically be renamed to coordinate with the entry data.

Dance Division Entry Form

Solo Entry

Veteran Name:		Email:	
Gender:		Phone #:	

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Entry

Veteran Name and Gender

Veteran Phone Number and Email

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Name:	
Number of Veterans in Group:	

Category Number and Name:			
Title of Entry:			
Title of Music Selection <i>(if different from Title of Entry):</i>			
Non-Veteran dance partner name(s):			
Was the entry choreographed by the Veteran(s)?	YES or NO		

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: *I/we have read all the rules for the division in which I/we am/are entering. If my/our entry places first at the national level, I/we understand that I/we will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. It is required that I/we attend and participate in rehearsals for the entire event. I/we have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).*

Veteran(s) Signature(s):

VA Staff Checklist

- Meets the competition eligibility criteria
- Is approved to enter the NVCA Competition as a representative of this VA facility
- Has signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

Drama Division

Local Level Veteran Participation - VA Local Staff Contacts should keep track of all Veterans who enter through their facility and enter Veteran information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Drama Entry vs. Creative Writing Entry - Veterans who wish to have their original work judged by **performance criteria** (stage presence, expressiveness and interpretation) should submit the entry into the **DRAMA** division in one of the categories below that best fits the entry. Veterans who wish to have their **original work** judged by criteria based upon the **merit of the composition** (creative content, message clarity, use of language, and originality of topic or idea) should submit the entry into the **CREATIVE WRITING** division.

Submit Top Three Finalists in Each Category - Facilities may submit the top three finalists in each category. A formal competition is not required at the local level but is strongly encouraged. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.

National Judging and Results - The national judging will occur in October-December via the digital image judging process with results being announced in January. VA Local Staff Contacts at each facility will be notified of the competition results via E-mail and through Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts. All first-place winners from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend and participate as chorus members in the live stage show performance at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

***Note:** Not all first-place winners will be selected to perform their solo/group entry in the show. Due to time constraints, the Festival show directors will choose approximately 25 dance, drama, and music first-place entries to perform in the show. The remaining first-place attendees will be invited to participate in the Festival chorus.

First-Place National Winning Veterans Invited to the Festival - Veterans invited to the Festival and who accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings

Please take a few extra minutes preparing a video correctly to give your Veteran the best chance possible during the judging process and to save hours of time with the judging process for our judges who donate their time.

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**
- **Focus on the performer.** Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.
- When video recording dance acts, it is necessary to include the whole-body in the entire recording, including the feet.
- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced. Be aware of the accompaniment being too loud. Oftentimes we see/hear the speaker/player is next to the video camera and it is difficult to hear the performer.
- Consider holding your local competition and then video recording **ONLY** the acts that will be sent forward for national judging.
- **Dance, drama, and music entries** will be accepted digitally (MP4, WMV, MOV, Unlisted Youtube link) through the Arts4Vets App.

Drama Division Rules

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must be recorded after October 1, 2023.
2. Veterans need to communicate (as early as January 2024) with their local VA facility to find out their local competition deadline date.
3. Veterans may submit entries in up to three solo categories and three group categories in the dance, drama and music divisions, however they may only submit/be a part of one entry per category. Each entry must be different. The same entry cannot be submitted into two categories within a division.
4. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
5. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
6. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that requires a write-up.
7. Suggested length of performance - no longer than three minutes.
8. Entries that contain a combination of the creative arts (to include visual arts, design, film, literature, dance, dramatic and musical performance) should be entered into the Mixed Arts category in the Drama division – see page 46, Category #13.
9. Judges reserve the right to move an entry to the appropriate category or disqualify the entry if rules are not followed.
10. The **addition of staff, volunteer(s), and/or Veterans who are not eligible Veterans to any entry will result in disqualification.** However, if a drama entry requires a female character and no eligible female Veterans are available, the part may be read by a female volunteer or staff member. *Although the National Veterans Creative Arts Program recognizes the therapeutic value of participation of staff, volunteers, and ineligible Veterans in groups, it is essential in keeping with the fairness of the competition that **only eligible Veterans** are competing against each other.*
11. All Veterans must contribute significantly to the presentation in a dramatic way and be seen on the video for an entry to be submitted into a group category.
12. Veterans who are invited to the Festival and accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Drama Categories

All categories include solo and group performances. Veterans may only submit one entry per category.

1. **Dramatic Prose** - A composition in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry). For example: a reading or excerpt from a speech.
2. **Patriotic Prose** - A composition in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry) with content that relates to American patriotism.
3. **Inspirational Prose** - A composition in ordinary speech or writing (not poetry) with content that is of spiritual nature.
4. **Comedy Prose** - Any drama of light and amusing character.
5. **Dramatic Poetry** - A verse composition.
6. **Patriotic Poetry** - A verse composition with content that relates to American patriotism.
7. **Inspirational Poetry** - A verse composition with content that is of an inspirational nature.
8. **Comedy Poetry** - A verse composition of light and amusing character.
9. **Interpretive Performance-Dramatic** - A presentation that involves acting, movement, and props.
10. **Interpretive Performance-Novelty** - A presentation that is of light and amusing character involving acting, movement and props. Mime, juggling, magic, puppetry and ventriloquism should be submitted into this category.
11. **Short Video-Military Theme** - A video presentation related to military theme using a combination of different content forms such as text/writing, images, audio, video and animation. Videos should be no longer than approximately 3 minutes in length.
12. **Short Video-General Theme** - A video presentation related to a general theme using a combination of different content forms such as text/writing, images, audio, video and animation. (Videos with military themes must be entered into Cat. 11-Short Video-Military Theme.) Videos should be no longer than approximately 3 minutes in length.

13. **Mixed Arts** - Using a combination of the creative arts, entries in this category creatively showcase an array of original artistic mediums and crafts such as art, writing, dance, drama and music (to include visual arts, design, film, literature, dance, dramatic and musical performance). The entire entry should be original and created by only by eligible Veterans. Entries may be submitted as images, text, or video submissions. Judging criteria for this category: Structure and Organization; Originality and Creativity; Total Presentation

14. **Special Recognition** - Entries that recognize individuals who exhibit creative expression through use of drama while possessing significant physical or psychological limitations. The intent of this category is to reinforce the concept of the arts as therapy, where an individual uses artistic expression to facilitate successful treatment outcomes.

Entries in this category **MUST** also include:

- **A Word document containing a typed statement/narrative** (50 to 250 words) composed by a VA staff person or the Veteran explaining why the Veteran is deserving of special recognition. **Entries submitted without a write-up will not be judged.**
- Consent form 10-3203 and 10-5345 (included in this handbook) must be signed and dated by the Veteran. The staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran should safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.

Sample Drama Judging Criteria

Sample Drama Judging Score Sheet

Category Number:	Category Name:
Title of Entry:	

CRITERIA	POINTS									
Stage Presence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Expressiveness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

Mixed Arts and Short Video Categories

Structure & Organization	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Originality & Creativity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Total Presentation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

How to Submit Entries to the National Competition

Entries may be submitted **only by VA Local Staff Contacts** to the national level of the competition using the Arts4Vets App.

Non-VA Staff from other government Veteran medical facilities will not have upload access to the Arts4Vets App and may continue submit entries in other ways. Please reach out to the National Director or division chairpersons to coordinate.

Veterans will not be able to submit their own entries through to the national level of competition or directly into the Arts4Vets App. They must work with the VA facility where they are enrolled and meet the local competition deadline dates.

File Naming Convention: There is no required file naming convention. Files uploaded to the Arts4Vets App will automatically be renamed to coordinate with the entry data.

Drama Division Entry Form

Solo Entry

Veteran Name:		Email:	
Gender:		Phone #:	

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Entry

Veteran Name and Gender

Veteran Phone Number and Email

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Name:	
Number of Veterans in Group:	

Category Number and Name:		
Title of Entry:		
Is the entry an original script written the Veteran(s)?	YES or NO	

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: *I/we have read all the rules for the division in which I/we am/are entering. If my/our entry places first at the national level, I/we understand that I/we will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. It is required that I/we attend and participate in rehearsals for the entire event. I/we have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).*

Veteran(s) Signature(s):

VA Staff Checklist

- Meets the competition eligibility criteria
- Is approved to enter the NVCA Competition as a representative of this VA facility
- Has signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

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Music Division

Local Level Veteran Participation - VA Local Staff Contacts should keep track of all Veterans who enter through their facility and enter Veteran information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

Submit Top Three Finalists in Each Category - Facilities may submit the top three finalists in each category. A formal competition is not required at the local level but is strongly encouraged. All eligible Veterans should be given the opportunity to participate regardless of degree of talent.

National Judging and Results - The national judging will occur in October-December via the digital image judging process with results being announced in January. VA Local Staff Contacts at each facility will be notified of the competition results via E-mail and through Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts. All first-place winners from the national level of the competition will be invited to attend and participate as chorus members in the live stage show performance at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival.

***Note:** Not all first-place winners will be selected to perform their solo/group entry in the show. Due to time constraints, the Festival show directors will choose approximately 25 dance, drama, and music first-place entries to perform in the show. The remaining first-place attendees will be invited to participate in the Festival chorus.

First-Place National Winning Veterans Invited to the Festival - Veterans invited to the Festival and who accept the invitation to attend must commit to participating fully in the Festival week to the best of their ability. The Festival week is structured with daily workshops, seminars, rehearsals, exhibitions, and the stage show performance. Veterans should not view their attendance at the Festival as a vacation experience. While there are downtimes, attendance and full participation is required at all scheduled events.

Veteran Artists, Writers, Performers who are also VA Employees

VA employees who are eligible to compete and if invited to attend the Festival event, must use annual leave (AL), compensatory time off (CT), sick leave (SL) or disabled veteran leave (DVL) (SL and DVL are only appropriate when the individual's participation is part of their required medical treatment/ordered by their provider), travel CT, or, leave without pay (LWOP). Normal leave approval procedures and rules, as outlined in VA Handbook 5017 and applicable labor agreements, apply.

Tips for Taking Better Video Recordings

Please take a few extra minutes preparing a video correctly to give your Veteran the best chance possible during the judging process and to save hours of time with the judging process for our judges who donate their time.

- **Be sure to check that all videos play with video and audio before submission.**
- **Focus on the performer** not on the accompanist. Avoid taping from the back of the room. Stage presence cannot be judged if you cannot clearly see the performer.
- When video recording dance acts, it is necessary to include the whole-body in the entire recording, including the feet.
- **Sound control** is important! Clear audio makes a performance much easier (and enjoyable) to judge. Make sure your sound is good and balanced. Be aware of the accompaniment being too loud. Oftentimes we see/hear the speaker/player is next to the video camera and it is difficult to hear the performer.
- Consider holding your local competition and then video recording **ONLY** the acts that will be sent forward for national judging.
- **Dance, drama, and music entries** will be accepted digitally (MP4, WMV, MOV, Unlisted Youtube link) through the Arts4Vets App.

Music Division Rules

1. All entries in the dance, drama and music divisions must be recorded after October 1, 2023.
2. Veterans need to communicate (as early as January 2024) with their local VA facility to find out their local competition deadline date.
3. Veterans may submit entries in up to three solo categories and three group categories in the dance, drama, and music divisions, however they may only submit/be a part of one entry per category. Each entry must be different. The same entry cannot be submitted into two categories within a division.
4. **Veterans may only submit one entry per category.** A Veteran may not have more than one entry in a category moving forward to the national level of the competition.
5. Veterans who have received a gold medal in the same category from any of the 5 divisions (art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music) for two consecutive years must enter a different category the third year. Failure to comply with this rule will result in the entry being disqualified.
6. References to diagnosis and explanations of emotional or personal content related to the Veteran will not be read or communicated to the national judges. The exception to this rule is an entry submitted into a category that requires a write-up.
7. Suggested length of performance - no longer than three minutes.
8. Entries that contain a combination of the creative arts (to include visual arts, design, film, literature, dance, dramatic and musical performance) should be entered into the Mixed Arts category in the Drama division – see page 46, Category #13.
9. Judges reserve the right to move an entry to the appropriate category or disqualify the entry if rules are not followed.
10. Music entries must be recorded live. No voice-over dubbing will be allowed. No lip syncing to a pre-recorded track will be allowed.
11. A medley of songs in an entry must be continuous/overlapping. Editing video compilations or starting/stopping songs to combine multiple songs as one entry will not be allowed.
12. Once an entry has placed first in the music division at the national level of competition, it is not eligible to be entered again. (Example: If a Veteran or group places first with a music selection in a category one year at the national level, the Veteran or group may not enter that specific music selection again in the competition, but he may enter that category again with a different

music selection.) Music entries that have not placed first at the national level of competition should not be entered more than two consecutive years.

13. If an accompanist is needed for an entry, they may only provide background accompaniment and not take instrumental leads or solos. (Example: An instrumental group entry may consist of eligible Veterans taking leads on saxophone, trumpet and guitar accompanied by VA staff or volunteers on piano, drums, and bass. The VA staff or volunteer accompanying the entry may not take a lead or solo.)
14. An original composition may be placed in categories other than original.
15. Entries submitted into the original vocal categories must include the typed lyrics. **Entries submitted without a copy of the lyrics will be disqualified.**
16. Only one voice may be present to be considered a solo. Once a second voice is added the **entry becomes a group entry and singers must meet eligibility requirements.** If back-up voices are present, they must be eligible Veterans and their inclusion would make the entry a **Vocal Group.** Back-up singing by VA staff, volunteers, and ineligible Veterans will result in disqualification. **Back-up tracks that have the Veteran's voice dubbed in, vocalizers, and harmonizers are not allowed.**
17. The presence of any vocalizations in an instrumental entry will eliminate that entry from competing in the instrumental category except for Instrumental Drums/Percussion and the Band/Ensemble categories.

Vocal Music Categories

- **Vocal Solo:** One Veteran singing.
- **Vocal Group:** To meet the intent of the categories for **Vocal Group**, the group must have **more than one eligible Veteran singing**. (Example: One eligible Veteran being accompanied on instruments by other eligible Veterans does not meet the definition of a vocal group. Instead, this type of entry would be a vocal solo with accompanists.)

VOCAL SOLO

1. **Vocal Solo Country/Folk/Bluegrass**
2. **Vocal Solo Pop**
3. **Vocal Solo Rock/Blues** - Example: Eagles, Rolling Stones, Elvis Presley, Queen, BB King, Buddy Guy, etc.

VOCAL GROUP

4. **Vocal Group Country/Folk/Bluegrass**
5. **Vocal Group Pop**
6. **Vocal Group Rock/Blues**

VOCAL SOLO OR GROUP

7. **Vocal Rap/Hip Hop** - Solo or group.
8. **Vocal Classical/World/Ethnic** - Solo or group. A vocal selection that reflects the music characteristics of a specific ethnicity, culture, or country. The selection should be from a culture other than that of English-speaking North America. Use of ethnic instruments as accompaniment is encouraged. This category does NOT include popular music.
9. **Vocal Jazz** - Solo or group. Example: Louis Armstrong, Billy Holliday, Fred Astaire, Tony Bennett, Norah Jones, Diana Krall, etc.
10. **Vocal R&B/Soul/Funk** - Solo or group. Example: Motown, Sam Cooke, John Legend, Al Green, James Brown, etc.

11. **Vocal Broadway** - Solo or group. Show Tunes, **not movies**. (Example: “People” would be acceptable as it is **also** from a Broadway show, not because it is from a movie. “New York, New York” would not be acceptable as it is from a 1977 Liza Minnelli movie.) *Specify the Broadway show after the title.*
12. **Vocal Patriotic** - Solo or group.
13. **Vocal Spiritual** - Solo or group.

ORIGINAL VOCAL

Original vocal compositions composed by one or more eligible Veterans judged solely on the merits of the composition. Lyrics and music must be composed entirely by an eligible Veteran/s and that Veteran/s will be the one entered in this category. A performer or group other than the composer may perform the work, but the composer(s) should be shown on the video.

A copy of the typed lyrics must be attached to the entry form. **Entries submitted without a copy of the lyrics will be disqualified.**

14. **Original Vocal - General Topic** - Solo or group.
15. **Original Vocal - Military Experience** - Solo or group.

Instrumental Music, Band/Ensemble, and Special Recognition Categories

- **Instrumental Solo:** One Veteran playing
- **Instrumental Group:** To meet the intent of the categories for **Instrumental Group**, the group must have **more than one eligible Veteran performing instrumental solos/leads or making other essential contributions musically to the entry other than just accompanying.** There are no limits to the number of accompanists in the group but care should be taken that non-eligible Veterans (i.e. staff, volunteers, Veterans who are not eligible to compete) are not performing solos/leads.

NOTE: The presence of any singing in an instrumental entry will eliminate that entry from competing in the instrumental category, except for entries in the Instrumental Drums/Percussion and Band/Ensemble Categories.

INSTRUMENTAL SOLO

16. Instrumental Solo Pop
17. Instrumental Solo Jazz/R&B/Soul

INSTRUMENTAL GROUP

18. Instrumental Group Pop
19. Instrumental Group Jazz/R&B/Soul

INSTRUMENTAL SOLO OR GROUP

20. Instrumental Country/Folk/Bluegrass – Solo or group.
21. Instrumental Rock/Blues – Solo or group.
22. Instrumental Broadway - Solo or group. Show Tunes, **not movies**. (Example: “People” would be acceptable as it is **also** from a Broadway show, not because it is from a movie. “New York, New York” would not be acceptable as it is from a 1977 Liza Minnelli movie.) *Specify the Broadway show after the title.*
23. Instrumental Patriotic - Solo or group.

24. **Instrumental Spiritual** - Solo or group.
25. **Instrumental Classical** - Solo or group. Conventional music following long-established principles other than a folk, jazz, or popular tradition (mid 1400s – late 1800s). Examples include symphonies, concertos, oratorios, operas, sonatas, fugues or any combination of dance movements such as suites. New age music may be submitted into this category.
26. **Instrumental World/Ethnic** - Solo or group. An instrumental selection that reflects the music characteristics of a special ethnicity, culture, or country. The selection should be from a culture other than that of English-speaking North America. Use of ethnic instruments is encouraged. This category does NOT include classical or popular music.
27. **Instrumental Drums/Percussion** - Solo or group. It is the intent of this category to showcase non-melodic percussion instruments, i.e. trap set, congas, bongos, spoons, rhythm instruments, etc. This category would exclude percussion instruments that can produce an obvious melody line, i.e. xylophone, vibraphone, marimba, etc. Accompaniment may be present as desired and may include melody line OR VOCALS, but ONLY the percussionist will be judged. **Vocal percussion beat boxing should be entered into this category.**

ORIGINAL INSTRUMENTAL

New score of music. A new song entirely, not an interpretation of an existing song. Original instrumental compositions composed by one or more eligible Veterans judged solely on the merits of the composition. Music must contain a distinct melody line and must be composed entirely by an eligible Veteran/s and that Veteran/s will be the one entered in this category. A performer or group other than the composer may perform the work, but the composer(s) should be shown on the video. Lead sheets and chord progressions are helpful to the judging process but are not required.

28. **Original Instrumental** - Solo or group.

BAND/ENSEMBLE CATEGORIES

To meet the criteria for the Band/Ensemble categories, the group must consist entirely of eligible Veterans and must include **at least 2 members (at least one must be a singer and at least one must be an instrumentalist)**. All group members must be shown on the video. **The presence of non-Veterans (including non-Veteran VA staff) will result in the entry being disqualified.** Accompanists are not allowed in this category.

29. **Band/Ensemble – Country/Folk/Bluegrass/Pop**

30. **Band/Ensemble – Jazz/R&B/Soul/Rock/Blues**

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

This category is for vocal or instrumental music entries that recognize individuals who exhibit creative expression through use of music while possessing significant physical or psychological limitations. The intent of this category is to reinforce the concept of the arts as therapy, where an individual uses artistic expression to facilitate successful treatment outcomes. **VA staff may accompany and vocally cue or assist Veterans with entries in this category.**

31. **Special Recognition**

Entries in this special recognition categories **MUST** also include:

- **A Word document containing a typed statement/narrative** (50 to 250 words) composed by a VA staff person or the Veteran explaining why the Veteran is deserving of special recognition. **Entries submitted without a write-up will not be judged.**
- Consent form 10-3203 and 10-5345 (included in this handbook) must be signed and dated by the Veteran. The staff contact person submitting the entry for the Veteran should safeguard the signed consent forms at their VA facility.

Sample Music Judging Criteria

Sample Music Judging Score Sheet

Category Number and Name:	
Title of Entry:	

(All Categories EXCEPT Originals)

Intonation (unless piano)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rhythm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Interpretation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Stage Presence	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Blend & Cohesiveness (if group)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

(Originals)

Melody Line	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Rhythm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Style	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Lyrics (if vocal)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

TOTAL SCORE _____

How to Submit Entries to the National Competition

Entries may be submitted **only by VA Local Staff Contacts** to the national level of the competition using the Arts4Vets App.

Non-VA Staff from other government Veteran medical facilities will not have upload access to the Arts4Vets App and may continue submit entries in other ways. Please reach out to the National Director or division chairpersons to coordinate.

Veterans will not be able to submit their own entries through to the national level of competition or directly into the Arts4Vets App. They must work with the VA facility where they are enrolled and meet the local competition deadline dates.

File Naming Convention: There is no required file naming convention. Files uploaded to the Arts4Vets App will automatically be renamed to coordinate with the entry data.

Music Division Entry Form

Solo Entry

Veteran Name:		Email:	
Gender:		Phone #:	

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Entry

Veteran Name and Gender

Veteran Phone Number and Email

**Gender information used only for national participation data collection.*

Group Name:	
Number of Veterans in Group:	

Category Number and Name:	
Title of Entry:	
Categories 11 & 23, specify from what Broadway show:	
If entering an instrumental category, what instrument is the Veteran playing:	

List all accompanists – Everyone that is visible or heard on the video must be identified as an accompanist or eligible Veteran.	Accompanist's name:
--	---------------------

***Veterans:** By entering this competition, you acknowledge that your name, email, phone number, entry, and entry detail information may be uploaded into the VA Arts4Vets/Salesforce Application for the purpose of collecting and organizing competition entries.

Veterans: *I/we have read all the rules for the division in which I/we am/are entering. If my/our entry places first at the national level, I/we understand that I/we will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. It is required that I/we attend and participate in rehearsals for the entire event. I/we have signed the required Consent for Picture/Voice form (VA form 10-3203).*

Veteran(s) Signature(s):

VA Staff Checklist

- Meets the competition eligibility criteria
- Is approved to enter the NVCA Competition as a representative of this VA facility
- Has signed the necessary consent forms (10-3203 and if necessary, 10-5345) – reference Page 10 for links to forms

Tips for Organizing Local Competitions

Set a date for your local competition that works best for your medical facility. The deadline for submission of entries to the national level of competition is October 1. Be sure to allow time in September to prepare entry form information, necessary write-ups, as well as the art digital images, creative writing texts, and dance, drama and music video recordings for submission to the Arts4Vets App. **It is encouraged to submit entries PRIOR to October 1 to ensure entries and all completed paperwork are received on time.**

Attempt to set a date for your local show(s) that is open on your facility Director's calendar. Send an invitation to the Director, Associate Director, CDCE Chief and local service organizations.

Request to appear on the agenda for VAVS quarterly meetings. At this meeting you can inform volunteers of your local creative arts program and the possibility of Veterans from your VA facility receiving an invitation to participate in the Festival. This is also an opportunity for them to be become aware of any support that may be needed.

Reminder: The American Legion Auxiliary is a co-presenter of this program and should be made aware of local creative arts programing. They also could be asked to support the local competition.

Publicity – Social media and word of mouth tend to be the best means of spreading the word about the local competition. A **press release** could also be prepared with a request to your Public Affairs Officer to submit it to your local news media. **A sample press release is included in the back of this handbook.** Create a poster/flyer to announce your local entry information (who, where and when entries are accepted), competition date, time and place. Produce a brochure/handout with the rules and other pertinent information. If your VA facility has a monthly newsletter, submit an **article** about your local show and ask that all staff encourage the Veterans from your VA facility to participate.

Decide what you will give the winners in recognition of their accomplishment (ribbons or medals). Also plan a certificate or other means of recognition for every Veteran who enters. Certificates for all participants can be inexpensive if made in-house. **A sample certificate is included in the back of this handbook.**

Secure three to five judges each for the visual arts, writing, and performing arts divisions. Judges in the community who are subject matter experts are preferred however VA facility staff who have expertise in the creative arts may also be used.

Each Veteran must complete and sign the necessary entry and consent forms. Use the information from the completed entry form to make the judges score sheets, arrange the order of the program, etc. When all Veteran entry forms have been completed, **double check to be sure they are accurate AND READABLE.**

As it is a rule at the national level, it is recommended that no one Veteran be allowed to enter more than three (3) solo categories and three (3) group categories of any one division.

Tips for Organizing Local Competitions (continued)

Keep track of all Veterans who compete/enter through your VA facility and enter their information into **Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet**. VA Local Staff Contacts may access the Local Level Veteran Participation Excel sheet in the Microsoft Teams channel: NVCA Competition-Local Staff Contacts or by emailing Arts4Vets@va.gov.

If you or another member of the staff does not play the piano or another accompanying instrument, contact CDCE (Voluntary Service office) for possible volunteers. Other sources may be the Chaplain Service musician, local music teachers, Army Band members, or the American Federation of Musicians. Veterans will usually perform better with an accompanist. A local drama teacher or a member of a community theater group may advise those participating in the drama division.

Local dance teachers are frequently willing to assist your dancers and teachers and other community members who are versed in writing poetry, essays, etc. would be useful in judging the creative writing entries. Many VA staff have a variety of talents and experiences in the arts and are very happy to work with their patients in a modality different from their regular routine. Work closely with the Chief of CDCE from the beginning so they are aware of your potential needs.

If you do not have an auditorium, shows may be held in a gym, a dining hall, a day room, or many other places in your medical facility. Also consider looking into the community for potential connections with museums or service organizations.

Have everything ready for the judges. Make one set of the judges score sheets (one for each entry), then duplicate enough sets for all judges. Have one person tally the scores as the judge's finish scoring each category.

Contact your finalists to complete any missing paperwork (entry and consent forms). You may also re-tape the dance, drama, and music winners if you wish to give them some extra attention and opportunity to further polish their number before their entries are submitted to the Arts4Vets App for national judging.

Take digital images of the local first-place art. Inform all Veterans that if an art piece is chosen as the first-place winner at the national level of the competition, the actual art piece will need to be shipped to the Festival host site location. Dioramas and fragile art pieces should not be shipped. These artwork images will be displayed on poster boards or a display banner during the art and writing exhibition.

Tips for Organizing Local Competitions (continued)

Suggestion of statement to post at local VA competitions:

The National Veterans Creative Arts Competition and Festival provides our nation's Veterans with an opportunity to gain recognition for their progress and recovery made through the creative arts therapies. The local VA competition enables our Veterans to share their talents and healing experiences with their peers and the community.

Art, writing and performance entries may be related to past traumas, personal life struggles or world views. Some may experience emotional turmoil when viewing the subject matter presented. Staff members are available for emotional processing and support if needed.

Thank you for being here and supporting Veteran artistry.

Sample Press Release



News Release

Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Insert Address

City, State, zip code

For further information, contact:

Insert Contact name

Title

Phone

DATE

For Immediate Release

Sample Press Release

Veteran Art Competition

Local Veterans Compete for Chance to attend National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

City, -Date Artwork by local Veterans will be on display to the public at the (Facility Location) on (Date) from (Time). It is estimated that over (#) pieces of art from among (#) different categories will be exhibited. VA medical facilities incorporate creative arts into their therapy programs to further the rehabilitation for both inpatients and outpatients. This annual competition recognizes the progress and recovery made through that therapy and raises the visibility of the creative achievements of our Nation's Veterans.

Finalists will advance to the national level where they will compete with entries submitted by Veterans from other VA facilities from across the country. The competition is an annual event that provides Veterans receiving treatment at VA facilities the opportunity to participate in creative self-expression in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music as part of their therapy, and to gain recognition for these artistic accomplishments.

First-place winners from the national competition will be invited to attend the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival held in (Location and Dates).

#

CERTIFICATE *of Recognition*

This certificate is awarded to

Veteran Name

In recognition of participation in the 2024 Department of Veterans Affairs



NATIONAL VETERANS
CREATIVE ARTS
COMPETITION

