

Union Veterans Councils

Local Chapter Building and Strategic Planning

Toolkit

*For Use in the
Building and Strategic Planning Process
by State Federations, Central Labor Councils
and Area Labor Federations*

Union Veterans Council
AFL-CIO
815 16th St., NW
Washington, DC 20006

May 2018

CONTENTS

Introduction

Overview

Establishing Your Chapter Timeline

Steps to Building Your Chapter

Building the Program

INTRODUCTION

Building a Veterans Voice Inside of Labor

The veterans community and the labor movement face historic challenges in the coming years. If these challenges are to be met and overcome, victories must come in the cities and towns, in the streets and in the neighborhoods, in the communities of America. That is why the Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO, is mobilizing working-class veterans and their families for the first time in history to take back our country and reclaim the basic American values of justice, equality and opportunity. To be successful in this historic struggle, AFL-CIO state federations, central labor councils and area labor federations must lead vibrant and effective local union veterans programs with the leadership skills, structure, capacity and resources to drive and build a new movement. The Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO, and its affiliated unions want to give state federations, CLCs and ALFs the tools to do this in their communities.

In May 2017, the Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO, announced a bold set of agenda ideas, with an objective to create a true voice for working-class veterans. The most important aspect of this plan is to build and establish a network of chapters at the local labor body level. These chapters will work to help engage, educate and mobilize our veterans community. Working-class veterans are lacking a credible voice and it is time that labor leads the way.

Many state federations and CLCs/ALFs already are engaged in veteran programs. The proposal for a unified veterans program is different in that it is not a plan for a single organization, but rather for the labor movement as a whole, involving state federations, CLCs, ALFs, affiliates and allies. This guide will walk your organization through all of the necessary steps to establish a veterans chapter and ensure it is a successful, long-term part of labor's overall path.

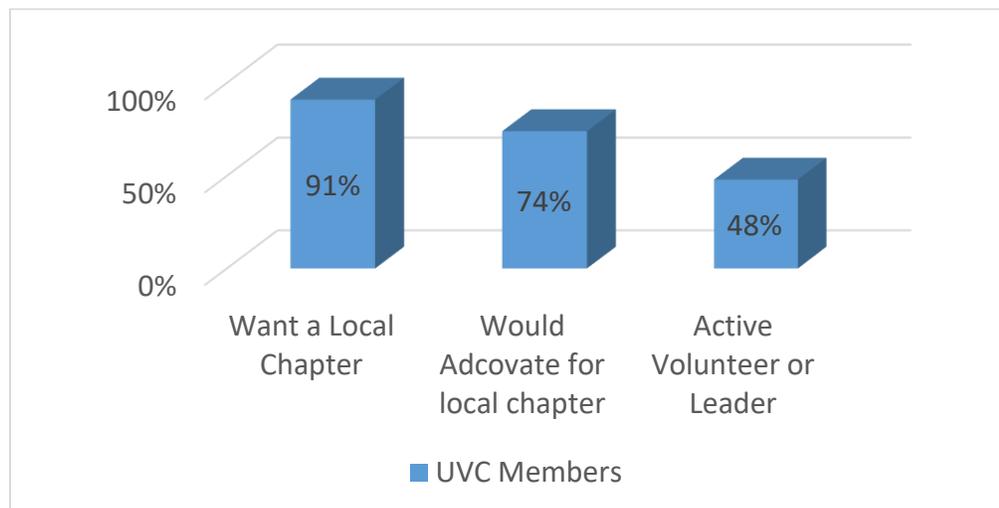
OVERVIEW

Why Build a Veterans Movement in Labor

The story of the American worker and the American veteran are one and the same. Since the foundation of our nation, young men and women have left their homes to fight for the country they believe in. They come from small, rural, working-class communities, the industrial heartland and our urban cities across the United States. They come mostly from working-class family, poor and minority communities; nevertheless, they all serve our nation with pride.

When our soldiers return home and gain their veteran status, they face a vast array of hurdles. These veterans navigate a system that is very different from the military structure they are familiar with. They also must make up for the critical learning period they missed while they were enlisted, and they must overcome stigmas and misinformation that comes with being a veteran. When veterans re-enter the workforce, most do so at a middle-class or lower level. A report from the Union Veterans Council shows that 58% of all working veterans make less than \$50,000 per year, with 31% making less than \$31,000. So how can we change this? That study also shows that, on average, veterans represented by a union earn more than \$12,000 more annually than their nonunion counterparts, so it is no surprise that one out of 9 veterans who work are in a union; that number is even higher among the retired union members.

A recent survey found union veterans are highly interested and engaged in helping advance the mission of the Union Veterans Council.



Among those surveyed, 91% said they would be interested in seeing a local chapter of the Union Veterans Council in their area. Furthermore, nearly half of the members surveyed reported an interest in being actively involved in a local UVC chapter with one-third of respondents (33%) expressing interest in a leadership or board member role and an additional 15% reporting an interest in being an active member. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of union veterans surveyed said they would advocate creating a UVC chapter with their local leadership.

History

The American labor movement has a long and storied history with our veterans community. Many can trace this back to Civil War veterans returning home from war only to find themselves facing horrible working conditions. Using the camaraderie they built during their time in the military, workers banded together and fought back. This happened again in the union movement when millions of veterans came home from fighting in France during World War I. WWII veterans came home to help build the middle class after defeating the Nazis and Axis forces. Along with providing our nation with a workforce, we saw veterans starting to be involved in social issues. Many prominent civil rights activists were drawn from the ranks of veterans, including *Brown v. Board of Education* plaintiff Oliver Brown and NAACP field officers Medgar Evers and Amzie Moore.

We saw the same phenomenon as Vietnam veterans home from a war that most did not understand became part of the movement to stop unjust wars. These veterans also went home to work in steel mills, coal mines and factories, only to slowly see these pathways to the American dream shipped overseas. Many from this generation saw unions as their only defenders at home.

After the attacks on 9/11, we saw the next generation of veterans ship off to fight in America's longest war, and once again unions were there to help support them when they came home. Unions created tens of thousands of jobs for returning veterans through programs like Veterans in Piping (VIP), the Utility Worker Military Assistance Program (UMAP) and many others, helping labor become one of the lead pathways for veterans employment. The Helmets to Hardhats program through the North America's Building Trades Unions has placed more than 20,000 veterans and spent more than \$1.2 billion to train veterans to be the next generation of highly skilled union craft workers. That is not all—unions across the country have fought to keep and build veterans preferences programs.

This is a history not often spoken about, particularly from people and organizations that like to take pictures with veterans and wrap themselves in the flag, but at the same time cut pay and working standards for veterans in the workforce.

An Attack on Workers is an Attack on Veterans

The American worker is under attack and it is time to take a stand. History shows us that veterans come from working-class families and return to working-class areas when they leave the service. This means that when we see attacks on workers, veterans are affected—and our voice needs to be heard. If it's a call for "right to work," that would weaken protections for working veterans. Attacks on prevailing wage laws and cuts to safety standards also hurt veterans. All too often, state and federal workers are the first to face cuts; most of the time, the leaders supporting these cuts to workers' health care, retirement benefits and wages are the same that claim to be the champions of veterans and the middle class. One in four post-9/11 veterans are employed by a state or federal government agency. Attacks on federal workers

alone target the largest numbers of middle-class veterans. The Union Veterans Council supports veteran workers across industries and wage tiers. **Our message is clear: when you attack workers, you attack veterans.**

ESTABLISHING YOUR CHAPTER TIMELINE

The following is a suggested series of steps to prepare for the launch and creation of your organization's veterans chapter, along with the recommended timeline. Although it may seem like an extended period for preparation, you will find that the more thoroughly you prepare, the more useful and successful the program will be. *(Note: All items will be explained in detail in the sections that follow.)*

Six weeks prior creating a chapter:

- Identify local veterans to lead the first steps of the process.
- Start to engage local unions to help identify veterans in their membership.
- Make plans for an announcement event.
- Send invitations to participants. Key officers should be invited personally or by phone.

Four weeks prior to announcement:

- Begin interviewing key leaders for the veterans steering committee.
- Schedule a phone conference with the national UVC.
- Confirm the location and time of announcement.
- Send a request to affiliates to solicit names of individuals and community organizations (allied and affiliated) for inclusion in the event.

Two weeks prior to announcement :

- Planning Committee meets to review plan, compile list of strategic issues, develop master calendar and plan agenda.
- Draft press release.

One week prior to announcement :

- Copy and prepare meeting materials.
- Decide who will conduct which parts of the agenda.
- Schedule a post-meeting debriefing session.
- Reconfirm participation of invited leaders, staff and facilitator(s).

Date of event:

- Designate an area to take pictures.
- Assign an individual to be the photographer.
- Carry out the plan.

STEPS TO BUILDING YOUR CHAPTER

Step 1. Purposing the Idea

The first step to creating a local UVC chapter is to build a coalition of support inside your organization and with affiliate leaders through one-on-one conversations, emails and organizational meetings:

- The local chapter will be established as a committee that falls under the governance of the creating labor body. This will not be a stand-alone program; the UVC chapter will work directly with the local body and established committees.
- The local chapters will have direct oversight from the national Union Veterans Council.
- The committee will follow the protocols that have been established for other committees under the local union body's constitution.
- The committee should reflect and come from a diverse pool of affiliate members.
- The committee will operate an escrowed account separate from the general fund.

Once a consensus is formed in support of a local chapter, you can then move on to the next steps.

Items to think about when pitching the idea:

- Is there a need for a veterans voice in your area?
- How high is the veterans density?
- Are there issues that directly affect the veterans community (right to work, outsourcing, etc.)?
- Do you already do things to support the veterans community?
- Do you have potential veteran leaders?

Step 2. Engage and Recruit

Identify potential chapter leaders: An ideal leader would be an individual who can use social media and understands labor's message and mission. This individual also cares and supports the veterans community, while understanding that attacks on workers are attacks on veterans.

There are a few basic skills the chapter leader should have:

- The ability to volunteer his or her time to the program.
- Basic computer knowledge and social media skills (the UVC will conduct training on social media).
- Be a well-organized individual.

Once a leader is identified, schedule a conference call with the national UVC. With communication under way and goals set, it is time to engage local union veterans.

Engaging and recruiting local veterans: One of the critical steps is to identify local union veterans in your membership ranks; by doing this, you will have a bigger pool to contact and recruit. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Contact local union leaders with a request for them to identify their veteran members.
- Attend local union meetings with UVC sign-up material.
- Digitally send out membership sign-up forms provided by the UVC:
 - The national UVC will assist in this process; andTemplate sign-up tools will be provided to the chapter drive.*

Step 3. Planning Announcement

An announcement event does not have to be elaborate; it can be done at the monthly meeting. Past practice has been to schedule a vote and announcement on the same night. Inviting local veterans and key leaders will help amplify the announcement.

Begin to interview local union veterans to sit on the steering committee; building a core group of local veterans is vital to the program's success. These veterans should come from both private- and public-sector unions.

Schedule a conference call with the national UVC. This call will help ensure all questions are answered, plans are being developed and resources are available.

Two weeks before the event, all plans must be finalized, along with a press release announcing the establishment of the local UVC chapter.

- If you do not have access to media support, contact the national UVC for assistance writing the press release.
- A draft copy of a press release will be available on the chapter drive.*

Week of Event

Carry out plan

Things to think about

Step 4. Create Steering Committee

By now, the word is out! It is time to identify key veterans to sit on the steering committee. These veterans will help move the newly formed chapter toward becoming a working labor program.

- It is key to recruit from both public- and private-sector unions.

The first two key tasks for the steering committee are to:

- Start the planning process for the first engagement event (Step 5); and
- Strategize activities for the local UVC to be involved in charity events, parades, etc.

Once the committee is formed, the national UVC will provide a day of on-the-ground training. *Find this training curriculum in the Appendix, page XX.*

Step 5. Membership Engagement Event

Engaging our members is key to building a productive program, bringing our veterans from all backgrounds together with two things in common—being a veteran and being a union member. The first membership engagement we call for is a scripted event involving the national UVC. *A detailed guide to the first event is in the Appendix, page XX.*

The following is a suggested series of steps to prepare for the first membership engagement event, along with a recommended timeline. Although it may seem like an extended period for preparation, you will find that the more thoroughly you prepare, the more useful the event itself will be.

Membership Engagement Event Timeline

Six weeks prior to event

- Meeting of Planning Committee and facilitator(s).
- Arrange for location of event.
- Send invitations to participants (between five and eight weeks before the event. A longer lead time may be necessary to get principal officers committed. Key officers also should be invited in person or by phone.

Four weeks prior to event

- Start to finalize guest speakers, including key members of the labor community.
- Invite allied organizations such as the Alliance for Retired Americans, Helmets to Hardhats, etc.
- Confirm the location and order food.
- Continue to recruit attendees.

Three weeks prior to event

- Hold a meeting and finalize plans.
- Start direct outreach to local unions to recruit veteran attendees.
- National UVC will send email to list inviting members.
- Continue to recruit from local groups.
- Confirm participation of invited leaders.

Two weeks prior to event

- Planning Committee meets to review plan and agenda.
- Finalize all arrangements and buy any needed supplies.

One week prior to event:

- Contact all key participants to ensure time, date and location is known.
- Send reminder email to all attendees who have signed up.
- Finalize all assignments.

Date of event:

- Execute plan for event.

One week after event:

- Debrief in person or by phone to review the next steps coming out of the event and clearly define responsibilities for these.
- Prepare a written report.

Step 6. Strategic Plan and Goals

As we say in the military, poor planning leads to poor performance. Formulating a strategic plan and key goals will ensure you have a working program that will help and support your labor community.

Now that we have established a chapter and had our first event, it is time to lay out plans and goals for the chapter. In the program-building section of this guide that follows, we lay out an in-depth look at what our goals and plans should be. *A template plan and goals worksheet may be found in the Appendix, page XX.*

Things to think about:

- Know your capacity; start small by setting achievable goals.

BUILDING THE PROGRAM

Once a committee is established and building steps are completed, the real work begins. The main objectives of the Union Veterans Council organization include engaging our veterans community, educating our members on union veteran issues and mobilizing the veterans in our ranks. These three pillars will act as a guide to creating a unique mission for your chapter.

Engagement

In the past, it was not a priority to identify our veteran members in labor, but with the large number of veterans returning from the global war on terror, it is essential to engage this vital portion of labor. There are more than 1.2 million working veterans who are union members; we have well more than twice that many who are retired. All too often, when veterans re-enter the workforce they become just another worker—the time is now to tap into the skills they learned while in the military.

Veteran Identification

To be able to engage our veterans we must know who they are. This not only will help your local program, it also will help the labor movement by providing veteran membership numbers and information to the international unions that represent them. It will be the committee's responsibility to design and conduct a membership drive. Here are a few examples of how to build your membership:

- **Outreach to local affiliates:** No one knows their membership better than the local union leadership. Work through local leaders to identify veterans who can join the UVC.
- **Membership sign-up drives:** There are many ways to hold a drive; it could be as simple as showing up to union events with a sign-up sheet or having prize giveaways to motivate new members to sign up.
- **Social media/traditional membership engagement:** This can be accomplished by sending emails to union membership lists, and designing graphics and links for social media that targets local union veterans.

Education

Our goal is to educate as many union veterans as we can. This will help union veterans understand how issues influence their lives and how they affect the veterans community. This will give us the ability to train our most trusted messengers and give them a voice to carry our message back to the worksite, home and the community at large.

Each quarter the national UVC will provide educational material on major labor issues focused on veterans. The primary issues will act as a base for the quarterly membership meeting. The chapter leader will work with the CLC/ALF leaders to designate a local or state issue that needs to be addressed.

Veterans benefits are always an issue; designating one member of the committee to learn about benefits will help all of our veterans.

By establishing a relationship with the veterans services community and our AFGE VA members, the chapter will be able to help better educate local members on their benefits:

- Reach out to local VFW to learn about their local service liaisons.
- Meet with local state VA advocates to learn state-specific benefits.
- Build relationships with other veterans organizations in the area to learn what they do and provide.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a very serious reality for veterans in the workforce; our local chapters should be well educated on the issue and identify resources available in the local community. This will help inform local unions and apprentice coordinators, which will in turn help our veteran members.

The national UVC will create education material on a regular basis to assist in this vital part of the program. Details on training and materials will be explained in a later portion of this guide.

Mobilization

Membership mobilization is key. Once we have engaged our veteran population, we must give them a task and a purpose to make this a sustainable, long-lasting and effective program. The UVC has designed a mobilization program that will help support labor's objectives, along with supporting the local veterans community. Setting goals and benchmarks in the four pillars of this program listed below will ensure a well-rounded program.

1. Supporting the Union Veterans and Veterans Community as a Whole

This is who we are; labor historically has supported our nation's veterans. The UVC will be a driving force for the veterans community and will strive to be a leading example of what people can do when they join together in pursuit of a common goal. Here are examples of how you can support veterans at your local chapter:

- Many veterans programs inside of labor need support. (Helmets to Hardhats, Veterans in Piping, etc.). Creating relationships with programs like this will assist efforts to provide gainful employment to veterans. *Contact information for these programs can be found in the Appendix, page XX.*
- Supporting other veteran organizations will help build your presence. Every community has great veterans organizations, from traditional organizations like the American Legion and VFW to the new 21st century groups like Team Rubicon and Team Red, White and Blue. By forging a positive relationship with programs like this, we will have a greater positive impact on veterans.
- Finding unique ways to collaborate with other programs in the labor community to focus on the veteran population.

2. Crafting a Positive Public Relations Message

In the words of UVC Co-Chair and Mine Workers (UMWA) President Cecil Roberts, “*We are the most patriotic people in the world; we just don’t talk about it.*” It is time we let the world know about the good that we do for our bravest Americans. For far too long, we have sat by as a corporate agenda has taken words like freedom, patriotic and veterans from our vocabulary; through our local chapters, we will start to win these back. Public outreach is one of the top ways we will do it:

- The local chapter should find ways to engage the general population. This can be achieved by locating veteran-centric charities and outreach programs to support.
- Helping recruit local veterans to join unions (example: Have a veterans career day with affiliated unions).
- Actively find ways to create earned media that supports and uplifts what labor is doing for veterans.
- Creating a quarterly “What is labor doing for veterans story” that highlights what the labor community is doing for veterans.

We will discuss media training in a later segment of this guide.

3. Policy and Legislation

Attacks on all workers are attacks on veterans. This is why the veterans’ voice on issues confronting the labor movement is pivotal. By mobilizing union vets around issues that affect themselves and their families, the UVC will be able to use our collective voice to support policies and legislation that uplifts all workers and their households:

- Mobilizing veterans in your area to speak out on issues that affect working-class veterans is a high priority.
- Find ways that policy and legislation will help or hurt working-class veterans, and then construct a veterans message in response.
- Build a relationship with the traditional Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) and find ways to support their legislative agenda.
- Writing letters to elected officials, stating your chapter’s position on issues.
- Holding press conferences with local union veterans to put a face on the issues.
- Developing a lobbying strategy that fits your local organization’s needs.

The local labor body’s needs and priorities always will drive the legislative agenda. The local leadership must clear all policies and legislation the chapter intends to support.

4. Political

Union Veterans Councils do not endorse candidates; state and local UVCs support the local labor body. Working closely with the political (COPE) committee, the veterans committee should find ways to support labor’s political agenda. Identifying veterans who will speak out, show up and support this agenda will be an asset to labor.

Examples of what we can do to support the political agenda:

- Make and release statements.

- Hold events hosted by the local UVC.
- Identify volunteers for on-camera interviews and ads.
- Send letter to the editor and opinion pieces from local members.
- Attend events as a unified group (UVC shirts, banner and signs).

The committee should develop a plan of support and activities to lift up the union veterans voice. *A draft political plan is in the Appendix, page XX.*

Things to think about