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For more information about the Veterans Connect @ the Library program, see:

https://calibrariesforveterans.org
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By every measure, the Veterans Connect @ the Library program has surpassed all expectations and been a substantial success.

• It has greatly increased its investment, generating $2 million in in-kind, cash matches and volunteer and work-study hours from a five year budget of $1.2 million.
• For every interaction that may have led to a VA benefit claim, new federal dollars would have been added to the California economy.
• Reluctant homeless veterans have been helped to find stable housing and saved cities and towns the high costs of emergency services for the impoverished.
• Dignity has been restored to a large number of veterans and veteran volunteers. It has seen volunteers gain new purpose and assuage old wounds.
• Community members and volunteers have an increased sense of compassion and appreciation for those that have served.
• Goals set by the California State Library (CSL) strategic plan and the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) have been exceeded, providing services to the underserved, developing an exceptional number of strategic partnerships, expanding access through face to face interactions, and providing links between participating libraries.
• The program is enriching lives and connecting people, libraries and government to information and resources.
• Its popularity with communities has been instrumental in moving a Library Renovation Bond forward.¹

Key Financial Findings

• The Return on Investment (ROI) is 60% based on a total investment to date of $1.2 million and in-kind/cash match/volunteer value of $2 million.²
• The Veterans Connect program can return significant new federal dollars to the State economy and its veterans for every library interaction that ultimately leads to a
successful Veteran Affairs (VA) benefit claim. The VA currently expends an estimated $15 billion in California, equal to about $40,000 per California veteran claim. Conservative estimates suggest that even a tiny uptake in claims originating from library interactions could bring significant double-digit millions of new federal monies to the state, its veterans and the communities they live in. Currently about 80% of California’s 1.82 million veterans have not registered with the VA for benefits.³
• The Veterans Connect program initiated over 27,000 interactions with veterans and their family members. Based on the new federal monies flowing to the state and its veterans through each new VA benefit claim, a breakeven point for the entire program could potentially occur when only 30 of these 27,000 meetings result in a new VA benefits claim.
• Research indicates that fully engaged and committed volunteers enjoy significant health benefits and well-being as they age. It also demonstrates that veterans have a built-in proclivity to service and volunteer at significantly higher rates than civilians. Indications from our evaluation suggest the pairing of veterans needing service with veterans acting as benefit coaches provides not only a sustainable model but one with a potential cost savings in healthcare as the California population ages.⁴
• Reducing the number of veterans experiencing homelessness increases civic wellbeing, staff cohesion and saves local economies the high cost of emergency services and health.⁵

**Key Financial Recommendations**

• The federal transfer of VA payments produces a net financial gain for the State of California and local veteran communities. As the main beneficiary and in advancement of its own economic health and the wellbeing of veterans and their families, it would be in the State’s best interest to provide ongoing funding for this program. It is recommended that the California State Library, in partnership with the California Department of Veteran Affairs (CalVet), present a formal request to the State of California for ongoing funding and expansion of the Veterans Connect program in California libraries.⁶
• Continue the investment in the Veterans Connect @ the Library program, implementing the key administrative recommendations to increase effectiveness across a range of measures.

\[\text{Federal VA $ to California per veteran claim}\]

\[\text{Cost per VRC veteran interaction at the library}\]

\[\text{CalVet $ per veteran claim}\]

\[\text{$45$ \hspace{1cm} $1,260$ \hspace{1cm} $40,000$}\]

This evaluation also considers barriers impacting veterans’ ability to access benefits and other services and how the library model ameliorates these challenges. It also examines individual impacts (HEHE: health, employment, housing, education, personal relationships, skill development, healing), community impacts (civic engagement, economic, leisure, social trust), and library impacts (staff cohesion, professional development, increased library usage, library support and political capital).
The California State Library was ahead of the curve when it first helped launch the Veterans Connect @ the Library demonstration project in FY 2012/13. Pew Research Center confirmed the value of this program in 2015 with a study that showed 94% of Americans believed that libraries should definitely/maybe (74%/20%) create services and programs for veterans and military personnel.

The Veterans Connect program found its roots in a 2011 conference on services to veterans hosted by the California State Library (CSL) Research Bureau (CRB). A 2011 research study about women veterans found that 80% indicated at least one need, generally falling under the categories of healthcare, employment, housing and education (HEHE). They required assistance navigating the maze of local, state and federal benefits and services, often did not know where to start and preferred peer-to-peer interactions for learning about benefits. The survey concluded that “the more personalized the communication, the more useful veterans will find the source.”

Interestingly, another iteration of this research completed two years later concluded that the women surveyed were still mostly unaware of earned veteran-related benefits and services.

A 2013 California State Auditor report further concluded that CalVet has a “strategic objective to connect veterans with the benefits and services they need to excel, but limited outreach personnel hinders its ability to conduct outreach; thus, many veterans may be unaware of benefits and services for which they may be eligible.”

Veterans remain difficult to find and the consensus among CalVet Local Interagency Network Coordinators (LINC) is that libraries are effective and critical to this mission. As one CalVet LINC field coordinator explains, “Libraries are a force multiplier. Where there was only one of me, now with the VRCs there are eight.”

These observations became part of the program design for Veterans Connect, borrowing also from the California Library Literacy Services model utilizing volunteer tutors.

It made good sense to launch the program. Public libraries have traditionally been the place to start when seeking information. They have also given special attention to vulnerable populations.
Veterans represent a special case of need. For one, their numbers are growing. There are currently an estimated 21.8 million veterans in the US and an estimated 200,000 transitioning to civilian life every year. About 1.8 million of these live in California. Second, as a society we feel an obligation to support those who offered their lives in service to the needs of the country. Third, active duty often caused service-related health issues. And fourth, our political history made the reintegration of veterans into society more challenging. Interestingly, the 1945-1946 Annual Report of the San Diego Public Library lists veteran assistance for returning WWII veterans as a priority.\(^\text{11}\) No such entry was found on the Annual Reports from the end of the Vietnam War era.

Veterans Connect @ the Library began as a pilot project in FY 2012/13 with only three libraries and an initial LSTA funding of just under $60,000 and has grown since then to encompass 50 libraries across the state with an expected 10 additional sites in FY 2017/18 and a budget of $329,000. It was designed to find and assist veterans to begin the process of connection with their earned benefits and services. The LSTA grant funding model provides first year funding to set up a Veteran Resource Center (VRC) and second year funding with continued but reduced financial support.

Grant funding consists of monies for veteran related collection development, staff backfill, a laptop and printer and military banners, lifesize standup military figures and a roll up banner to increase VRC visibility, a bright orange branded Veterans Connect tablecloth, miscellaneous supplies, and a budget for social media advertising.\(^\text{12}\)

Funded libraries commit to:
- Initiate training with their CalVet LINC field coordinator & attend webinar training for staff
- Set up a Veteran Resource Center with a desk, phone and regular hours
- Recruit volunteers and have them self-train using CalVet online training modules
- Host at least two veteran related library programs annually
- Develop partnerships with at least five veteran service organizations
- Attend an annual full day conference
- Submit statistics ongoing
- Funds to provide public programs to educate veterans and the public about the needs of veterans and to promote the VRC
- Funds for a laptop and printer for volunteers to assist veterans and family members

After the official grant funding period ends, participation continues to include support in the form of updating resources, providing training options for staff and volunteers, and at least one annual conference for library staff. Annual full day conferences have been presented on at least an annual basis and often include a library volunteer.

These meetings have been presented regionally as well as a pre-conference option at the annual conference of the California Library Association (CLA). Library staff and volunteers rate these meetings highly for networking, training and the inspiration garnered from shared success stories.

Evaluation feedback from these conferences
indicate a high degree of satisfaction and a continued call for more opportunities to meet by both library staff and volunteers. In a recent online survey of volunteers, 40% requested additional meetings with other Veterans Connect libraries.

Despite the two year funding limit, award libraries have remained committed to the mission of the Veterans Connect program with only one library opting out in the last five years. The remarkable endurance and growth of the program speaks to the perfect alignment of this program with libraries, volunteers and the communities they serve.

Why Grantmaking?

Grantmaking is much more than just additional monies to individual libraries. Grantmaking provides a focus for service delivery. It affirms and highlights the state’s commitment to veterans affairs. Grantmaking, through its output and outcome requirements, can help provide the needed structure to ensure individual library efforts are effective and efficient. It can also help ensure that in the ever changing landscape of benefits and services to veterans, the most current and authentic information is available and accessible. The prestige of receiving a grant can raise the political capital within a community as “bragging rights” are an acknowledgement of a library’s commitment to one of its most vulnerable community groups. Grantmaking builds staff capacity and professional development particularly because the two year grant cycle provides sufficient time to polish staff skills. Finally, grantmaking provides a seal of approval that a program has been sufficiently vetted, potentially making it more attractive to additional funding from partners, foundations and private funds.

Our research indicates that librarians recognize and appreciate the statewide oversight of the program, particularly including:

- Collecting statistics and benchmarking
- Conference gatherings with staff and volunteers
- Veteran resource information updated regularly
- Staff and volunteer training updated
- Support for work-study volunteers

Organization and Purpose

The Veterans Connect program is administered by two dedicated part time program consultants, Karen Bosch Cobb and Jacquie Brinkley. Jacquie was instrumental in the original launch of Veterans Connect and the two have worked closely together to ensure a high standard of program delivery. Interviews with appreciative librarians across the state attest to their responsiveness and enthusiasm.

Veterans Connect operates on a lean budget. The two project administrators currently share a .5 FTE consultant position. Their project management oversight includes:

- Identifying potential library partners for new VRC sites and securing commitments
- Determining start-up budget funding and overseeing spending
- Providing six months of onboarding
support for new libraries as well as ongoing support and communications with all existing sites.

• Organizing and delivery of on-going training and professional development for library staff and volunteers, including at least one annual all day conference

• Providing statistical record keeping, staying current on veteran issues, and exploring opportunities to enhance collaborations on a local, state and national level.

In addition to the project administrators, Veterans Connect maintains a consultant for website and data management and social media enhancements, equal to about .1 FTE or 240 hours per year. 14

The Pacific Library Partnership, a Northern California regional library cooperative, administers the financial aspects of the project.

The California Department of Veterans Affairs, CalVet, is a non-financial partner with Veterans Connect, providing online training modules for library staff and volunteers, printed supplies such as the popular California Veterans Resource Book, onsite training, and attendance at grand openings and major events. Library staff and volunteers also generally have direct phone access to the LINC field coordinator in their region for additional on-the-ground support.15

The stated purpose of the Veterans Connect grant is “to reintegrate California veterans into the California workforce and our communities in order to provide them the quality of life of other Americans.”16 It has four stated goals:

• Provide veterans benefits and local service information to veterans and family members, links to other local organizations serving veterans especially local County Veteran Service Offices (CVSO), CalVet and

the federal VA

• Increase registered veterans in the CalVet Reintegration system through use of the myCalVet website

• Increase California veteran benefit claims

• Increase use of libraries by veterans and their families

**Veteran Resource Center Models**

Veteran Resource Centers (VRC) are as diverse as the communities they serve. While they each share common elements based on the funding model, over the past five years VRCs have adapted service delivery to the needs of their particular communities and space availability. Space is typically at a premium in libraries, and several use repurposed space in order to provide a VRC. San Francisco, for example, utilizes an Adult Literacy Room that is transformed each weekday between noon and 5:00 pm into a popular Veteran Resource Center, providing multiple laptops, sanctuary, and volunteer support. Veterans appreciate the additional resources and support available by virtue of being closely situated to a larger literacy and learning center within the library. The Camarillo Library VRC also shared a room with Adult Literacy until it was able to
re-purpose a photocopier room into a home of its own.

The Rancho Cordova branch was able to move a self-check station in order to carve out space for its busy VRC, and added modular panels for a makeshift private area to meet with veterans about sensitive matters. Arroyo Grande, a southern branch of the San Luis Obispo (SLO) library system, built a semi-permanent modular office complete with a white noise machine for added privacy in the Friends of the Library's book sorting room. In place of the traditional volunteer model, the SLO CVSO provides an accredited officer two days a week to conduct full benefit reviews and benefit claims filing by appointment. Where they lack the social benefit aspect of the volunteer model, having a dedicated CVSO on site means that veterans and family members can have their claims filed directly into the Cal Vet and VA systems. In Whittier, a Bond Measure vote to renovate and expand the library will be held in November, which if successful would see the VRC move from cramped second floor quarters downstairs closer to the main entrance.  

One of the earliest libraries to open a VRC, the Point Loma branch library of the San Diego Public Library system, has since transitioned into primarily a resource center for active duty military and their families in response to the large numbers of service members in their neighborhood. These users will eventually become veterans and access to veteran benefit information is still a primary focus. They also conduct on-foot outreach to the homeless living in the beachfront areas to let them know that the library can help connect them with services.

Some libraries are also experimenting with having a mobile popup VRC that can visit other branch libraries as well as participate at outreach events throughout a community.

While not currently connected with the Veterans Connect program, another model being tested at the Imperial Beach branch of the San Diego County library system utilizes a kiosk booth where a veteran can conduct a Skype meeting with a County Veteran Services Office (CVSO) officer at a distance. While beyond the scope of this evaluation, it is noted that the kiosk is still in a pilot stage and utilization statistics are not known. While this might be an idea for further investigation, our interviewees have expressed concerns regarding how supporting documents would get scanned or faxed by the claimant, the problem with some scanned signatures not being allowed by some agencies, and question how veterans with low technology skills might manage to navigate this system alone.

This research report seeks to evaluate the Veterans Connect @ the Library over its five year history through a series of quantitative and qualitative measures to determine whether it has met its purpose and recommendations for where to go from here.
METHODOLOGY

This evaluation makes use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

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<td>16 hours of in depth face to face interviews were recorded and transcribed in order that a qualitative coding analysis could be done. These interviews included:</td>
<td>Quantitative data collected over five years:</td>
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<td>• 11 VRC staff members</td>
<td>• Comment cards from VRC users</td>
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<td>• 1 CVSO officer</td>
<td>• Statistical reporting by Veterans Connect libraries, including donations, volunteer numbers, hours and type, number of interactions, number of reintegration forms completed, number of new partnerships, and the number of veteran-related programs and attendance figures</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 8 VRC volunteers that were also veterans</td>
<td>Data collected for this evaluation:</td>
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<td>• 3 VRC civilian volunteers</td>
<td>• Online survey of staff (55 responses) and volunteers (57 responses)</td>
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<td>• 1 VRC work-study student</td>
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<td>• 3 veteran users of the VRC</td>
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<td>Additionally, unrecorded interviews were conducted with:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• 6 CalVet LINC field coordinators</td>
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<td>• 1 VRC staff interview</td>
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Quantitative Data Analysis

The outputs of the project were measured in relation to the funds allocated and in this way return on investment (ROI) was calculated.

This project has received sole funding from CSL/LSTA of $1.27 million dollars over the last five years, or slightly more than a quarter of a million dollars per year. The project was piloted in FY 2012/13 with three California libraries, and currently has 50 VRCs with another 10 expected to onboard in FY 2017/18.

As more libraries join the program and set up physical Veteran Resource Centers, the cost per library is falling significantly. This is indicative of a project that scales efficiently. Total grant funding divided by the number of participant libraries shows a reduction from a high of $19,877 per library in Year One, to a current low of $8,731 per library in Year Five. These costs may eventually level as additional libraries are added. The cost of annual conferences and training is fully funded for all active Veterans Connect libraries beyond the two year grant cycle and this will eventually increase the budget outlay. Further, the need for additional program oversight may occur with some unknown larger set of libraries. Though it was beyond the scope of this evaluation to determine future growth and budget forecasts, it would be a recommended exercise.

The cost per interaction with a veteran or family member is less than $50. As explained later in this report, it could take

5 Year Veterans Connect investment: $1,272,243
# of Veterans reached: 27,675
Cost per interaction: $45.97
about 30 VRC interactions that lead to a federal VA benefit claim to break even on the $1.2 million invested in the program. While there is no mechanism currently in place to track VA benefits received as a result of library interactions, there have been over 27,000 such interactions to date.

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Beyond the outputs and outcomes measured by quantitative data lies a rich field of nuanced data that cannot be captured by numbers. For this we conducted a series of face to face in-depth interviews with Veterans Connect library staff, volunteers and veterans that use the services. In this way we were able to dig deeper and identify the impact the program is having in a community.

By its very nature, qualitative data generally tends to be more complex than the organization of statistical quantitative data. Field interviews are more art than science and their success depends on the special skill set of the interviewer. Once the interviews are transcribed, the text is assigned labels, allowing us to group and compare responses, as well as illuminate any emergent themes, ideally uncovering exactly where the program strikes its major and minor chords.

Approximately 16 hours of in-depth face to face interviews were recorded and transcribed for qualitative coding analysis. These interviews included 11 VRC staff members, 1 CVSO officer, 8 VRC volunteers that were also veterans, 3 VRC civilian volunteers, 1 VRC work-study student, and 3 veteran users of the VRC. Additionally, unrecorded interviews were conducted with six CalVet LINC field coordinators and one VRC staff interview.

These interviews were conducted onsite in library VRCs across the state including three large central libraries and six smaller libraries and branches.¹⁸

The participant interviews represent a critical reflection of the program. Seeking to understand the program from the perspective of those involved has the potential to yield the most revealing insights. We are, by nature, storytellers and derive deep meaning from the stories that we hear. Stories may direct us to our moral compass. They provide meaning, context and direction, in a world of chaos, information overload and loss. By allowing participants to speak in their own voices, we are able to code their narratives and conceptualize the underlying patterns.

The coded narratives presented themes along a broad series of thirteen outcome measures which were grouped into outcomes that impact three populations: outcomes with individual impacts, outcomes that impact the broader community, and outcomes that impact the library and staff.

Outcomes are generally considered to be changes in skills, knowledge, behavior, attitude or life condition in a target population. While the primary goal of the Veterans Connect program is to connect veterans with their earned benefits, our analysis reveals several additional unintended and noteworthy results.

**Impacts on individuals**

- HEHE - Health Education Housing Employment
- Personal relationships & supports
- Skill development
- Well-being

**Impacts on the broader community**

- Civic engagement
- Economic impacts
- Equity
- Leisure
Social trust and connectedness

**Impacts on the library and staff**
- Professional development
- Staff cohesion
- Library support and political capital
- Increased library usage by the target population

**Datasets and Limitations**

New libraries open their VRCs along a varied timetable each grant cycle, somewhat limiting data comparison across years as some inconsistency may be reflected in the data manipulation by annual counts.

- Comment cards from VRC users over five years, intermittent and at the initiative of the library
- Statistical reporting by Veteran Connect libraries, with some changed reporting requirements across the years, including donations (in-kind and cash/match), volunteer numbers and hours and type, number of veteran interactions, number of reintegration forms completed, number of veteran families served, number of partnerships with other organizations, number of veteran-related events and attendance figures
- Online survey of staff and volunteers
- In depth face to face interviews, conducted at nine libraries and branches
- Interviews with 6 CalVet LINC field coordinators

From the hundreds of approaches for measuring the impact of social programs, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) suggests two conceptual frameworks for thinking about how libraries “spark change” in their communities: societal well being and collective impact.\(^\text{19}\)

The idea of social well being grew out of the recognition that wellness cannot simply be measured by economic outputs. This framework considers the interplay between economics, diversity, health, education, cultural engagement, housing, political voice, environment and social tensions. The IMLS study considers the role of the library in enhancing social well being along many of these dimensions, particularly through strategic partnerships. Now the search for return on investment (ROI) becomes a much more complex goal. How exactly are social well being and community impacts measured?

Qualitative data is particularly useful in helping understand how outputs happen, and where they may be replicated, by uncovering both processes and the key elements of those processes that impact change. For example, a count can be made of all the reintegration forms input into CalVet as a result of the Veterans Connect program, however this alone cannot explain how the program accomplishes this and what elements are at play during the actual process from setting up a VRC desk to having someone complete a form.

To capture the value that accrues to an individual from being assisted at a Veteran Resource Center requires a series of judgments about impacts. The social impacts or outcomes discussed in this evaluation have been teased out from the hundreds of pages of transcribed interviews and are ordered along three main types: individual impacts, community impacts, and library related impacts.\(^\text{20}\)

Before an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Veterans Connect program can be completed, it will be helpful to situate what the research revealed about the barriers encountered by the target population and why connecting veterans to their benefits was seen as challenging enough to spark this project in the beginning.
REDUCING BARRIERS
How pointing in the right direction helps and heals

One of the core functions of a library is reducing barriers to information. Veterans tend to suffer more obstacles to access than many other target audiences.

By understanding the barriers to veterans, and how the Veterans Connect program ameliorates those barriers, a foundation can be established for understanding how the Veterans Connect program works.

Barriers were a common theme throughout the in-depth interviews. The three main sources of barriers identified were: individual circumstances, government obstacles and library obstacles. From this list, we then sought to understand how the implementation of a Veteran Resource Center mitigated these barriers.

**Barriers: Individual Circumstances**

The first barrier is related to the circumstances of individual veterans, especially those with mental health issues, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and substance abuse. Declining health due to age or service related issues such as hearing loss and exposure to Agent Orange may also impact the ability to access service. Anecdotal reports from veteran and civilian volunteers and library staff indicate that veterans may be too proud to ask for help, see others in need as more deserving, and lack the technological and mobility skills required to navigate the complex veteran benefits systems. Veterans are also reluctant to access earned military benefits for a number of personal reasons. Older veterans were particularly described as “very proud.”

“They don’t come in until they are forced.”

“They literally aren’t coming in here until there is a problem with their insurance that won’t cover certain things, such as nursing
“There is just too much fragmentation, too many obstacles there for the veteran. Veterans with PTSD for example, they need direct access, there can’t be barriers. They can’t be in situations where no one answers the phone. They can’t be in situations where they can’t easily walk into a building. And there can’t be other kinds of barriers such as no access to transportation. They don’t have vehicles and they don’t have bus passes.”  Volunteer, Veteran

While the rate of veterans experiencing homelessness has been decreasing, almost one in ten homeless are veterans. According to CalVet, “America’s homeless veterans have served in every U.S. war, but nearly half served in the Vietnam-era.”

These same barriers can contribute to a lack of job opportunities and resulting economic and housing instability. A lack of financial interactions between veterans and volunteers at the library.

Limited office hours - Government service offices typically close earlier than libraries and do not offer weekend hours, making access a particular challenge for those working.

Need for appointments - The need for an appointment with a CVSO or the VA is particularly difficult for those in crisis, those
unable to navigate any complex systems due to mental health issues or age, and those without access to a phone or transportation. Those suffering a substance abuse disorder are also less likely to be able to plan the several weeks in advance that may be required to secure an appointment.

“We looked at the Cal-Vet book and it said that the office was open until 3:00. First, we couldn’t find the office and after wandering around the complex, we found it by accident. There’s a sign on the door that says their office closed at 2:00. It didn’t have a phone number on it. It’s after 2:00. We looked at the book for the phone number and left a message explaining who we were and saying that we wanted to help veterans. It took three phone calls to get an appointment. So, we make the appointment. We go back. The security screening was almost more daunting than a TSA screening. We carried our bags just in case we wanted to show them something. We had a pair of scissors in our bag that we use at the library and that was a security risk. For someone with PTSD you will trigger everything in them for fight or flight by this time. It was almost 20 minutes before we got up to meet with the person we had an appointment with. We thought, ‘Wow.‘ It wasn’t that the people there weren’t sincere and it wasn’t that they weren’t helping them, but it’s just too much for the average veteran trying to negotiate the system.” Volunteer, Veteran took six visits and six weeks for the veteran to secure his pass.24

**Location and transportation issues** -
Issues of transportation to health facilities and veteran service organizations can be hampered by distance and lack of money for public transit or gas. Volunteers relate the story of one “frequent flyer” in the VRC, a homeless veteran who was assaulted and left with a fractured hip. After emergency surgery, he was released to a motel for one week with a walker. In his attempts to secure a three month disabled bus pass, his doctor’s paperwork was turned down three times after three visits to the City’s transit office and making another three visits the doctor’s office for corrections. It ultimately\n
**Problems with documentation** -
Volunteers have encountered issues with the National Personnel Records Center fire of 1973 which destroyed more than 16 million military records. Another persistent problem for the homeless is having ID lost or stolen

“The doctor is only seeing Medicaid patients on Thursdays from 6:30-9:30 in the morning. If you miss that appointment, you are out of luck until next week or when you can get back into the appointment system. This guy did his due diligence, went back there, got the form again, tried to turn it in again. He was turned down again. He brought it back to me. They said the form wasn’t filled out properly and denied him again. And meanwhile he still has a broken hip. So, I said, ‘okay, I hate to ask you again, could you please try to go back up there, but make sure they fill out every single line and ask them to do it in blue ink so it doesn’t look like a copy.’ By then, it was six weeks later. I give the guy credit, he did do it. He is not the most diplomatic person. He has low patience and every little thing will make him tell people off. These are the things these people face.” Volunteer, Veteran
and the challenges of reissuing due to cost, lack of a physical address, and lack of computer skills to fill out the required forms. Several volunteers spoke about the problems with how the military documented medical issues during service time and how this affects the veterans eligibility status for in-service related medical care. While not impossible, these issues typically require a high degree of persistence to overcome.

**Challenges with discharge upgrades** - In order to receive most earned benefits, a veteran must have an honorable discharge status. The criteria for upgrading from less than honorable or dishonorable discharge has changed over the years and is still changing. In years previous, homosexuality was a dischargeable offense, as was addiction. Minor clashes resulting in less than honorable discharges are now sometimes recognized as having been aggravated by combat-induced PTSD and may be reversible. However it can be a long and difficult process to find corroborating unit members to assist with recreating their service record or to provide the witness and personal statements which may help secure a veterans upgrade claim.

**Constantly changing eligibility criteria** - What was once not a benefit may now be a benefit. PTSD, for example, did not become a medical diagnosis until 1980, years after the end of the Vietnam war. It wasn’t until 2014 that a PTSD diagnosis could be used to reapply for an upgrade of discharge. The VA has officially directed staff to apply “liberal consideration” to such applications. This one change alone is expected to affect some 80,000 veterans who may not even be aware of the opportunity. The current White House administration has also enacted significant changes to veteran services and even CVSOs are challenged to keep up.

**Bureaucracy** - The immensity of the VA bureaucracy has left some veterans discouraged and with a lack of trust in the process. The offerings for veterans and “where to start” with the process are overwhelming. Library volunteers take 7.5 hours of online training to learn the general basics about earned benefits, and many hours of ongoing training to keep up with benefit changes.

**Sheer number of organizations** - The number of organizations providing services to veterans is listed in the hundreds, if not thousands, which adds immensely to the complexity of accessing the right service that may be useful to a veteran in need. The VA Directory of federal organizations serving veterans, for example, is 76 pages in length.25

**Lack of local resources** - Local community resources for veterans were indicated to be ‘poor’ or ‘fair’ by 50% of the volunteers surveyed. The other 50% felt they were ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’. Access to local resources may be expected to be more limited in smaller regions.

**Talk, no action** - Some interviewees
suggested that the local political rhetoric to end homelessness for veterans is not always followed up with effective actions.

**Barriers: Library Obstacles**

**Computer Access** - Veterans and staff spoke of the appeal of VRC computers because they do not typically impose the same time limits on these computers as they do on those found elsewhere in the library. Time limits on use are a barrier for those veterans who are technologically challenged or need extra time for filling out complex forms.

**Library Rules** - Even the need for a library card to access public computers can become too much of a barrier for some to overcome. One volunteer relates the story of noticing an agitated younger man pacing back and forth in the library parking lot whom he identified as a possible veteran due to his “haircut, his build, his tattoos and what is coming out of his mouth”. He was able to calm him down enough to discover that he was unable to wait in line for a library card needed to access the computers. “So we sat down and talked and I found out he came in to use the computers and had to go through a whole process to get an ID card to get a library card and he didn’t want to stick around for it. He’d already been kicked out of his house, he wasn’t allowed to talk to his grandma. All he had was his car and one tank of gas. We are talking acute depression.” The volunteer, a retired police officer and veteran himself, was concerned that the veteran was at risk for suicide.

**VRC Signage** - A significant percent of client survey responses indicate that they “stumbled upon” the VRC signage inside the library. Signage is key. Prime location of the VRC desk may not be available due to lack of space.

**Lack of Awareness** - There are challenges with marketing, outreach and advertising to let the community know the VRC exists.

**Volunteer Application Process** - Some libraries have challenges with recruiting volunteers, particularly where the city controls the process independent of the library.

“I assisted a veteran get a Congressional inquiry. He was virtually ignored by the V.A., unhelped by his CVSO for 4 years, after appealing a denial of his original Claim for Compensation, even though his records had the supporting documentation for his contention and appeal. Finally, this spring his case was resolved and properly adjudicated.” Volunteer, Veteran
Veteran VRC Use: In Their Own Words

Ron, Retired Senior, Air Force Veteran, Vietnam Era
Experiencing Homelessness

"I am a homeless vet. I was in the Air Force for four years during Vietnam but I was never in Vietnam. I was an electronic computer electrician in air defense in places like Montana and Nevada."

"After I got out, I looked at the VA at that time for job help but it was another one of those tight times and I didn’t have the experience so I went to college. I went to Cal State Long Beach on the GI bill and ended up getting a degree in accounting. That was kind of bad time to be a veteran or GI. They told us that if you’re flying home in a uniform when you get to the airport, change into civvies or else you may have problems. That’s not good. That’s not how the veterans are treated now. Veterans are respected. They weren’t then. It was the kind of thing you didn’t brag to people."

"When I got out of college, I ended up working for the IRS. Later I was providing care for my mother until she died at the end of 2009. In 2010 I moved up to the guest house of some really old friends who lived in another city from here. I lived there for six years and they were getting old and decided they had to move so I had to move out."

"When they moved, I didn’t have enough money to pay rent. I was only paying them $500 a month but even that was more than I could afford. Suddenly, I didn’t have any place to live and I’m living out of my car. It has only become bad since I have become homeless."

"I can get depressed and get down about it. The people up here are really friendly and they are always willing to talk with you. I’m up here a lot. It helps to come and see what they have on their bulletin board, if there is anything new, if there is a new meeting, if the congresswoman is coming up and I can ask her if I have a problem. There are a lot reasons to come up here other than the fact that I get bored in my car."

"The first thing they told me here is, why don’t you try to apply for a pension. The first place they sent me was where I could apply for a pension. I didn’t think I’d be eligible for pension or any VA help because I was never injured. Exactly two months from when I applied for a pension I started getting checks for $330 a month, not a huge amount, but it helps, it helps a lot. That extra money has made a big difference in my life. From basically living at the end of the month on nothing, to now, I have spare money. I’m not living now from paycheck to paycheck. I have social security and the veteran’s check."

"They’ve been working on trying to find me a place to live. The biggest thing they did was introduce me to a gentleman who does miracles with the vets. He works with the VA out of east LA. He really helps. I had to go to the VA in west Los Angeles on Tuesday. He met me in east L.A. at 6 o’clock in the morning and he drove me there, and all around the VA campus in west LA. He really helped me get oriented and get help there. We accomplished a lot of different things there. He’s going to take me there again on Monday."

"I had a VA physical and they are going
to give my prescriptions for free, which is nice. And, they are going to give me glasses. I've had them so long that they are falling apart. One thing is when you live in your car, you tend to fall asleep and roll on your glasses."

"The library volunteers helped me get in contact with the VA when I didn't really know how to do it. If you just call the VA and say, I need help, it’s a lot harder than if someone up here tells you how the VA can help you and where you can go to get that help and who are the best people to talk to."

"You need contacts and they give you the contacts. That's the main thing they do. They don't do the work. They help you with it. If you need help filling out forms, they'll help you fill out the forms. I've had the volunteers, as soon as I say what I need, look up what I need, and find out what will help, such as shelters. They are very helpful."

"I didn't know the libraries had something like this. When I first lost my place to live I didn't even know how to start, where to go first. I started having to find something to do during the day and I started coming up to the library and I saw the signs and I thought I'd go up there and see what they can do for me."

"Now, I come up several times a week. Sometimes you need someone to talk to. They have a lot of veterans who work here and we have something in common. They definitely point you to the right direction. They've done a lot of things and just a friendly voice sometimes saying "it's a long process but you're making progress and things will get better" helps. You feel like someone is on your side. That's the big thing. Someone is going out of their way to help you. They don't do it directly, they point you to the people who can help you. Sometimes I've needed to fill out forms, and they fill out the forms for me. Sometimes it's just hard to get things done; they help you with things. I am really happy with this place."

"For example, I didn't realize there was a church two blocks north that has a soup kitchen open five days a week for an hour in the afternoon. The church also takes care of providing you with email service and they let you use them as a mailing address and you can pick it up every day."

"There are other veteran things that they pointed out that I had never heard of. They have booklets here with all of the resources. For example, Interfaith Food Services—you go there and they give you a whole grocery bag full of food."

"I make friends outside of the library too. I make friends in the parking area where many people walk their dogs. I've gotten to know them. One of them whose husband died a few weeks ago just gave me a whole bunch of clothes that fit which is hard to find when you are as short as I am. She has offered me to use a spare bathroom she has that I can take a shower once in awhile."

"I do try to keep an upbeat attitude, but sometimes I get down. They keep telling me that things are going to get a lot better, that I am going to get a home. I keep working at it but sometimes it's hard knowing that you need to keep going and there are always problems. I think it is a great program. I just think that there should be more of them in more cities. It would be a lot harder if I didn't have this program to help me. They are always looking for things that will help me."
How do Veterans Connect volunteers assist with barriers?

In their own words, here is how volunteers talk about what they do:

**Building Trust and Respect**
- Building trust over time
- “You may not see somebody out there who is actually seeing you showing up every day. And that in itself is part of building the trust for people who eventually when they are ready will come up and talk to you”
- Showing respect and appreciation for veterans
- Providing all of the time a veteran needs
- Creating a safe space
- Being patient and an active listener
- Being a trusted person
- Providing a comfortable place away from the hustle and bustle of the rest of the library

**Just Being There**
- Providing consistent service hours - “You don't help once and they are good for life, it is ongoing”
- Taking initiative where staff lacks time to assist
- Providing social contact
- Always showing up so they are there when a veteran is ready to talk

**Finding Solutions**
- Finding local solutions to local problems such as the $500 emergency cash fund sponsored by Lions group for clients in crisis
- Finding an actual person to help
- Being an intermediary - providing triage for CVSO/LINC/VA by bringing crisis cases to the top
- Drawing out other hurdles a veteran may face: as trust built and the initial inquiry was taken care of, a volunteer discovered that the veteran had a police record in another state, which lead to the next interaction, connecting them with a pro bono veteran lawyer
- Filling out forms
- Translating job experience
- Helping with technology - print forms, scan documents, fax forms, receive phone calls, assist with email setup, provide extended computer time
- Linking to other library services - meditation groups, computer classes, adult literacy classes, special programming
- Being a rule navigator - A trained volunteer starts to learn all of the local rules so they are not sending someone off blindly for services they may not qualify for
- Making referrals to real people, including working phone numbers and organizations that have solutions in place
- Handing out toiletry kits
- Distributing California Veteran Resource books wherever they go

**Teamwork**
- Creating teamwork by being ‘On My Team’ - Several volunteers may work with the same veteran over time - multiple needs means multiple visits

**Providing Advocacy**
- Find the right person to help whether it is the local church offering mail service, the local Congressperson, or a direct line to the CalVet LINC field coordinator
- Rephrasing issues so service providers can understand what the veteran requires
- Creating alliances with veterans and helping other veterans
- Providing community goodwill
- Understanding the duty of service

**Providing Support**
- Hand holding for those who cannot do it alone
- Acting as a Benefits Coach
• Acting as a go-between
• Being a mediator
• Acting as a guide and mentor
• Inspiring hope
• Creative problem solving
• Providing face to face interaction
• Being a real live person to talk to
• Pointing the veteran in the right direction
• Flushing out needs

• Talking veterans through a complicated process
• Convincing veterans they have “money on the table”
• Providing emotional support - “Someone on your side”
• Putting Suicide Crisis Line keyrings on clients keychains

“I think we're bringing a lot of the pride back for veterans. The climate has changed so dramatically. That's another reason why people that have never come here before are coming in now, because now they are proud to say they are veteran. Even those that have an other than honorable discharge, or court-martialed, I see them coming in and wanting to get upgraded and get benefits now instead of just feeling shameful and undeserving.”

Volunteer, Veteran

Veterans are specified as a distinct population in the California State Library LSTA Five-Year Plan 2013-2017 which asserts to “develop and support library programs and services that address the information and resource needs of veterans and their families.”

The Veterans Connect @ the Library, while meeting this goal, is also instrumental in meeting at least three additional programs under the Community Connections banner, including: Life Stages, the development and support of library services that respond to the changing stages of life; Volunteerism, which seeks to encourage libraries to leverage the unique experience of community members seeking opportunities to serve; and Community Engagement, which aims to position libraries as centers for civic engagement.

Life Stages (Goal VII, Program I)

For our state veteran population, life stages are constantly changing and so are their information needs. For example, as older veterans with limited income they are at greater risk of becoming homeless.

Medical concerns and the need for care facilities also rise with age. As one County Veteran Service Officer put it, “I see a lot more family members and friends bringing elderly veterans who are being placed in assisted living or nursing homes. They are coming here to see if they can get more assistance. A lot of them might never before have accessed their benefits. Or maybe they weren't eligible years ago but now they are. So when we establish a relationship with somebody, they're going to be dealing with us for the rest of their days, because there is always going to be something.” The library VRCs have been well-positioned to assist these veterans and their families as their life changes.

Community Engagement (Goal VII, Program IV)

Community Engagement is an ongoing focus for Veterans Connect libraries as grant requirements include the development and
presentation of at least two veteran-focused programs per year. Statistics gathered over the last five years of the program indicate that the number of programs delivered, program attendance and community partnerships developed significantly exceed the minimum requirements year after year. This commitment shows no signs of abating despite the lack of direct program funding provided after year two of the grant cycle. A recent full day conference, Mission Connect: Your Programming Duffel Bag, was held for Veterans Connect library staff in order to provide staff with additional programming tools.

**835 veteran programs presented**

**17,262 attendance**

Programs have ranged from simple veteran book clubs to women veteran panels to Veteran Job Fairs to a Tuskegee Airmen visit. While some are designed specifically for a veteran-only audience, others are presented for full community engagement, with library staff indicating how some of these programs are helping to “bridge the military-civilian divide.”

**Volunteerism (Goal VII, Program II)**

While not specified as one of the program goals of the Veterans Connect program, volunteerism is a special instance for program evaluation, both because it supports CSL and IMLS goals, and because interviews with staff, volunteers and veterans all attest to the intersection of volunteerism and healing in a significant way.

Veterans Connect @ the Library provides a unique and outstanding volunteer opportunity for community members that they have found to be enriching and healing. In particular, veteran volunteers report a strong degree of commitment to the mission.

Without exception, older volunteers that were also veterans share how volunteering to assist other veterans has alleviated their own suffering and expedited their healing. Volunteers find their way to the Veterans Connect program through a variety of pathways including:

- City-mandated volunteer web pages and application processes
- VolunteerMatch postings
• Direct recruitment by library staff
• Call for volunteers at VFW, American Legion, or other veteran service organization
• Radio or print announcements
• Veteran Work-Study programs through local colleges or Cal Vet
• Past veteran clients that now want to train and participate as a volunteer.

**Veteran Volunteers**

The total number of volunteer hours attributable to the program during the past 60 months this metric was collected was 33,056. For some volunteers, including advanced senior veterans, this was their first instance of ever volunteering during their lifetime. For other volunteers, they sought opportunities to continue to serve their communities and country. As one veteran volunteer said, “When I took the oath to serve, it was for life.”

This willingness to serve has now been substantiated by the Veterans Civic Health Index, created in 2015 and updated annually by the nonprofit organization, Got Your 6. It was built on the idea that “the veteran population plays a crucial role in revitalizing civic engagement and strengthening communities nationwide. Due to their training, skill sets, and proclivity toward service, veterans are unique models for small- and large-scale problem solving as well as widespread cooperation.” 29

As the 2016 infographic on page 27 affirms, veterans consistently demonstrate higher levels of engagement than non-veterans on all civic health indicators, including volunteering a significantly higher number of hours per year than civilians. This is borne out in discussions with veteran volunteers who indicate a high degree of commitment to their library Veteran Resource Center.

“As a veteran, I wanted to give back to fellow veterans and show appreciation for their sacrifices for serving our country.” Volunteer, Veteran

Volunteers comprise a critical cornerstone of the Veterans Connect program and a critical key to sustainability.

In the same way that the volunteer tutor model works in library Adult Literacy programs, the volunteer in the Veterans Connect program represents a fundamental key. Once the funding and library commitment are secured, the most essential element becomes the recruitment, training and care of volunteers.

While some libraries struggle with maintaining a large enough cohort of volunteers, those volunteers that are older and veterans themselves, seem to be the most engaged and committed. This is in no way meant to discourage successful civilian volunteers already dedicated to Veterans Connect but merely to point out perceived difference. While the program has very dedicated civilian volunteers and they certainly have success as VRC volunteers, the greatest return seems to be the recruitment of veterans. Volunteer surveys would suggest that civilian volunteers were more likely to be discouraged by not having veterans to help every shift they work.

Considering the cost of churn on limited staff time, it is appropriate for the VRC program to dedicate further efforts to assist libraries recruit for success.

A number of reasons for volunteer veteran success in the VRC emerged from the evaluation and are further borne out by academic research on volunteerism:
• Some veteran clients are only willing to speak with a veteran. There is a natural bond between veterans that no civilian can fully penetrate.
• Veterans are dedicated to service.
• Veterans are gifted at veteran outreach and always on the lookout for other veterans who may need the services of the

VRC. Rather than wait for people to approach the desk, they seem more able to read the subtle clues when someone walks by and glances at the tablecloth, and then ask, "Have you served?"
• Very significantly, many of the volunteers talk about the healing aspects of serving fellow veterans. Veterans at the desk become a self-reinforcing loop as every interaction adds to their own healing journey.
• Veterans receive intrinsic reward from simple daily encounters with other veterans. Typically intrinsic rewards are stronger and less easily shaken than extrinsic motivations, thereby suggestive of a lower turnover rate. It is worth noting that 20% of volunteers responding to an online survey indicated that this was the first time they have ever volunteered in their lives. Again, veteran volunteers were less likely to report a concern that the VRC desk was too quiet, as they seem to understand the need to be there on a consistent basis so as to be available when a veteran is ready to talk. It may also be that they approach more library patrons asking, "have you served?" and not waiting for a reluctant veteran to make the first move.

**Volunteer Retention**

The research on volunteerism indicates that retention is increased when a variety of activities are performed such as mentoring.
and coaching. Retention rates are highest for those who were invited to participate by someone in the volunteer organization.\textsuperscript{30} Interviews with long term VRC volunteers bear this out.

Opportunities for training and professional development also add to volunteer retention rates. After initial training, the VRC volunteer is able to use their life experience and self-directed information-seeking to perform a variety of tasks including providing ongoing direction for clients.

Consistency of volunteer staffing and hours, is another critical element of the program as volunteers repeatedly described how veterans in the library often need to build trust before they are willing to engage with anyone about their needs. As one volunteer explained, “You may not see somebody out there who is actually seeing you showing up every day. And that in itself is part of building the trust for people who eventually, when they are ready, will come up and talk to you. Especially with the older veterans, they are very often leery of offers from nonprofits and agencies. They’ve been through it before and been disappointed. Maybe some of them don’t have a very good opinion of the VA. So they may say to themselves, oh here’s another a person that’s going to be here today and gone tomorrow.”

The combination of the appeal of the VRC volunteer opportunity, with the strong indicators of veteran engagement in volunteer service, and with the effectiveness of veterans speaking with other veterans, would suggest that focusing efforts on fortifying the volunteer program at the state level would be beneficial and would increase the scalability of the Veterans Connect program. This could include an increased level of focus on continued and upgraded training, increased volunteer involvement at VRC conferences and a structured program for the care and capacity management of volunteers such as a recognition program with CalVet or Governor-level involvement. Finally, the development of an online statistical gathering tool, perhaps with a mobile component, would ensure that valuable volunteer interaction data is gathered on a consistent and ongoing basis, critical to measuring true outcomes and

“Recently, a mother of a post-911 era veteran approached the VRC desk, and asked about the purpose of the desk. I explained to her that I am volunteer and that the desk serves as a resource to connect military veterans and their dependents with the benefits and services they’ve earned. As I gave this mother more detailed information about various specific types of services I noticed she was most interested in learning more about services related to ‘PTSD’. She was also interested in knowing if I was a veteran and about my combat experiences. After briefly sharing some of my veteran experiences she finally shared information with me about her son who is an Army veteran suffering from PTSD. I had the impression that she was interviewing me to determine if I would be able to assist her. This was not an issue for me as I understand many vet related matters involve sensitivity and trust.” Volunteer, Veteran
attracting future funding.

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<tr>
<th>VRC Volunteer Survey</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>63 %</strong> Veterans</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>37 %</strong> Civilian</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>20 %</strong> First Time Volunteers - 72% of first time volunteers were veterans</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>63 %</strong> Age 65+</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>41 %</strong> Would like to be more involved, help with veteran programming</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>38 %</strong> Use the library more since becoming a volunteer</td>
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**Veterans Healing Veterans**

Interview analysis consistently reveals that the act of volunteering is highly beneficial, not only for the VRC user, but also for the volunteer. These effects are confirmed by another research review compiled by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) office which suggests that volunteering leads to an improvement in both physical and mental health. Social ties are strengthened, which help guard against depression and lead to a greater sense of self-worth. Further, studies reveal that those with chronic or serious illness experienced increased well-being and pain reduction when serving as peer mentors for others experiencing chronic pain - benefits assessed as positive outcomes beyond what the medical system could achieve.

As the California population ages, the expansion of volunteerism exhibited by the Veterans Connect program is worthy of additional study for its potential impact on state health care costs and quality of life, particularly the program to grow exponentially across the state. Finding satisfying and engaging volunteer opportunities is key to these health and welfare outcomes and the VRC volunteer assignment is certainly recognized by its current volunteers as a deserving and rewarding service.

In order for these health benefits to accrue, a volunteering threshold of about 100 hours per year must be met. Considering that veterans volunteer a significantly higher number of hours per year than the civilian average, and the inherent preference for veterans to connect with veteran volunteers, there could be a perfect opportunity to assist veterans of all ages by engaging them in the Veterans Connect program.

"I was a B-52 Navigator during the Cold War/Vietnam era. Early in the Vietnam war our unit spent 6 months flying missions over South East Asia. Our typical bomb load was 106 five hundred pound bombs. We always flew in wave of three and multiple waves. “Friendly forces” were usually within 1 kilometer of the drop zone and we never knew if we hit our own troops given our altitude and the effect of the blast waves. For me, part of volunteering is to try to help those who may have suffered from that part of my life.”

Volunteer, Veteran
Volunteer VRC Use: In Their Own Words

California Public Library VRC Volunteer and Retired Soldier

"I am paying it forward. It was the VFW that saved my bacon and kept me out of prison. When I got out in the 1970s I wasn't treated very well. When I came home on leave, with my GI haircut, I was refused service. I went to an auto parts store to try and buy a carburetor and the long-haired hippie dude took his carburetor off the shelf and said he didn't have any for me. And that made me angry. And I was not the type of guy to be angry. I was a pacifist of sorts. I got out of the service and for six months couldn't find a job. What the service trained me for I wasn't physically qualified for. So on my way to look for a fight, I stopped at the VFW to get juiced up and the sergeant there recognized it and took me under his wing and the VFW gave me a job and I had work. And now I'm paying it forward. That's why I'm volunteering here."

"Nobody knows the veteran better than another veteran. My dad is a good example of that. About the last five years of his life I noticed that he wasn't watching war movies anymore. He wasn't even able to watch his John Wayne movies anymore. I had rescued all of his wartime and Veteran memorabilia. He had a pair of wooden shoes from Holland full of signatures and one day I brought them over to his house. And that's when he broke down. 60 years later. That's when he started telling me the true stories. The real stories. And he died with a little bit of that weight off of his shoulders."

"The veterans that are coming to us from the Vietnam era; some of them don't believe they are veterans because they didn't serve there. And some of them don't believe they are deserving. But most of them are filled with the bravado of a combat veteran. That's where you have to listen to them to get inside. And I was able to do that for the first veteran that I saw here."

"He was a Vietnam Combat Marine, POW, and Medal of Honor recipient. Everyone thought he had PTSD and was an alcoholic. I finally realized after talking to him for over a few weeks that he was riddled with guilt. Survivor's guilt. He lost his men, and presumed them dead, on his last patrol when he was captured."

"I asked him to give me an After Action Report and asked him to send it to his congressperson to see if they could find out what happened to the guys on his patrol. The Commandant of the Marine Corps wrote him back. He briefed him. Sent him a map of Arlington Cemetery where three of his patrol guys were. He walked in here on such a cloud! He had such a lift to his strut! He was happy. He was smiling. He was joking."

"Unfortunately it only lasted a month because he found out then he had terminal cancer. And 10 days later he died. But he died without guilt. And it took more than 40 years for that to happen. He was my first contact here. If the Veteran Resource Center wasn't here, I don't think this would have happened. He had gone to several shrinks over the years. And he had talked to several vets. And none of them seemed to make a dent. And the staff here before the Center opened, they would sit and listen to to him and have to excuse themselves to return to their work. He wanted to talk but he just couldn't find anybody to listen for as long as he needed."

"A lot of veterans are disgruntled with service organizations. They're disgruntled with the government. They want absolutely
nothing to do with government. We have here at the library what they don't have anywhere else in the government system. The volunteers are helping each other here too."

"We were at a pop-up event and doing our thing and talking to folks and the other volunteer was having trouble hearing. So in the lull I said, have you ever thought of getting your hearing tested? I told him, you've got a claim for your hearing. It's just a matter of filling out a few forms. So we're talking and he signs up for eBenefits and so on. He was trying to get an appointment on the VA website to get his ears tested. So a couple hours later, I'm closing up the pop-up and he says, 'You know what, we didn't have one Marine here that we helped.'"

"I said, 'Yes we did,' because I keep a list of who I helped and what I did for them. I said, 'see it says right here, Marine.' "

"He said, 'When did you talk to him?'" "I said, 'Well I got him to sign up for E Benefits and make an appointment for a hearing aid.' You SOB! That's how it's done. That's how we do it."

"So we had a bit of fun with that. We help one another here. It's veterans helping veterans."

"Some people just sit passively and I think that's why it might be slow at some other libraries. It's not so much here. Veterans won't approach because they don't know that they need help. Some volunteers don't realize that."

"GIs don't realize that they are veterans. Active-duty don't realize they are veterans. Are you a vet, I ask? 'No', they answer. Well I see the USMC logo. 'I'm in the reserves'. Well then you are a vet, I say. 'But I'm on active duty', they say. But you're still a vet."

"I can if I introduce myself as a veteran, I can usually get close to the person needing help quicker. But on two occasions I had females just glance at the table and then as soon as they saw me look at them, they looked away. So I went up to them and said, 'Did you serve?''"

"They said, 'Well yes."

"I said, 'Is there anything I can do for you? Do you have any questions about any of your benefits available to you?'"

"No not really."

"Do you know about the DMV program where you can get 'Veteran' put on your driver's license and be eligible for discounts at the stores?'"

"So they sit down. And little by little I will try and get them to talk with me. And if tears comes to their eyes at all, I will ask them if they want to speak with a woman veteran. I tell them they don't have to do this alone. They don't have to be alone in the world and there is help available for them. There are women out there who are rooting for you. So if they can't trust me, I'll find somebody that they can trust."

"We never insist or persist. We encourage and leave people to think. It works. I've had several who said 'no thank you,' but returned to talk to one of us, just because we are there."

"We have here what they don't have anywhere else in the government system. So the volunteers are helping each other here. It's veterans helping veterans. And a lot of family members of veterans. One-on-one keeps this thing alive. Volunteer, Veteran"
**ROI**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FY 2012/13</th>
<th>FY 2013/14</th>
<th>FY 2014/15</th>
<th>FY 2015/16</th>
<th>FY 2016/17</th>
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<tr>
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<td>$26.34</td>
<td>$26.87</td>
<td>$27.59</td>
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Source: IndependentSector.org

As the VRC gains traction in a community, it attracts increasing in-kind and cash matches, and increased volunteer participation, growing substantially from about $14,000 in the first year of the project to almost $900,000 in FY 2016/17. The program has netted a return of 60% on investment and shows no signs of slowing down.

Under the VA sponsored Work Study program veteran students may be eligible to volunteer for veteran related organizations up to 25 hours per week and be paid by the VA. It is recommended that the option of a statewide agreement with the VA and CalVet for Work Study volunteers be explored.

Volunteers and staff have been instrumental in attracting additional support. Friends of the Library groups also generously support their Veterans Connect program.

NB. This report has separated volunteer hours from In-Kind/Cash Match in order to demonstrate the value of volunteers and AmeriCorps /VA Work Study to the Veterans Connect program.
FINANCIAL BENEFITS

There are currently two types of earned veteran benefits - those originating with the federal US Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), and those originating with the State of California, through the California Department of Veteran Affairs (Cal Vet).32

Federal - VA Benefits & Services
- Compensation and pension payments
- Healthcare
- Education and training (e.g., GI Bill)
- Survivor and burial benefits
- VA Home Loan guarantee

State of California - Cal Vet Benefits & Services
- Veterans Homes
- Cal Vet Home Loans
- Dependent college tuition fee waiver
- Property tax exemptions
- Veteran license plates
- Fishing and hunting license discounts, State Parks and Recreation Pass
- Employment and Unemployment Insurance Assistance

VA Federal Benefits: By the numbers

Datasets from the VA Annual Benefits Report for FY 2016 indicate that the total amount of benefits expenditures for the VA was $102 billion dollars. From a total population of 21.8 million US veterans, about 4.7 million are receiving compensation, or disability benefits and another several million are receiving additional benefits including pensions.33 The VA asserts a benefit utilization rate of about 18.5% of the total population of veterans.34

According to the VA, these earned benefits “have a sweeping impact not only on the Veteran community, but also on the whole of American society. These are programs that touch millions of lives in fundamental ways.”35

Of the $102 billion dollars spent on benefits by the VA, nearly $15 billion was disbursed in California. While the number of veterans in California has decreased 11% between 2010 and 2015, the VA annual expenditure within California has nearly doubled in the last five years.

However, the large majority of California veterans remain unregistered with the VA and therefore unable to receive benefits.

Of the total population of California veterans estimated at 1,802,446 (2015), about 355,000 of these received disability compensation. The average California VA annual disability payment was $14,259. Another 28,250 California veterans received pensions with an average value of $12,683. Veteran pensions are designed to assist low income veterans 65 years and older (as well as 100% disabled younger veterans). It is worth noting that while over 44% of California veterans were 65 years and older in 2015, less than 4% of an estimated 751,140 senior veterans are receiving VA pensions. It is unknown how many may be eligible. Despite this seemingly low uptake of veteran pensions in California, the VA estimates an overall general benefit utilization rate for VA benefits in California of about 18.9%, slightly higher than the national average.

In addition to these direct benefit payments to veterans and their family members, a significant portion of the $15 billion dollars expended to California, pays for VA facilities construction, education benefits, medical care, home loan guarantees and so on. Regardless whether the expenditures flow directly to veterans and their family members directly or are spent elsewhere in the state, we find that the total VA expenditures on a per
veteran-enrolled basis provides a net benefit of new federal monies into the State of California and its veterans in the amount of almost $40,000.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to bringing new federal dollars into the state economy, particularly assisting homeless veterans in obtaining their earned federal benefits also reduces pressure on city and state social and protective services dealing with such challenges as addiction, homelessness, and deadly Hepatitis A outbreaks.\textsuperscript{37} Federal payments to veterans also work to restore the personal economic stability of veterans and their families, as well as benefiting the local communities where they live and spend their money.

CalVet State Benefits: By the Numbers

California delivers its own set of earned veteran benefits. The entire FY 2015/16 budget expenditure for all veteran funds was $429 million. Using the VA 18.9% utilization rate, we can estimate 340,000 CalVet claims costs the State of California on average $1,260 per veteran per year.\textsuperscript{38}

The California model for veteran services combines the forces of County Veteran Service Offices (CVSO) with CalVet. CVSOs conduct benefit reviews for veterans and family members and initiate the filing of those deemed benefits, and CalVet supports claims assistance and representation. CVSOs received $5.6 million dollars from CalVet in 2017, about 20 percent of their total operating budget. Library volunteers are often referring veterans to both organizations, registering veterans with CalVet and sending them to their local CVSO (if there is one nearby) to file.

While these organizations are able to do the actual work of filing, the biggest challenge for both is reaching the 80% of veterans that are not registered with CalVet or the VA. This was the initial impetus behind the creation of the Veterans Connect @ the Library program - finding those difficult to find veterans, the veterans that are wary of the government, the veterans that have had poor experiences with the VA or their military service and want nothing to do with it, those veterans that have never needed to access benefits before but now find their life circumstances such that they need to move into a care facility and cannot afford the costs, those veterans that have struggled with addiction or homelessness for so long that they no longer have the skills to navigate complex government services that might improve their lives, those veterans who don't know what they don't know - that discharges can be upgraded for PTSD, TBI and MST, that medical issues from possible Agent Orange exposure are now covered, that their spouse may be entitled to burial benefits, or a plot in a military cemetery.

According to CalVet LINC field coordinators, the library is the ideal partner. The library is a trusted place, a visible place, a brick and mortar place with extended and consistent hours and plenty of foot traffic.

“\textit{We don’t have a brick and mortar place. The library is that place. It is one more outpost to find veterans we have not already identified because of their location and the sheer numbers. Veterans are hard to find. The Veterans Connect program increases outreach to veterans exponentially. There should be at least one in every city.}” CalVet LINC Field Coordinator
SROI: ASSESSING OUTCOMES WITH IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Social Return on Investment (SROI) attempts to put a value on the costs avoided by providing a service. For example, if there were no Veteran Resource Centers, what might be the expected economic cost?

One of the largest areas of impact from the point of view of library staff and volunteers is when they are able to point a previously unwilling or unable homeless veteran towards the path of housing. Interviews with staff, volunteers and veterans confirmed at least five such outcomes. A recent economic study, Homelessness In Orange County: The Costs To Our Community, places the average annual cost of leaving a homeless person on the street at $45,000 per year. The amount saved by providing permanent housing represents about half this value. The high cost of homelessness represents the high usage cost of public services such as emergency health care, jails, and emergency shelters. The top ten percent of chronically homeless incur an estimated $439,000 in services. The average savings to a municipality for each properly housed veteran experiencing homelessness should represent about a $20,000+ savings, and considerably more for those most at risk.

While the Veterans Connect program is not able to track housing outcomes for veteran interactions in the library, anecdotal evidence from several interviews suggests that homeless veterans have been housed after utilizing the services of the library VRC. The savings to a municipality to house a veteran experiencing homelessness, is enough to fund two additional Veteran Resource Centers.40

As discussed earlier, the health benefits of the volunteer component of the Veterans Connect program has the real potential to impact the health care costs associated with aging as well as well being and social connectedness. These real-world outcomes are significant and worth additional study in the context of veterans helping veterans as a positive self-reinforcing loop.
### SROI - Assessing Outcomes with Impact Measurement

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<tr>
<th>Impact Area</th>
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84% of surveyed volunteers reported that there should be a Veteran Resource Center in every library.
Impact Effects on Individuals

HEHE: Health, Education, Housing and Employment

The four areas of health, education, housing and employment are the areas where earned benefits are concentrated and of primary interest to CalVet.

The health impacts of connecting into the VA system are considerable. For example, the earlier story of the non-VA connected homeless veteran that was discharged to a motel for one week right after surgery for a fractured hip underlines the challenges of regular emergency health care. A VA connection would provide a full range of ongoing medical care. While the VRC volunteers coached this struggling veteran after the fact as best they could, undoubtedly he would not have suffered so greatly had he connected with his benefits sooner.

When veterans find the library VRC, it tends to be they first place they start. One formerly homeless veteran tells his story, “Someone told me there was a vet center at the library and that they had access to a lot of resources. I learned about Swords to Plowshares here at the library, and they put me in a beautiful hotel and I stayed there for two months. They sent me over to the the VA facility by the freeway and they started my housing processing. In two months I was in my own place. I appreciate it. The gratitude I have for it, it’s such a blessing. When I wake up everyday it’s almost like a dream. I wake up in my own place.” Now that this veteran has stable housing, he is utilizing the library for 3D design classes to create a logo for a nonprofit that he dreams of creating. He takes advantage of the calm atmosphere of the VRC to concentrate on his work.

One of the most critical aspects for success in changing the quality of someone’s life is making the connections with service providers. As one librarian notes, “Volunteers are able to cut through the barriers and get access for a veteran in need.”

At the San Diego Central library, the program became the point of contact for the County Health Service Agency, with whom they had already established a relationship through their outreach efforts, to rapidly deploy an immunization clinic against a deadly and unprecedented outbreak of Hepatitis A. Ensuring access to housing and health care is not only the right thing to do, it can help reduce the financial burden on communities by reducing the expense of health care crisis. According a 2016 HUD report to Congress, almost a quarter of the homeless veteran population live in California. Access to stable housing increases the health and wellbeing of veterans and improves local communities.

Health and housing, education and employment are fundamental to build a life. As one veteran sums up, “We have had so many incidents here where we have had a deep impact on lives. This is a community place. And this place is impacting people's lives. Not just with a place to go and read, or get information or do research for school paper. We are dealing with real life issues here.”

Economic Security

Sufficient financial resources are necessary to participate in community fully and with dignity. For the veteran that has not connected with his or her benefits, this participation may be severely limited. As Ron, homeless and living in his car indicates, his newly acquired $300 monthly veteran pension makes all the difference. Recently homeless and prior to discovering the VRC at a library outside his usual home area, he did not know where to start in order to access any veterans benefits or services, or even that he was eligible.
Personal Relationships and Support

One theme of the Veterans Connect program that kept being repeated was the community of support that develops between veterans, with veterans helping each other. One librarian reflects: “We hear all the time from our veterans and our volunteers that they sort of help each other with these questions around the table. The communal aspect of it, there’s a lot of conversation. It’s crowdsourced in a way.”

“I will treat every veteran like my family, helping my brothers and sisters in arms. Being here helps me take my knowledge and give back to the ones that served before me. Before volunteering here, I missed the connection between vets.” VRC Volunteer, Veteran, Recently Transitioned

Skills Development

Skills development happens for veterans, especially those with low digital skills, as volunteers are able to take the time needed to teach veterans how to set up an email, apply for a job online and other skills that will help them access their benefits. Another oft repeated sentiment was how volunteers and staff coach at-risk veterans with low coping skills and low tolerances for frustration. As one librarian shared, “We had someone who was almost hostile in the beginning, and then warmed up when he saw that folks were really here to help him. He eventually got his claim taken care of, and then, his housing. So I think we helped in some degree to give him the resources to follow through on his plan and to be a little more communicative. Right now there are two people sitting, working on their computers side by side and I see those small successes as important.”

Volunteers also develop skills. While the self-reported knowledge of veteran benefits and services varied across several measures on the volunteer online survey, 80% of volunteers reported an increase in their knowledge since starting as a volunteer. That said, many suggested more online courses, more one-on-one training, more conference participation, and volunteer mentors as areas of training improvement. Responses also seem to indicate that libraries with robust outreach and contact with their LINC and CVSO had greater volunteer learning.

Well-Being and Personal Growth

Where libraries have sufficient space carved out for their VRCs, they are used by veterans to boost their social connectedness. As one librarian describes, “We have people that come in because they enjoy spending time in there. They like to use the computers in there. They like to do their work there. They like to kind of hang out. It’s like an office space for veterans. A little bit of a computer reading social club.”

Another librarian explains, “This is one of the few places anywhere in life where you can see the change that is happening. We don’t always see people come back but when they do you know they’re in a better place than when they started.”

“What happens is the volunteers learn, they get excited, and they grow in their capacity as volunteers. You cannot contain them. They are seeing the impact that they are having.” VRC Staff
Impact Effects on Community

Civic Engagement

The level of a community members involvement in civic life is dependent first on one's basic needs for food and shelter being met. Affording those dignities make it possible for one to be engaged civically. As community members see real positive changes within areas such as housing homeless veterans, their own civic pride can rise.

Economic Development

A new VCSO office opened in Whittier which the VRC credits with creating a significant demand for services.

The Whittier Public Library votes in November, 2017 on a $22 million library renovation bond measure, in part due to the success of the VRC. (see: Library Support)

The amount of federal dollars returned to the State and directly to veterans for every successful VA claim can add significantly to local economies. By current estimates every VA claim is valued at over $40,000 back into California. (see Federal Benefits: By the numbers)

Equity and Freedom

Another common impact theme which emerged from the narrative analysis was the dignity afforded to the most vulnerable veteran. Part of restoring dignity sometimes means just taking the time to listen. While libraries have always prided themselves on neutrality and being a welcoming space for all, staff is usually unable to allot the amount of time to one individual that a volunteer is able to devote. Volunteers speak repeatedly about the need to honor and serve those that served us.

One VRC manager describes such an interaction: “We had a homeless veteran come in and print documents one day. She was desperate and had no money. It was a child custody thing. And she needed them the following morning. She was so grateful to us when we helped her. When she left we asked her to come back and let us know how things went. At that, she burst into tears and put her arms around me and said, ‘I haven’t run into people who really care’. And I told her that all of our volunteers here care. She did come back and things are going well and she has a place to stay in Montana so she thinks she is going to be able to get her kids back and take them to Montana.”

Leisure and Recreation

Veterans Connect provides opportunities to satisfy community needs for leisure and recreation through the grant requirement of presenting two veteran programs per year in each of the two years of funding. In fact over the last four years, VRC libraries have provided 835 programs for over 17,000 veterans, their
families and community members, averaging more than five programs per library per year.

Social Trust and Connectedness

Social trust builds as we connect with each other face to face. Might the patron who befriended the homeless veteran in the library parking lot had been so open if she had not seen him as a regular VRC user interacting and socializing positively with volunteers and staff?44 These types of unintended consequences may be impossible to correlate and are worth noting nonetheless.

Some libraries with a VRC make a point of connecting with military families and involving the local community, helping to bridge the military-civilian divide. For example, at least two libraries have provided letter writing and coloring page campaigns which are then included in military and veteran care packages.

“When I first thought about volunteering I was looking at adult literacy. When the veteran opportunity came up I didn’t know if at my age this is something I should be doing. I see all the homeless people outside and I was a little apprehensive. But what I found is that these people are wonderful. They deal with all kinds of strife and things and they are strong. They figure out a way to deal with things and they just want a little help. And, they also want someone to talk to, because they’re ignored. They are not able to talk to somebody one-on-one and have them actually see them. And that is pretty impressive. It changed me. And now I think differently about the homeless. Because in this big city there are a lot of homeless and it kind of effects you if you live downtown on a day-in, day-out basis. It made me realize what these people are like and they’re mostly good people. It’s changed the way I think about people.”

Volunteer, Civilian, Senior

Impact Effects on the Library

Professional Development

Many libraries make sure that all public-facing staff receive some veteran-related training. LINC field coordinators indicate that they are available to provide additional staff training as needed, alleviating librarians from this task. In one central library, all of the reference librarians received training including a two-hour training session with the LINC field coordinator. CalVet also has online training modules which are a prerequisite for volunteering. Our interviews indicate that this seems to become a self-reinforcing loop: as staff learn more about the needs of, and services for veterans, and about their earned benefits, they not only become more able to assist and refer to the VRC, but their level of support for the program and empathy for the veterans seems to rise.

Librarians and staff that oversee the VRC also talk about how much they have learned by taking responsibility for the grant. For some it was their first grant and they learned about keeping statistics, overseeing volunteers and developing and implementing programming. Some had opportunity for outreach in the community, finding and attending Stand...
development. Several VRC staff members spoke about how their attitude toward being repurposed for the VRC brought them from initially questioning the mission and having concerns about extra duties, to a complete about-face--sharing enthusiastic praise for the rewards they have received for being a part of the Veterans Connect program.

**Staff Cohesion and Enrichment**

Another theme that emerged from the narrative coding was the transformation of staff as they watched the success of the VRC desk grow. Once they understood the program, and how it impacted veterans, they were able to get behind the program and pitch in. Libraries where the veteran success stories are shared, report that staff are more likely to ‘cover’ for a busy VRC staff person.

When a new library comes on board, the VRC duties are typically added to a staff member's existing workload. In addition, non-VRC related staff are sometimes required to backfill their colleagues' regular duties. Nonetheless, at least half the libraries made a point of noting, without prompting, that staff support overrides potential conflict over extra duties due to the nature of the mission. As one.

> “Remember, this is my first grant and deadlines are coming up and I’m sweating bullets and doing my other library duties. And it’s like, I’m killing myself. Why are we doing this? And then I hear about Cam and it makes me feel good. I knew Cam for a few years. He’s the guy with a backpack who is a veteran and has his library card. But I never really thought about him again. Until I heard this story and said, oh that’s why I don’t see him anymore!

_He is our biggest success story. He was an honorably discharged navy veteran but he didn’t want to go back home to New Mexico so he stayed here. Unfortunately he was homeless and on the streets. And even our VSO tried to tell him there were programs to get him off the street. But I guess Cam just had enough of people telling him what to do. And he continued to be on the streets. But he used the library regularly. Nice guy. Used the computers. Went up to the mezzanine area and minded his own business. Then when our VRC desk went live, Cam had to go past that desk every day to get up to the mezzanine. So after about 3 or 4 weeks, our veteran work-study student told me Cam just came up to the desk and said, ‘Hey, I’m tired of being on the streets and I was wondering if you could help me out’. And our volunteer knew that WestCare in Fresno had some units. So she got in touch with them and last I heard, Cam is off the streets and in housing._

_He knew the desk was there, but didn’t make any appointments, or check the schedule to see if anyone would be there. It was just one of those random things. I think he got comfortable. Maybe the location of the VRC desk at the library is more comfortable than going to the County Government Center or the Veterans Service Office. He would sit there and read his magazines until finally his comfort level reached a point where he said, ‘Hey it’s safe to approach these guys’._

_So Cam was the high point. All the questions we get are important. But getting someone off the streets is just ‘wow.’” VRC Librarian_
manager relates, “My co-workers have been amazing about being willing to do that extra hour on the desk for me. As we built up the VRC and I needed more time, I made sure that they heard the stories about the veterans we serve. We are a team. This isn’t me, this is all the volunteers and this entire library staff. I get the honor of working with the VRC, but they are my teammates and I can’t do it without them.”

For those libraries that experience a large daily homeless population, it would seem that staff benefits from seeing some progress being made against the sense of helplessness they may otherwise feel in the face of the numerous barriers the homeless face. As staff at one large central library explains, “People like being part of the effort. We see the volunteers from the reference desk talking to people and nodding and smiling. They really care. It’s really infectious.”

“The need is so great, so profound. If something is needed we will all pitch in. There’s just a lot of interest and a lot of caring. There is a lot, a lot of caring.”

VRC Librarian

Even large central libraries find the VRC builds cohesion among staff. “There is a lot of support both with professional and paraprofessional staff. We’ve had no turf problems trying to find a place to locate the VRC. People really like being a part of the effort. The librarians like having a hand in every way.”

Learning about veterans and military issues provides common ground for staff learning. Explains one librarian, “For the librarians this is foreign territory. I recognize that. So that’s why is was very important for them to have the immersion in military issues. I expect the librarians to have more information. There’s too much information to have everyone be fully immersed in it. But it’s important that they are invested in it. And everyone is on board. Even someone I suspect is a pretty strong pacifist and who might not fully understand a military life or a military lifestyle.”

“We all interact in a reference setting with people who look like people that have it all together, are just fine. Then you find out it’s a husband and wife who are being evicted. They don’t have anywhere to live. Then you find out he is a veteran and he hasn’t claimed his benefits yet. It can happen on the reference desk on days when the Veterans Connect volunteers aren’t here. We’ll refer people to other locations or do a reference interview with whatever materials we know about and send them on. But of course we don’t have a whole hour on this model to go over things like the volunteers do.”

VRC Librarian

Library Support

Whittier Public Library recently engaged a firm to conduct a Bond Feasibility Survey to test voter support in anticipation of a $22 million library renovation. The survey included 13 possible upgraded features for the library. The Veteran Resource Center ranked 4th in desirability (.99 mean score). In fact, the top four items ranked within several points of each other, suggesting that the top four renovation features were nearly equally supported.

This indicates that the impact of the VRC at the library has a real world value to local tax-paying stakeholders. Whittier voters go to the polls in November, 2017. Political capital has increased as libraries with Veteran Resource Centers tend to develop relationships with their congresspeople. They typically meet their aides at their local military
collaborative meetings. Some libraries have invited their congresspeople to staff a table at special events with good success. Others may call their offices for assistance with challenging veteran predicaments. For example, one volunteer made contact with their congressperson in order to find out what happened to the platoon members of a Vietnam veteran after he was captured and spent time in a POW camp.

Another sign of increased library support are the in-kind and cash matches which this project attracts. As one volunteer notes, “It has leveraged a lot of funding support for the library. This program was the doorway.”

Friends of the Library groups are often cited supporting veteran programming costs and additional funds for veteran book and media collections. The mission of the Veterans Connect project encouraged the Friends of the Library in Arroyo Grande to graciously surrender a sizable portion of their book organizing space in order that a modular office could be installed to house the VRC.

Over the five years of the program, an LSTA grant investment of $1.27 million dollars has seen 60% return on investment (ROI) to a value of $2 million in-kind donations, cash/match donations, and volunteer participation.

**Library Usage**

According to our survey of volunteers, 38% indicate that they use the library more now that they are volunteering.

In one VRC model, veterans requesting an appointment with the local CVSO are directed to the library which has twice-weekly CVSO meetings onsite. This model brings new visitors to the library that will sign up for new library cards.

One librarian explains how the cross-use of materials purchased with the grant startup funds aids civilians as well as veterans interested in becoming more knowledgeable about veteran issues. Programming for veterans, whether it be financial literacy, job resources or art therapy, for example, is also of interest to the general adult population, which builds the offerings of adult services generally in libraries.

“I had never even been to the central library before volunteering. Now I have now gone to a few exhibits here and also have brought guests here to see it. Beautiful place!” — VRC Volunteer

“We have several Vets that never came to the library before and are now regular users.” — VRC Staff

It would seem that some VRC libraries are seeing a greater participation rate, particularly among homeless veterans that used the library on a regular basis as a day shelter, now joining in other library programming. They join meditation classes, computer classes, digital drop in classes, and job resource classes. As their trust in library staff builds, they come to understand the other benefits of the library. What was once a day shelter has become a community resource of a much more enriching type.

“The we’re creating this warm environment and then they learn more about general library resources. So come for the Veterans Resource Center and stay for the computer classes - that’s what we see!” — VRC Librarian
In Their Own Words: CalVet LINC Field Coordinators

A compilation of interviews with six Local Interagency Network Coordinators (LINC); California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet)

Eight LINC field coordinators bridge the gap between CalVet and all of the other agencies that provide services to California’s nearly 2 million veterans. They are advocates for veterans and military families and supplement and support the County Veterans Service Offices (CVSO) and other regional partners to develop improved and expanded services. With the substantial number of veterans under the age of 30 leaving the military after deployments to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, coupled with a considerably large population of Vietnam veterans who are now approaching a period in their lives where they will need greater access to medical and long-term care, California is preparing for a sustained spike in earned services and benefits.

“I see libraries as the first established contact for the veteran in need.”

“In my experience, the veterans who access the VRC tend to be older. They are upset. Frustrated. Chances are they hate the VA and hate CalVet. Most of them are considered the tough cases. They need to establish rapport and build trust. Then they can confide. It will be on their terms, when they are ready.”

“Having a volunteer sitting and waiting for a veteran to come in - it is paramount! It is a big deal to veterans to see them there. The library provides a vital resource when veterans think there is no hope.”

“Here is a classic example. A veteran came out of the Vietnam war. He wanted nothing to do with the military and just wanted to get on with his life. So maybe he didn't register with the VA. He had a career, maybe a family. Then in his 50's he began to have medical issues. What he doesn't know is that these may be presumptive issues, such as Agent Orange and the tie to diabetes. So now he needs to establish his benefits and go to the VA. How would he find out that these health services are available to him? Perhaps from another veteran? Or a spouse? One spouse talking to another? Having repeated exposure to the VRC in the library increases the likelihood of them hearing and getting the message.”

“They trust libraries. They find comfort in libraries.”

“Vietnam era veterans also tend to have huge housing issues. They are just trying to survive. And some haven’t been successful, not through any fault of their own.”

“Younger veterans may return from service and discover they no longer have a bed at mom's house. They don't have a job. Their parents consider them adults. It's almost impossible to have a smooth transition out of the military. Hopefully connecting veterans with their benefits makes it smoother.”

“There are over two million veterans in California and any one LINC officer might have about 10 to 15 percent of his or her veteran population registered with CalVet. That leaves a large population that haven’t been reached.”

“So for me the library is definitely a “force multiplier”. I am only one person and now with seven library VRC desks, I am eight people. The library is one more outpost to find veterans that we have not already identified, based on the location, the sheer numbers and the clientele that already go to libraries. I believe veterans have been helped exponentially by the library VRCs and I would..."
expect to see my CalVet registrations drop if they were no longer in libraries. My numbers show that veterans registering with CalVet has more than doubled in the last few years. I will talk to a veteran that says, hey I didn’t know about you guys until I stumbled into the VRC at the library. Libraries plant the seed."

“Veterans are hard to find. Our challenge is always in reaching veterans. Getting information into their hands. We don’t have a brick and mortar place. The Veterans Connect program increases outreach to veterans exponentially. Helping us find them means that we can help stem the mental health issues and homelessness issues in a community. Everything is local. And via local service providers. The libraries are instrumental as they are community based. And libraries aren’t going anywhere! And veterans will always be there.”

“Libraries are constantly visible. It makes a good national template and there really should be at least one VRC in every city. It will be great when this program becomes synonymous with libraries - great for everyone!”

“Libraries are first responders. Especially around unemployment and homelessness. First, it works well in libraries because of foot traffic. They are already giving out information as part of what they do. They tend to have good parking and are accessible to a large number of people. Someone may walk by a VRC desk who isn’t a veteran but knows a veteran and they bring them the information. It is educating the civilian community as well as veterans and a constant resource that is talked about and supported. It is invaluable. When I sit at a collaborative meeting, other cities say, why don’t we have it?”

“Right now I don’t have a fixed schedule to visit the library VRCs in my area. I go when they need training for their staff or volunteers. I assist with their grand openings. And I make sure to bring them the resources they need to keep stocked up on. They can call me anytime for help. I had a volunteer text me for help just today.”

“Programs come and go. Libraries, on the other hand, will always be there. I love the program. It is a natural marriage. It is such a great marriage.”

"My numbers show that veterans registering with CalVet has more than doubled in the last few years. I will talk to a veteran that says, hey I didn’t know about you guys until I stumbled into the VRC at the library. Libraries plant the seed."  CalVet LINC Field Coordinator
Moving Forward: Policy Recommendations

If the VRC libraries were able to increase the uptake in VA benefits by one percentage point, based on an expanded presence in libraries throughout the state, it could potentially increase federal funds to the state and its veterans by as much as $65 million. With a current annual budget of $329,000, and a model that has proven itself to be both sustainable and scalable, Veterans Connect is well positioned to assist the State and its veterans move closer to their earned benefits and bring significant federal dollars into the state and local economies.

Put another way, the break even point for the entire five year budget for the Veterans Connect program could potentially be achieved when only 30 of the 27,000 veteran interactions result in a VA benefits claim.

In conclusion, it would appear that the federal transfer of VA payments produces a net financial gain for the State of California and local veteran communities. Every Veterans Connect interaction that initiates a veterans’ process towards a successful earned benefit claim could net an estimated $40,000 to the State, its veterans and their communities. As the main beneficiary and in advancement of its own economic health and the wellbeing of veterans and their families, it would be in the State’s best interest to expand and provide ongoing funding of this program. It is recommended that the California State Library, in partnership with CalVet present a formal request to the State of California for ongoing funding.

1 % of VRC Interactions that lead to a VA benefits claim pays for the entire VRC budget

Just 30 of 27,000 veteran interactions required to breakeven
Moving Forward: Administrative Recommendations

The Veterans Connect @ the Library program has demonstrated itself to be both sustainable as well as scalable. The cost per library is continuing to drop at the 50 library mark, and it operates with less than 1 FTE. It would make sense to concentrate any future expansion efforts on those areas of service and expertise that libraries are unable to manage efficiently on their own and that hold the best potential for increasing connections between veterans and their earned benefits.

Two main areas of focus suggested by our research are an increased concentration on volunteers and stronger statistical inputs:

- Volunteers are at the heart of project success however they also require the most staff inputs. They also provide many of the social benefits to veterans, themselves and the greater community. Upgrading the volunteer program will allow it to scale more easily.
- Growth may demand outside funding. More emphasis on critical statistical inputs should be considered, including a way to include a stronger feedback loop between veterans coached in the library who then move on to service providers such as CSVOs and CalVet.

**Strengthening Volunteer Focus**

Without hard data, we may assume that the number of veterans that may be served and assisted is directly proportional to the number of hours that well-trained volunteers are available in the library’s public space to meet with and assist veterans. This places volunteers at a critical center of the project and efforts to help libraries recruit, train and retain volunteers is key. Feedback from the volunteer survey seems to indicate that those libraries with a dedicated focus on volunteers have successful results, while those with little library support suffer. While 78% of volunteers indicated that training was ‘good’ or ‘excellent’, another 22% found it only adequate or unsatisfactory. As one volunteer said, “Invest in volunteers and volunteers will invest in the purpose. Come up with a continuous development program.”

Libraries, in general, could use additional support when it comes to training and managing VRC volunteers. For example:

- More strongly encourage the placement of two volunteers together on the same shift, particularly as a training and mentoring tool.
- Develop ways to engage volunteers more fully with the program despite their desk traffic, or lack of.
- Share stories to help maintain motivation and facilitate volunteer communications across the state.

Staff survey results indicate the main challenges with volunteers include people that cannot make the required commitment; volunteers feeling discouraged during slow periods; cities that manage the volunteer process (slowly or by not giving enough exposure to the project); cities that require backgrounds checks; and turnover due to volunteer life events.

To increase the scalability of the Veterans Connect program, it is recommended that an increased level of focus be placed on continual upgrading training, increasing volunteer involvement at VRC conferences and structuring a program for the care and capacity management of volunteers such as a recognition program with CalVet or Governor-level involvement. One insight uncovered is that the best hope of reaching a “last mile” veteran is through trust. The willingness of a veteran to engage with a volunteer is a process most suited to consistency and quality of the volunteers.

Also recommended is the development of an online statistical gathering tool, with a mobile component, to ensure that valuable volunteer interaction data is gathered on a consistent and ongoing basis. This data is critical to measuring true outcomes and attracting future funding.

Additional suggestions include:
- Consider a statewide recruitment drive and/or marketing materials for libraries. One aspect of this would be to target female veterans for volunteer opportunities, given their higher rates of military sexual trauma and the need for sensitive conversations.
- Consider ramping up the adjunct program: Volunteer Ambassador Program - a place for those volunteers that cannot commit the time or do not have the technical skills required to be a Benefits Coach. Encourage them to become an outreach ambassador for the program, distributing knowledge and flyers about the library VRC. Provide support via brief online training, flyers, and CalVet Resource Books.
- Consider a printed commemorative for VRC volunteers on anniversary of X years of service to veterans, the library and their community. This increases opportunities for marketing and public relations awareness to the program.
- Consider a quarterly newsletter for VRCs highlighting success stories, veteran programs, interview spotlights with volunteers, tips, and upcoming benefit changes. The connection to stories is powerful in terms of motivating volunteers, whether they actually had contact with the veteran who was helped or not.
- Design and sponsor workshops with greater volunteer participation.
- Continue developing more advanced training modules as the long term volunteers are hungry to learn more. The better information they have, the better they can coach veterans through the process.

**Strengthening Partnerships Focus**

A more formalized partnership reduces sustainability risks inherent in informal partnerships based on individual library staff members or volunteers, and become more critical as a program matures. It also affords greater access to funding opportunities as grant making organizations expect collaborative efforts.

- CalVet currently has no formal mandated requirement for LINC to have any set library hours. Most LINC estimate less than 2
hours per week spent on library VRC related items. Advocate for a consistent and scheduled presence wherever it makes sense to do so.

- Library VRCs are not currently listed in the CalVet Resource Book and other related CalVet materials, such as the CalVet Volunteer Opportunities Fact Sheet. 47 Veterans attend related events in cities other than their home cities and need to be able to look up services.

- Consider asking the Governor to officially recognize VRCs with an official plaque designating the library site as a joint CalVet/State library initiative (or some such other designation).

- Consider formalizing through a statewide agreement with VA /CalVet a provision to provide a work-study student option to all libraries within range. Facilitate an easy application process for libraries to request and participate.

- Investigate the feasibility of VSO accreditation for those volunteers ready and willing to take the next step in benefit assistance, particularly in larger cities and busier libraries.

- Become a leading strategic partner with the IMLS three-year plan to study community based solutions for veterans and military families. Ensure that Veterans Connect has a strong voice and seat at this table given that Veterans Connect has the most depth and breadth of service experience with this population through library services of anywhere in the country.

- Leverage the potential for high net financial gain to the State ($40,000+ net per VA claim) to continue financial investment to expand the Veterans Connect program.

- Study additional funding opportunities particularly given the current administration’s strong emphasis on supporting veterans.

Library Staff Focus

- Ask to present at any Statewide Library Directors gatherings as high level institutional support is critical to sustained engagement. As one librarian states: “I think that the State Library hosting conversations is important. Keeping in the forefront of everyone’s mind that we have a large portion of veterans in our communities, just having that reminder out there from the State is important. That we should all be considering services to veterans.”

- Consider marketing programs opportunities for general library staff such as “Did You Serve?” buttons they can wear at the front
desk, encouraging them to be aware of the VRC as well as direct people there when queried about the button. Encourage the spread of veteran awareness throughout the library as a means to both drive additional usage to the VRC as well as facilitate staff enrichment by greater participation with the program.

**Marketing & Technology Focus**

- Consider options available for next-level sophisticated online statistical reporting tools. Study how concrete impact measurements can be facilitated moving forward. For example, considering the direct impact on libraries and communities, it is critical to future funding that the explicit number of housing for homeless veterans the VRC interaction(s) facilitated be available. For future evaluations consider an annual survey of library directors, staff and volunteers, with questions designed around each of the impact areas identified in this report. Consider articulating mission/goals to line up with actionable and measurable items. This would require additional study beyond the scope of this evaluation and may require an in-depth focus group made of major stakeholders and funders. Research a method of tracking success stories, such as each time an interaction has eventually lead to housing for a homeless veteran.

- Consider a centralized reference librarian in charge of keeping reliability, consistency and currency of benefit data up to date and communicated across the program. Allow volunteers to direct questions. This may be a .25 FTE at most. Volunteers are not professionally trained information seekers, though they do their best. There seems to be some ‘reinventing of the wheel’ and local pockets of information discovered that would be useful to all volunteers. As an example, one volunteer is using “VA indebtedness waivers” to save low-income veterans from copays. It seems that he was aware of this from working in HR in the military and it may not be common knowledge.

- Consider development of a VRC mobile app. Volunteers could use when doing outreach, both formal and informal. Users can check which other cities have VRCs and their hours and locations. Provide direct links to the VA and CalVet. Add a scheduling option, a training option (complete with iconic “awards” earned as you move through the training), as well as an online volunteer application form, for those libraries that allow for direct volunteer intake.

- Consider statewide marketing of the need for veteran volunteers with posters and other materials distributed to places where veterans congregate including the VFW, the American Legion, VRCs on college campuses etc. with an emphasis on female volunteers that are also veterans.

- More marketing materials for “embedded volunteers.”

- Consider funding for a statewide marketing campaign to overcome the lack of library staff skill or time in doing this effectively on a local basis.

- Consider applying for the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program in late spring, 2018. The VA awarded $343 million in grants to 288 nonprofit
organizations to help low-income Veterans and their families in September and averaged $1.2 million.  

- Build upon the on-the-ground expertise developed over five years of service. Solicit a second evaluation which would seek to identify and expand effective strategies to increase economic stability and sustainability. This evaluation should also identify additional ways to adapt the strategy to better meet the needs of clients and help engage new funders and implementing partners and strengthen the case for building a national template to federal policymakers, grantmakers and the VA. Build on the strong brand, while allowing for local adaptation of the project.
- Allocate funding for demonstration presentations at National and State level library conferences (including ALA, and other states with significant veteran populations) to raise awareness, attract sustainable funding and help create a national template of services to veterans.
WHY LIBRARIES? 
BRIDGING THE GAP...

A compilation of quotations by library staff, in their own words.

**Veteran Enrichment**

"Why libraries? Because it works! My belief is that it works like this for the library: first it shows that the library believes in taking care of and opening doors for veterans who are Americans, who are our brothers, sisters, uncles, and important members of the community. And this is a population, whether it’s from the Vietnam or other wars, who haven’t felt welcomed back into the community. So we are bringing them back in as readers, and bringing them back in as members of the community. And it’s bringing the veterans into other library programs that they normally wouldn’t be a part of. We’re giving veterans the opportunity to be able to take steps for themselves outside of the library to better their family, to better themselves, to gain education, to gain jobs, to gain resources through the government. I think that’s part of our mission."

"One of our core missions in the library is to get information that people need into their hands. Veterans' needs are a little bit different and so I think we are in the best position in the community to do that. And if it’s not at the library, where would it be? Every part of a community has competing demands, so offering it in a library is the closest nexus in terms of how you’re going to access that information. It’s natural that they would come to the library, it’s a place that’s comfortable, a place they’re accepted. So to me it makes the most sense in a library, a thing that we need to do to make sure we’re addressing this specific need in our community."

"I know everybody tells you their program changes lives and they all do, but I feel like this is a population that hasn’t been served well before and it’s been bad in the past. And where do you even start with the VA? It’s just a huge bureaucracy. It’s so intimidating, And the library is the place where you go and people help you. They will hold your hand and take you wherever it is you need to go and they open up the world to you. It would be great to have it in every city."

**Community Enrichment**

"When this idea was originally presented to me I did have some thoughts like, wow, it seems like we're being repurposed for a lot of things. I had my manager's hat on, and thought how do I manage this? But since being involved, I think it’s come to really enrich the community and I’ve gotten such great feedback from veterans who are using this service, such appreciation, that I just do think that libraries are a logical place. I think it took me a little while to recognize that this is a natural partnership."

**Staff Enrichment**

"And on the other side, I think that what it does for the librarians, it helps to have librarians see veterans not just as the homeless, not the unsheltered or the unfortunate “them,” but as us. They are us. For library staff there seems to be lot of enthusiasm about engaging with the public that way: What else can we do for them? The volunteer model just really seems to have an extra spark. And then the oversight that the state provides is really important."
"Everyone counts when they walk in the building, so it kind of matches up with what we are already doing, trying to help everybody. Some people are harder to reach depending on their situation, but it's a good place to set up shop with the veterans table and it allows us to reach everybody. Veterans have volunteered their time and perhaps things haven't gone very well or they are having difficulty with some aspect of life, so anything we can do to help—to reach out to somebody and at least extend a referral to them."

**It Changes Lives**

"In our experience, the center has helped so many people get the resources they need and make those steps to get off the street and improve the quality of their life. That's the main thing. We do this in libraries because we're a trusted resource. People know they can come to us. We are a third-party. So if someone has to contact the VA directly, and they have concerns about that or they've had bad experiences with social service providers, we can try to cut through that and find someone who can help them with whatever their situation is. We are a third way."

"I know that it's working. It's such a wonderful thing! The general veteran services have too much fragmentation and too many obstacles. We know veterans with PTSD problems, for example, need direct access. There can't be barriers. They can't be in situations where no one answers the phone. They can't be in situations where they can't walk into a building. So our volunteers do the best that they can to cut through that."

"Having opportunities in a library that are geared towards veterans or are comfortable and safe for veterans is tremendously important. Offering things like painting classes and other forms of art therapy with homeless and with veterans, in the place in community where everybody is welcome, makes a ton of sense. Libraries are the great equalizer."

"That veteran over there wouldn't probably be using that jobs lab right now if he hadn't come in and started using the VRC. The VRC helps them understand the other benefits of the library. And other veterans come to our digital drop-in classes pretty regularly. And that one also comes to a meditation class pretty regularly. And I'm assuming that is because of his comfort level from using the VRC."

"It helps people. And we may not have big numbers, but they are dramatic stories and there are stories that will make you cry. It's worth doing. One dramatic story – a Vietnam veteran photographer had been steered in the wrong direction when he got out of service and wasn't getting help because his job classification was messed up and he was suffering some severe PTSD. For 40 years he wasn't listed as a combat vet even though he was in-country. Without the right classification he wasn't getting the help he needed. At the time one of our volunteers met him he was in dire straights emotionally. So our volunteer got him into the system and now he's being taken care of. Up to that point nobody was taking care of him. He got his treatment because one of our volunteers got him in touch with one of the effective people who have come into our circle."

"I hope we can continue this indefinitely because the need is always there. There are new people arriving, people in changed circumstances, all the time. We definitely would like to have it affiliated with the State of California with the support that we get."  

VRC Librarian
Notes

NB. Some names have been changed for privacy concerns.

1. See Library Support, p. 42
2. ROI = Net Gain / Total Investment * 100 ($762,261/1,272,243*100 = 60% ROI)
3. The average CalVet veteran claim from the state is estimated at less than $1,300, making every VA claim a substantial net gain of new federal money to the State of California economy.
4. See Veterans Healing Veterans, p. 29
5. See SROI - Assessing Outcomes - Impact measurement Homelessness In Orange County: The Costs To Our Community, p. 35
6. See VA Federal Benefits: By the numbers, p. 33
8. https://www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/12-004.pdf p.56
11. See Appendix F
12. Approximately $7500 including $5800 for staff backfill and $1100 for collection development. See Appendix A
13. See Appendix B
14. See Appendix C
15. See Appendix D
16. See Appendix A
18. The author also visited the Imperial Beach branch library to view the San Diego County Veteran Kiosk pilot project. In-depth face to face interviews, conducted at three large central libraries (Los Angeles Public Library / San Francisco Public Library / San Diego Public Library) as well as smaller libraries and branches (Kings County, Hanford Branch / Whittier Main Library / Sacramento, Rancho Cordova Branch / Riverside Public Library, Arlanza Branch / San Luis Obispo, Arroyo Grande Branch / unrecorded interview: San Diego Public, Point Loma Branch. Unrecorded interviews with 6 CalVet LINC field coordinators.
20. We are making a broad assumption of causality as our control group, which would be a library without a dedicated VRC, typically would not have the in-depth CalVet training or adequate time that a long term volunteer can provide in order to build trust with at-risk veteran.
24. NB. According to the volunteer, this homeless veteran used Medicare and may have had a VA rehab option if he had trusted the VA enough to access them.
27. See: Veteran VRC Use: In Their Own Words, p. 20
28. See Appendix E List of Sample VRC Programs in California Libraries, p. 71
32. These lists are not exhaustive.
33. The data does not aggregate how many unique or individual veterans are receiving benefits and there is expected to be some overlap between the number of veterans receiving multiple benefits, for example disability, pension, healthcare and a home loan guarantee might all be available to one veteran.
35. Ibid
36. Total VA expenditures in California divided by the estimated 383,000 California veterans receiving compensation and pensions.
37. mercurynews.com/2017/10/02/california-scrambles-to-contain-deadly-hepatitis-a-outbreaks/
40. Average cost of a VRC in 2016/17, $8,731 per library.
41. The Hepatitis A outbreak has claimed at least 17 lives in California as of Oct 1, 2017, primarily among the homeless population of which many veterans belong to. There are 481 confirmed cases of the disease and 337 hospitalizations. This is one of the most common vaccine-preventable diseases. A 2014 VA study estimates about 1300 homeless veterans live in San Diego County. The VA also acknowledges that these numbers may be unreliable due to inaccurate self reporting of veteran status due to dishonorable discharges or non-combat veterans not reporting themselves as veterans. VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Treglia_brief.pdf
43. See: Veteran VRC Use: In Their Own Words, p. 20
44. See Veteran VRC Use: In Their Own Words, p. 20
45. ballotpedia.org/Whittier,_California,_Library_Bond_Issue,_Measure_L_(November_2017)
46. Only one library of 51 has opted out of the program since 2012.
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Appendix A

Veterans Connect @ the Library

Letter of Commitment for Designated Participants, FY 2017-18

On behalf of the ____________________________ Library, I agree to support the goals of the Veterans Connect @ the Library project. Specifically, I certify the Library’s commitment to each of the points listed below under Library for the period of July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018.

I understand that the purpose of this grant is to reintegrate California veterans into the California workforce and our communities in order to provide them the quality of life of other Americans. The goals for this grant are to:

Provide veterans benefits and local service information to veterans and family members, links to other local organizations serving veterans especially local County Service Offices, CalVet and the Federal VA.

Increase registered veterans in the CalVet Reintegration system through use of myCalVet.

Increase California veteran benefit claims.

Increase use of libraries by veterans and their families.

This project began in 2012, and FY 17-18 is the sixth year of LSTA grant funding. Libraries are expected to participate over multiple years. In year one during setup, libraries receive the largest amount of funding. In year two additional funds are given, and in year three libraries are expected to provide any additional funds needed; the grant will continue to provide direction such as ongoing training, regular informative emails, etc.

I understand that my library is one of the new grant libraries for FY 17-18 and as such is responsible for tasks outlined below, and that my library will receive grant resources/assistance as outlined below.

The fiscal agent for this grant is Pacific Library Partnership. (PLP).

Grant Component

Library Responsibility

Provided by Grant

Primary Contact

**Designate a primary contact** and provide that person’s contact information, phone, and email.

Designate a contact and mailing address for delivery of materials and equipment.

The primary contact will promptly respond to emails and phone calls from project managers, participate in conference calls and web meetings, promptly respond to reports as required etc.

The Library will ensure that the service is rolled out on schedule, as specified by project managers, and that staff follow the policies, procedures and guidelines outlined in the project documentation. The Veterans Resource Center is to be opened no later than December 31, 2017.

My Library will comply with federal restrictions on the use of LSTA Grant Funds LSTA regulations
Near the end of the grant the Library may submit an invoice for staff support up to $5,800. A form and instructions will be sent to you for this claim.

**Introduce yourself to the leaders of your local veteran community**

Set up a time to meet your County Veteran Service Officer (CVSO) and contact your LINCs Coordinator.

Later introduce yourself and work with other agencies working with veterans in your community. Libraries will report on number of, and increase in partnerships with organizations serving veterans (a minimum of 5 is required).

It is highly desirable for your primary contact or trained volunteer to attend local regional coalition meetings of agencies working with veterans. Ask your County Veteran Service Officer or LINC Coordinator for information about groups in your area.

http://www.cacvso.org-county-contacts


https://calibrariesforveterans.org/veterans.html (see list in right hand side of page)

**Library Materials**

Add materials to library database for checkout. If possible, code materials to monitor use. Set up and display collection in a prominent spot (shelving is not provided).

You will order the materials and when invited send one invoice to PLP (Pacific Library Partnership which is the grant fiscal agent) for reimbursement.

Order free multiple copies of the current California Veterans Resource Book and relevant pamphlets, or referral to local agencies with copies available.


$1100 to purchase an In-a-Box Veterans information collection of about 50-60 print and video items. Our list of Recommended Books and DVDs.

**Library Veteran Resource Center**

Library will provide space for a Veteran Resource Center. This can be as simple as a desk for volunteers to use while the Resource Center is open. Library must provide a phone at a desk or convenient access to a phone. A laptop and printer need to be available for the volunteers to use in this space. Space for confidential interviews with veterans and/or family members is required but may be in an adjacent or nearby area. Other veterans’ resources at the library, i.e. the collection and pamphlets, bulletin board, etc., should be nearby.

Library will determine number of hours the Center will be open. Ideal is at least half the library’s open hours.

Photos of the Veteran Resource Center setups in other libraries. (These are in the NING account.) See below for details on laptop and printer purchase.

Military flag with seals of 5 branches, 5 military windsocks, and veteran standup cutouts to
promote Center.

Grant also provides $200 per site for misc. supplies, and $125 for display equipment. Library identifies and purchases materials and invoices PLP (Pacific Library Partnership.) All items must be eligible for purchase under LSTA regulations.

**Library Resources**

Library will identify veteran resources in its community and have referral information available to staff, volunteers, and to veterans and their families (e.g. Web resources, bulletin boards, etc.)

Each library to develop a webpage of local resources.

List of the most recent State and Federal online resources will be provided.


California Veterans Resource Book: link to online copy.

Sample pages from other libraries and essential federal and state links will be shared.


**Technology Access**

Give first priority use to staff, volunteers and veterans. Comply with Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and LSTA. If you are not CIPA compliant please disclose prior to signing this Letter of Commitment.

Library will purchase computer and printer and when invited invoice PLP.

CIPA compliant libraries receive funds to purchase 1 laptop, 1 printer. Non-CIPA compliant libraries provide laptop and printer and receive funds for other items.

These tools will allow volunteers, veterans and their families to use the online resources available to them for employment applications, and completion of other veteran-related applications.

**Staff Training**

Prior to beginning training complete a survey to assess knowledge.

Primary contact must view these two webinars available through Infopeople. As many other front desk staff as possible should also attend, as they may be called upon to answer questions from veterans and their families.

Veterans and Public Libraries: What Every Public Library Should Know: Infopeople Webinar

Veterans Connect @ the Library.

Complete the CalVet online training modules for staff and volunteers. Click here for a link to the Introduction and 6 modules.

One staff and one volunteer attend regional annual training. Travel expenses are covered. Dates not set – tentatively Spring 2018.

**Recruit and Train Volunteers and/or Work Study Veterans**

Recruit and train volunteers who will become Benefits Coaches or Community Outreach Specialist to keep the Veteran Resource Center open as many hours a week as possible.
Complete the CalVet online training modules for staff and volunteers. Click here for a link to the introduction and 6 modules.

Recruit and train new volunteers to fill vacancies.

Meet individually or in a group on a regular basis with individual volunteers/work-study veterans to provide them with updated grant information, answer their questions, etc.

Everything you need is on the website under Volunteer Recruitment:
Volunteer Position Description – Community Outreach Specialist
Volunteer Position Description – Veteran Benefits Coach
Volunteer interview questions
Volunteer agreement

Initial training is provided online. Each library should establish and maintain ongoing relationships with their local County Veteran Service Officer and CalVet LINC coordinator. Volunteers will be invited to attend the annual training for staff and volunteers.

Public Relations

Comply with requirements for public relations contacts, as specified by project managers.

Online PR toolkit with sample documents, bookmarks, an event/booth supplies, business cards if desired. Branded tablecloth and pull up banner, volunteer badges.

$200 for Social Media ads.

Library Programs for Veterans

Host 2 programs for veterans in the first and second year of the grant.

Programming toolkit with program ideas available on the website. Please note that this page will be expanded with many more program ideas in fall 2017.

If the Library chooses to have a book club as one of its programs, up to 40 copies of a recommended title for book club use maybe purchased; library may purchase 20 copies of two titles if it wishes to have two programs on different books. A list of recommended books will be provided.

Library may use grant funds to hire speakers or other authors, etc.

Reimbursement is available for up to $800 for program.

Grant monitoring

Outputs: Statistics will be kept on interactions with veterans and family members, volunteers, etc.

Outcomes: Surveys - Veterans and families will also receive comment cards to determine the impact of their library interaction.

Access to online reporting form for collection of statistics on a monthly basis.

Twice a year you will be asked to give us a list of inkind and cash matches.
As the Library Director, I personally will monitor the project activities and participate as much as possible.

Definition of CIPA Compliance: “All library computers, ebook readers, tablets or any other devices capable of connecting to the Internet via wired, Wi-Fi or cellular networks, including those used solely by staff, will comply with CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act) requirements.” For additional detail, visit Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and LSTA.

My library is_________ CIPA compliant or is not __________ CIPA compliant

Director’s Signature: __________________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________  Library: ________________________________
Appendix B

Scope of Service: Grant Project Managers 2016/17
Veterans Connect @ the Library – LSTA Grant

Grant Project Managers will provide project management & technical support to the Veterans Connect LSTA grant sites as approved by the California State Library. Project Managers will also work to develop and maintain communications with statewide partners including CalVet.

Duties to include:

Project Management

1. Project Managers will contact library directors regarding their interest in creating a Veteran Resource Center at one or more of their library locations. Follow-up is made to confirm interest and to secure commitments.
2. Will provide continuous support and oversight to all sites to insure LSTA compliance.
3. Will request from each confirmed library a Letter of Agreement and request Library Director’s signature to insure expectations for both library and project administration are clearly understood and agreed upon.
4. Will determine funding for each startup library, depending on approved LSTA budget and number of proposed sites. A template “start-up” cost structure has been developed.
5. Will provide start-up guidelines and details for each new site – approx. a 6-month process.
6. Will provide ongoing administrative support to startup and existing sites, including online and live referrals and communications.
7. Will create and/or coordinate and deliver on-going training and professional development opportunities for library staff and volunteers related to the Veterans Connect projects.
8. Will provide statistical data and record keeping systems to document all activities related to the Veteran Resource Center. This includes Comment Cards obtained from Veterans and/or Veteran family members to monitor outcome of project objectives and library services.
9. When budget allows, will coordinate pre-conference CLA or other training for all project sites. Purpose is to bring together one library staff and volunteers from each site for training and professional development, information sharing, Veteran trend updates from CalVet; community partnership discussions, and volunteer management best practices.
10. Will develop and provide oversight of contracts with other consultants and/or contractors.
11. Will research and explore funding opportunities to sustain and expand project.
12. Will conduct continual research and stay current on various Veteran issues relevant to project goals in order to provide updated content for project website and to disseminate to project participants.
13. Will continue to explore and identify opportunities to enhance national, state and local collaborations and provide workplace opportunities for Veterans, i.e. VA Work Study Students assigned to VA approved library sites.
14. Will continue to research Veteran resources on national, state and local level to support
project libraries in their outreach and program services to Veterans and Veteran families.
15. Will work closely with California State Library (CSL) Grant Monitor and Pacific Library Partnership as the Fiscal Partner to complete and maintain reporting and financial records.
16. Manage the grant and be available for questions.
17. Maintain files and records for each grant site which includes: notes from communication with each library, reports, and any additional information that creates a meaningful record of the grant and project development.
   • Provide proactive support and assistance (e.g. sending a news article or website that relates to the project).
   • Review quarterly and final reports with CSL Grant Monitor assigned to this project and with Fiscal Partner for appropriate expenditures and progress towards completing project.
   • Review the encumbrances made before the end of the grant and insure full expenditures before grant end date.
18. Check for conformity:
   a. Ensure that terms of the grant are being met. Examples include:
      i. Reports are completed and sent on time.
      ii. Expenditures are consistent with approved budget.
      iii. Activities are consistent with those that were approved.
   b. Provide necessary assistance when project goals and objectives need to be changed or realigned or if the grant deadline needs to be extended.
      i. Document and file any changes to the approved goals and objectives. Assure that changes are reported in the next quarterly narrative report.
   c. Ensure that all publications produced in any format by any of the project libraries include the proper credits and disclaimers. Examples:
      i. "This [publication/project] was supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian."
      ii. "The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services or the California State Library, and no official endorsement by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services or the California State Library should be inferred.
19. Provide any close out assistance required by project.
   a. Develop and submit to CSL Grant Monitor and Fiscal Partner a Final Report evaluation of the project, suitable for publication.
   b. Complete State Program Reports (SPRs) on assigned LSTA grants.
20. Attend events on behalf of the State Library at the project site:
   a. Ideally, will coordinate with CSL Public Information Officers or State Library personnel to insure CSL Admin attendance at project site events.
   b. May attend grant events when requested or when deemed appropriate, i.e. VRC Grand Opening.
   c. Conduct site visit(s) as needed or determined by the Project Managers, Grant Monitor, or Fiscal Partner.
21. Communication:
   a. The Project Mgrs serve as primary point of grant information and contact for the grantee.
   b. The Project Mgrs will assist the CSL Grant Monitor and/or the Fiscal Partner in developing communication links with the State Librarian in areas such as exemplary progress, lessons learned, and serious breaches of LSTA rules.
   c. Brief reports may be given at LDS staff meetings (to be arranged through the LDS Bureau Chief).
   d. The State Library Budget Office is responsible for processing claims, receiving and sending to LDS all required reports, and notifying grantees when reports are late.
   e. The Bureau Chief and/or Grant Monitor will assist the Project Mgrs and Fiscal Partner with legal issues and contacting the General Counsel.

COMPENSATION

Consultant to be paid at contracted rate per hour. Travel for grant project site visits will be paid over and above hourly rates.

Project Managers will submit detailed monthly Invoice noting all project activities and include all receipts for any travel claims.
Appendix C
Scope of Service
Data Management and Social Media Contract Consultant
Veterans Connect @ the Library/Pacific Library Partnership

Duties Include:

Project Libraries/ LSTA Survey Data compilation and reporting - will manage and aggregate online collection of monthly and semi-annual statistics and feedback; will provide results to Project Managers for analysis and quarterly reporting; will gather data from Survey Monkey pre and post training modules for both library staff and volunteers to compile and prepare for reporting as outcome data for grant compliance; will monitor project libraries’ websites for compliance and consistency with project goals (resources for Veterans). Will ensure site listings are up-to-date and accurate in a variety of locations (Facebook, Pinterest, map, website, etc.)

Website and Social Media - Will coordinate updates to and manage social media communications for the Veterans Connect @ the Library grantees and project library staff contacts with approval from Project Manager(s). Will research and select appropriate and timely media communications to share with all project libraries through variety of communication channels, including email, Ning, and website postings.

Content Creation for Website - Consultant will research veteran-related materials including media, journal articles, partner newsletters, etc., to be approved by Project Manager(s) and submit for posting on the website. Will also obtain from project libraries their programming and event products produced (promotional materials, programs, etc.) in order to synthesize and format for posting to website.

Regional Trainings - Will assist with notification and enrollment of participants and assist with assembly of the conference packets. Will assist at meetings with on-site welcome and check-in and other logistical tasks. May be asked to present a training component with selected library staff and/or Project Manager(s).

Other projects that may arise during the course of the grant. Some travel within CA will be required. Eligible travel expenses will be reimbursed.

Approximately 20 hours per month for FY2017/18 beginning July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018.
Appendix D
CalVet Letter of Agreement, 2017

Keith Boylan
Deputy Secretary Veterans Services
California Department of Veteran Affairs
P.O. Box 942895
Sacramento, CA 94295

April 12, 2017

Subject: Veterans Connect @ the Library Grant Application for FY 17/18

Dear Mr. Boylan,

As you are aware, the Pacific Library Partnership (PLP) has received grant funding for the Veterans Connect @ the Library for several years, and has always appreciated working with the California Department of Veteran Affairs in bringing services to California Veterans. PLP is preparing a grant application to continue the Veterans Connect @ the Library project in FY 2017/2018. I am the CEO of the Pacific Library Partnership, which is the fiscal agent for the current project and will serve as the fiscal agent for next year.

The grant application will be submitted to the California State Library, which administers funds from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act. The State Library has requested that an application be prepared.

For the first time this year project applicants are requested to include in the grant application a signed agreement with each partner. The agreement is to outline the role the partner will play and the resources the partner will contribute. In order to expedite this process, this letter can serve the purpose of the signed agreement.

Role of the Partner on the Project
1. California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) will coordinate with the grant applicant to provide services to 50 current and 10 new Veterans Connect @ the Library sites.
   Coordination will include
   a. Advice and coordination with grant managers, Jacquie Brinkley
   b. Support from Local Interagency Field Coordinators (LINCS) to the Veterans Connect @ the Library sites via regular visits, individual training, and attendance at the five 2017/2018 regional workshops for staff and volunteers.
   c. Public Relations efforts from CalVet (graphics, inclusion in relevant CalVet publications, emails)
   d. If requested, coordination with the State Librarian and/or grant managers to explore use of State interagency funds directed at veterans and resources which would benefit veterans and their families and could be implemented in local libraries. Examples would include work force development, citizenship for veterans, etc.
2. CalVet will provide printed materials in response to requests from the 60 sites.

If you find these deliverables and contract aggregable, please sign and date this agreement. Please email me a scanned copy of the letter as soon as possible so that a copy may be included in the grant application, and mail a hard copy to my attention at the Pacific Library Partnership, 2471 Flores Street, San Mateo, CA 94403.

Sincerely yours,

Carol Frost
CEO, Pacific Library Partnership

Approved by

Keith Boylan
Deputy Secretary Veterans Services
California Department of Veteran Affairs

Date 4/13/17
Appendix E

List of Sample Veterans Connect Programs in California Libraries

Panels & Lectures
- Veterans Court Panel - included Veterans Court program manager, probation officer, public defender and veteran
- Lecture on Military-Civilian Divide
- WWII Panel - included university professor serving as moderator for panel of veterans from across all eras
- Lecture: History of Camp Pendleton
- Veteran/Military Spouses Panel
- What a Woman Veteran Looks Like Panel

Authors Visits & Books
- Jim Gregory (Patriot Graves: Discovering a California Town’s Civil War Heritage & World War II Arroyo Grande)
- Luis Carlos Montalvan (Until Tuesday: A Wounded Warrior and the Golden Retriever Who Saved Him)
- John Adame (Where’s the Music?)
- Tom Morton (Whiskey Tango Foxtrot: Remembrances of my Service in the Marines)
- Susan A. Herney (Steadfast: Compelling first hand accounts of two parallel journeys in World War II)
- Veterans Book Club
- Standing Down: Great Books book club

Special Events
- Joining Community Forces
- Tuskegee Airmen Program - included four of the remaining original airmen
- Grand openings - typically include Congresspeople, CalVet LINCs, local CVSO officers and other dignitaries
- Civil Air Patrol program
- Vet Job Fair
- Veterans Day Celebration
- Veteran Resource Fair
- Spring Fling for Women Veterans

Workshops
- Veterans Benefits Workshop
- Memoir Writing Workshop for Veterans
- War Time Memories - artifact sharing group
- Veteran Owned Small Business Assistance
- Financial Wellness for Veterans
- Monthly Visit from Congresswoman
- Veterans Voice
- Interviewing for Jobs: Tips & Training
- Resume writing for veterans
- Basic Computer Coaching
- Home Buying for Veterans

State or Federal programs
- Veterans History Project, Library of Congress
- Fallen Heros photo exhibit
- War Comes Home Exhibit

Creative & the Arts
- Write to a Soldier
- Operation Gratitude Cards and Letters
- Mindful Warrior Project : Stories of the 1/2%
- Trench Art/Combat Art Display
- Poetry Writing
- Concert featuring Vietnam Era music

Film Screenings
- Guy Gabaldon, American Hero
- The Men of Company E, Producer/Writer in attendance
- Between the Lines
- Patriot Guard

Other
- Soldiers Project Monthly Support Group
- VA Mobile Medical Team
- Meet your CVSO
- Meet your Congressperson
- Playgroups for children of veterans
SAN DIEGO PUBLIC LIBRARY
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
ANNUAL REPORT
1945 - 1946

The increasing demand of the public for help in finding the right course to take, or for books to help them in their studies, makes librarians think that everyone in the world must be going to school. The Reference Department reports that college catalogs have never been so much in demand. The Circulation Department maintains a card index of adult classes in San Diego which is arranged by subject and is used constantly.

VETERAN ASSISTANCE

All departments of the library strengthened collections of material of interest and value to veterans. They pored over college catalogs. They flocked to the Business and Technical Department for help in passing Civil Service examinations or for information about new trades or job opportunities. In general they exhibited none of the war neuroses that had been predicted, but were serious seekers after information with almost too much faith in the ability of the library to help them. A veteran's bulletin board has been maintained in the lobby of the Main Library on which are posted announcements of interest to veterans and suggestions about where to go for more information about counseling services or other services.

Service men who have returned to their home towns after being stationed in San Diego often mail their old library cards back, and over and over again they enclose a note thanking the library for courtesy and helpfulness extended toward them while they were here.

GOVERNMENTAL REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Governmental Reference Library completed its first year under the joint sponsorship of the city and county of San Diego. Progress of the library has seemed slow but it has been steady and sure. During the first few months the resources of the library were so limited that the librarian's time was spent in determining the needs of city and county departments, discovering what books and magazines and other materials were already available for them, and deciding what to order. The book collection grew from 32 books to 350, the
One of the core functions of a library is to reduce barriers of access to information. Veterans, as a distinct group, tend to suffer more obstacles to access than many other target audiences, usually through no fault of their own. By understanding the barriers to veterans, and how the Veterans Connect program ameliorates those barriers, we can establish the foundation for understanding the primary justification for the project itself.

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