Best Practices for Engaging with Student Veterans

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SVA History

- SVA grew out the grassroots efforts of small groups of Post-9/11 student veterans who mobilized in key Congressional districts to help pass the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

- These student groups worked to improve college and university support services for their student veteran communities.

- After an initial National Conference in Chicago and formal incorporation, twenty student organizations became the first SVA Chapters on January 11, 2008.
SVA Today

- SVA has grown from 20 SVA Chapters in 2008 to **1,500+ SVA Chapters today**.

- SVA's National Conference, NatCon, is the largest annual gathering of Post-9/11 veterans in the world, with **over 3,000 attendees expected in 2020**.

- SVA trains nearly **1,700 top-performing student veterans** annually at the Leadership Institute and SVA Chapter Summits each year.

- **Over $2.1 million** has been awarded in scholarships to student veterans.

- SVA has conducted research and analysis on **millions of Post-9/11 GI Bill recipients**.

- SVA informed, advanced, and continues to defend Forever GI Bill legislation passed in 2017, which was the largest increase to the GI Bill in a decade at nearly **$3.5 billion**.

"To, Through, and Beyond"
Veterans in Popular Culture
Misconception vs. Reality

- Less likely than their peers to persist and earn a degree.

- Do not perform well academically in post-secondary education.

- Prefer to earn degrees that are similar to the job they had while in the military.

- Pursue less academically rigorous degrees.

- More likely to graduate compared to their peers.

- Veterans have a higher GPA than the national average.

- Majority report that their major or field of study is not at all similar to their specialization in the military.

- Majority pursue degrees in business, STEM, and healthcare related fields.
Who Are Student Veterans?

- 27% are women
- 83% attend a public or private non-profit
- 46% have children
- 52% are married
- 80% are between the ages 24-35
- 90% were enlisted

Over 1 million are receiving G.I. Bill benefits, & 750,000 of them are on campuses with an SVA Chapter.
The Post-9/11 GI Bill Has Helped Veterans Earn Degrees in...

- BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, MARKETING: 96,270
- SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS (STEM): 51,486
- HEALTH PROFESSIONS: 37,138

Over half of student veterans using the Post-9/11 GI Bill earned these degrees in one of these high-growth, high-demand fields that greatly contribute to the country’s economy.
Where to Start? Being “Veteran-Inclusive”

Understanding Campus Culture.
- What makes my campus unique? What are we known for?

Connect with all military and veteran resources across university campus(es), and educate veterans and military-connected students about these resources.

Create and host military/veteran social events.
- Invite school leadership and military/veteran resource providers to these events.

Encourage student veterans to self-identify during the admissions process.

Promote opportunities for student veterans to volunteer or take up campus leadership roles.

Drive and encourage sustainable growth.
- personal, academic, professional development
- Normalize the concept of asking for help (mentorship)
Key Design Elements for SVA Chapters

- **Campus Culture** – what are the things that make your campus unique?

- **Mission** – your SVA Chapter’s reason for existing.

- **Goals** – “big picture” things you would like to achieve in the short-term and long-term.

- **S.M.A.R.T. Objectives** – the specific ways you will execute your goals.

- **Strategies** – your actions; details about how you will work on our objectives.

- **Records & Budgeting** – funding and keeping track of your events and programming.

- **Elections & Leadership Transition** — ensuring sustainable growth.
What is Campus Culture?

- Institution Type
- Residential vs. Commuter
- Student Population
- Student Veteran Population
- Athletics, Greek Life, Other Factors
Creating a Community Culture

- Campus / Community Advocates
- Chapter History
- Chapter Accomplishments
- Membership Demographics
- Family-Friendly Programming
- Engagement with Your Campus
- Engagement with SVA Headquarters
Developing Partnerships

• **On-Campus Community**
  - Student Government Association
  - Career Services
  - Disability Services
  - Alumni Association
  - Clubs/ organizations/ societies with a focus on professional development.

• **Off-Campus Community**
  - Localize SVA's Business and Industry Roundtable.
  - Rotary Club
  - Local Chamber of Commerce
  - Campus Recruiters
  - Professional Societies
  - National Associations (support, grants, network, etc.)
Sources of Income & Donor Cultivation

- Event Tickets
- Merchandise Sales
- Donations
- In-Kind Donations
- Funds for student organizations
- Grants and awards

Thinking about donor cultivation:

- Finding the appropriate donors and matching their interests with the needs of the chapter requires a unique combination of skill and perseverance.
- Many potential donors want to support your cause because they already believe in your mission.
- Alumni who have directly benefited from your SVA Chapter are a great place to start.
- People invest in people they believe in.
- Always follow up and maintain your relationships.
Marketing & Communications

Consider your audiences:
- Chapter Members
- Campus & Student Body
- Local Community & Media

Develop a Brand:
- A name, term, design, symbol or other feature that identifies your organization as distinct from another organization on campus.
- This should be consistent with SVA's national branding.

Leverage Social Media:
- Shares pictures and videos, and tag SVA HQ, campus news, and respective partner orgs so they can share your content.
Marketing & Communications (Continued)

Talking Points:
• Before you tell the world about your SVA Chapter, it’s important to think about your key messages.
• These talking points can help guide your conversations with potential members, reporters, community partners, and more.
• Be sure to share these talking points with all of your Chapter Leaders.
• Each one of us can be a spokesperson for our organization at any time!

Calendar Pulse Moments:
• Memorial Day
• Graduation
• Back-to-School
• Veterans Day
Choosing a Chapter Advisor

• The Chapter Advisor is a full-time staff or faculty member who has agreed to mentor, support, and advocate for the SVA Chapter at their school or campus.

• Chapter Advisors are not members of the Chapter leadership team, ‘in-charge’ of the Chapter, or employers.

• A Chapter Advisor is invited into the role by the SVA Chapter and serves at its discretion.
Creating Valuable Programming

• Your SVA Chapter’s strategic plan will lay the framework for the types of programming to offer.

• Programming may cover a broad range of topics – everything from service opportunities to a Military Ball.

• A variety of activities will ensure all members and spouses/families maintain interest and feel included.

• A clear understanding of your campus culture and your membership will serve you well.

• Solicit ideas and gauge interest for potential activities at meetings and through other mediums.
Types of Programming

**SOCIAL**
- Dinners
- Tailgates & Athletics
- Movie Screenings
- Camping Trips
- Happy Hours
- Military Balls

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**
- Resume Workshops
- Mock Interviews
- Job Fairs
- Mentoring Sessions
- LinkedIn Workshops

**PHILANTHROPY AND SERVICE**
- Fundraisers
- Bake Sales
- Service Days
- Volunteer Opportunities

**ACADEMIC**
- Special office hours
- Group study sessions
- Invite professors to speak
- Surviving Mid-Terms/Finals

**ADMINISTRATIVE**
- Chapter meetings
- Leadership team meetings
- Committee meetings
- SVA Census (Annual)
- Campus Utilization Survey (Annual)
- Update Chapter Contact Information

**KEY MOMENTS**
- Memorial Day
- Veterans Day
- Back-to-School
- Graduation
- NatCon
Chapter Meetings

• **Establish a consistent time/location**, determined by members (Then promote!)

• **Build camaraderie, increase learning, and advance the mission** (Save operational details for leadership meetings.)

• **Invite speakers** (professors, career services, support staff, alumni)

• **Hold virtual meetings at busy times** with Skype, Facebook Live, or another platform.

• “If you feed them, they will come”
Event Planning and Adding Support

- **Goals**: audiences, type of event, when and where, resources needed, etc.

- **Logistics**: Date, time, location, catering, etc.

- **Communications**: Getting the word out and inviting guests.

- **After-Action**: Post event evaluations and follow up.
Example: Annual Seminole Military Ball

- **Goals:** Celebrate the integration of student veterans into all areas of campus life, fundraiser, connect different audiences.

- **Logistics:** Date (April 4th), time (6:30pm-12am), location (Mission San Luis-Mission Ballroom), catering (Madison Social), resources needed (tables, chairs, dance floor, music, food, lighting, Flag, Cake, etc.).

- **Communications:** Invitations to student leaders, campus administration, student government, local media, local community leaders, etc. Leveraging social media and the school newspaper.

- **After-Action:** Follow up with guests, share photos and stories.
Managing and engaging your membership
- How do we define membership?
- Does this match our campus and Chapter culture?
- What proportion of our members attend events?

Recruitment and retention
- Consistent communication
- Follow up with potential members
- Engage new members immediately
- Set up future Chapter Leaders for success
- Deliver relevant value

Records management
- Transparent records, meeting minutes, budgets
- Cloud storage and share drives

Building Sustainable Chapters
Building Sustainable Chapters (Continued)

**Elections**
- Are we hosting regular, fair elections?
- Are multiple contenders running for positions?
- Have we identified the next generation of Chapter Leaders?

**Leadership Transition**
- Transition Meetings
- Transfer of records and documents
- Keeping contact records up to date with campus and SVA HQ

**Fundraising**
- How will our SVA Chapter maintain enough revenue in the future?
- Are we keeping donors and supporters engaged?
Leadership Transition & Elections

- Define leadership positions and responsibilities in writing.
- Continuously recruit and grow new leaders.
- Recruit your replacement from day one.
- Use chairmanships as intermediate leadership positions to empower Chapter Members.
- Find the balance between leader entrenchment and smooth succession.
- Formalize your elections and transition processes.

**Build future leaders—make them want to be in your shoes!**
Evaluation Methods

- **Outputs** indicate counts and activity and answer the question, “What did we do?”

- **Outcomes** show benefits, influence, and effect and answer the question, “What difference does it make?”

**TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF OUTPUT VS. OUTCOME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership grew from 10 to 15 in one month.</td>
<td>The number of peer mentors in the Engineering Technology program increased by 50% with the addition of five new members from that department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We conducted two activities with other student organizations.</td>
<td>SVO members collaborated with the student senate and the student newspaper on initiatives to raise awareness of military issues on campus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The SVO hosted a seminar attended by 12 SVO members.</td>
<td>We connected with campus support services to familiarize our members with on-campus resources they might need for college success.</td>
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Practices in Student Veteran Career Development

• **Begin by targeting specific student veterans based on field of study.** Focusing resources to help develop student veterans early in degree field preps them for internship and jobs where veterans are best suited for success.

• **Leverage a targeted outreach strategy** to match the types of veterans you’re looking for, rather than a shotgun approach to just get more veterans at the top of the funnel.

• **Make self-identification a priority and easy to do for veterans.** Survey and assess how they are contributing in the workforce will support your ability to build an internal business case for how veterans add to your bottom line.

• **Leverage veteran employee resource groups to mentor veterans** through everything from the application process to onboarding to long-term career development. This will make it more likely veteran candidates will succeed and veteran employees will stay and develop into corporate leaders.
Leverage the LinkedIn Community

▪ Use LinkedIn Groups to build networks and for professional development.

▪ Mobilize and invite student veterans, alumni, mentors, industry experts, community partners, and employers.

▪ Optimize Group experience by sharing professional opportunities and events happening on campus and local community.
Can you help get our student vets here?