

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)
Outreach to Women Veterans
Thursday, August 29th, 2024, 3 – 4 p.m. ET**

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Guest Presenter Staff

Hollie Scoma, President, National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators (NASWVC)

Jessica Bradley, Women Veterans' Coordinator/Appeals & Special Advocacy, Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA)

Erika Hoover, Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Manager, Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA)

Key Points

- **Introduction**
 - NVTAC Coach Chris Taylor introduced Hollie Scoma, Jessica Bradley, and Erika Hoover. Each guest presenter introduced themselves, including their branch of service, current roles, and connection to the topic. Their goal was to open a discussion on best practices for identifying and engaging with women veterans to connect them with vital services and supports.
 - NASWVC is active in 28 states and advocates for women veterans by developing partnerships, training, and sharing information. They also provide training on benefits claims, assist veterans with the transition to civilian life, recommend solutions, propose legislation, and perform outreach.
- **Transitioning from the Military for Women Veterans**
 - Jessica stated that it was difficult translating her military experience into civilian life. The accessibility of resources is vital to veterans and their families to support this transition. In her opinion, women veterans are the most visible when in uniform and the most invisible when out of uniform; they are less likely to be recognized by the community for their service.
 - Hollie stated her transition out of the military led to feelings of grief and a sense of lost identity and community. She experienced ignorance and disparaging remarks toward women veterans which turned her off from seeking help. It is important to educate people on the needs and barriers of women veterans.

- Erika seconded Jennifer and Hollie’s experiences. She stated that women veterans’ stories are diverse, but at their core, similar.
- **How can service providers identify women veterans?**
 - Hollie suggested using the verbiage, “Have you served?” instead of “Are you a veteran?” as many women feel they do not meet the definition or identify as a veteran.
 - Jessica recommended starting conversations about serving in the military or military connections in previous generations. This can lead to sharing valuable information about benefits and access to services for loved ones that may have served.
- **What does women veteran recognition look like in your state and how can organizations engage in it?**
 - Erika shared that in Michigan (MI), resolutions are being put forth to establish June 12th as Women Veterans Recognition Day. The topic has caused some division amongst the veteran community, and outreach is needed to raise awareness of this day’s true purpose.
 - Hollie said that Arkansas (AR) had a Women Veterans Day this year and is working on legislation to make it permanent. She has also noticed confusion and pushback from male veterans, questioning why Veteran’s Day does not suffice. This day is not meant to leave out other members of the community, but to highlight extraordinary women veterans and the progress that has been made toward equality of treatment in military service.
 - Jessica stated that Oregon recognizes women veterans on June 12th, as this is the anniversary of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act. She has also noticed pushback to this concept but shared examples of why specifically celebrating women veterans is so important. For example, women’s service was previously classified as “contracting,” and limited access to military benefits. This day is intended to give visibility to the strides women veteran have made.
- **What are some tips for connecting with this community? How can organizations gain cultural competency, find educational opportunities, and adopt strategies that create a welcoming environment for women veterans?**
 - Hollie said she has had success connecting with women veterans by partnering with schools, domestic violence resources, legal aid, or other homelessness providers to host or join benefit fairs. Women veterans may avoid traditional veteran services or be unaware of the keywords for resources and eligibility, so entering these spaces increases access and awareness.
 - Jessica remarked about the importance of connections to women-specific accommodations and helping women veterans understand the language of homelessness programs to identify the best option available to them. Women tend to face higher barriers to accessing benefits, especially due to child care needs. One additional resource is the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP).

- Erika agreed with Jessica’s assessment that child care poses a barrier for women veterans accessing services. She discussed one resource in MI called Tri-Share, wherein the cost of an employee's child care is shared equally among the employer, the employee, and the state of MI. The Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program (SSG Fox SPGP) also provides some funding for child care expenses.
- **What organizations have you partnered with to help women veterans?**
 - Hollie has partnered with Military Service Sisters (AR-based resource) emergency fund, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the Salvation Army. She has also worked with local organizations like Project Healing Waters and food banks as their funding and resources tends to be quicker to access than state or federal programs. Programs need to do the work of outreach and community engagement to identify partners, veterans, and increase word of mouth.
 - Jessica agreed that being embedded in your local community and veterans’ organizations is vital to collaborate and reach veterans in need. She suggested attending Stand Downs, being present on college/university campuses, working with VA health care partners (especially Women Veteran Coordinators), and being plugged into resources at all levels.
- **What organizations do you work with that are not veteran-centric?**
 - Jessica suggested going everywhere; get out in the community, attend events, host listening sessions at local libraries, use social media to reach out across backgrounds/ethnicities, and connect to your tribal veteran communities.
 - Erika agreed, saying veterans are citizens first and will be present in all spaces.
 - Hollie found success identifying women veterans by looking beyond the veteran space. She worked with local school systems, Department of Health, and local fish and game organizations to identify and engage women veterans. She also recommended getting out to connect at job fairs, colleges/universities, workforce agencies, and other community events (i.e., festivals).
- **What is the most successful outreach initiative you have undertaken?**
 - Jessica states the ODVA hosts a statewide conference for women veterans and increases attendance by using social media and partnering with other agencies like the VA and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).
 - Hollie shared that one of their most successful events with 400 women veterans in attendance was due in part to posting flyers in banks and tax offices during tax season. They also host a Women Veterans Summit in AR and perform outreach through the VA, radio stations, TV, and social media.
 - Erika said MI also hosts a conference for women veterans and improves engagement by offering scholarships and sponsorships.
- **Do you include other vendors or service providers at your events?**
 - Jessica stated she regularly has local partners join her resource events, including the American Legion, DAV, VFW, and county veteran service officers (VSO).

She recommends reaching out to your local Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) or Women Veteran Coordinator to see if they can share information about programs serving veterans.

- Erika said merchandise can be a helpful outreach tool. Hollie seconded this, saying the AR DVA provides shirts at their summits as promotional items and she regularly sees veterans in the community wearing them.
- **Final Thoughts**
 - Jessica recommended connecting with NASWVC for ideas and assistance with outreach connections in your community.
 - Hollie emphasized the importance of having platforms for women veterans in each state. She asked participants to reach out to the presenters to make connections and get help to implement strategies to identify and build trust with women veterans.
 - Erika believes building cultural competency and understanding best practices to communicate with women veterans can help women access needed homelessness resources.

Conclusion

Women veterans can be difficult to find and engage because they are less likely to identify themselves as a veteran and engage in traditional veteran services or spaces. They may have also experienced trauma related to their military service or accessing homelessness resources. To overcome these challenges, resource providers should seek to become culturally competent and trauma-informed through education and use strategies that create a welcoming environment. Organizations can also increase connection with women veterans by using more inclusive language (“Have you served?”) and performing outreach in spaces that are not veteran-centric, such as community events or schools. Outreach to women veterans should recognize and respect their particular history, service, barriers, needs, and strengths.

You can review the presentation recording here: [NVTAC August 2024 CoP](#)