



My Next Steps:

Connecting with Veteran Service Organizations after Transition from the Military



Question

What veteran organizations can my service member and I connect with after transition from the military to civilian life? What can these organizations offer our family?



Answer

Veteran service organizations are non-government organizations, associations, non-profits and for-profit groups that serve the needs of military veterans and their families. Over 400,000 VSOs exist today with the sole purpose of veteran and military family support. Families like yours, who are transitioning from the military to civilian life, may benefit from membership, participation or involvement with one or more of these VSOs now or in the future. Connecting with VSOs can serve as a vital link in the support system available to your family after leaving the military.

VSOs can provide support for your family during the first stages of transition planning and throughout the rest of your lives. Before transition, you can seek assistance from a VSO that is chartered by the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide free, trusted information and prompt action to help your service member develop his or her claim for veterans' benefits through the VA. Some VSOs can also connect your family with an accredited representative or veteran service officer to personally assist with appeals about benefits decisions, reopening a claim, filing a new claim or filing a secondary claim.

In addition to assistance with VA claims and benefits, VSOs provide support and many services that can help minimize stress and strengthen your family's overall wellness during and after transition from the military. Some of these services include the following: employment and education assistance; information and referral services; rehabilitation services;

help with combat stress or readjustment issues; housing support; scholarships; financial assistance; leadership programs and training; youth programs; emergency needs, such as food, clothing or shelter; discounts for goods and services and healthcare advocacy, coordination and intervention.

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Engaging with the various veteran organizations may improve your family's well-being and quality of life in other ways. VSOs provide volunteer opportunities, so you can continue using your skills to carry on in your service to your country; to honor our nation and other veterans at parades, special events and funerals and to influence public policy and legislation. Giving your time and talents to these organizations also offers an opportunity to foster connections with people in your new community who have a desire to enhance the quality of life for veterans and military families.

Some of the VSOs you may be familiar with include the American Red Cross, the American Legion, Disabled

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Resources at a Glance

- Veteran Service Organization [Directory](#)
- Accredited Veteran Representatives and Veteran Service Officers [Overview](#)
- [National Resource Directory](#)



Answer (cont.)

Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Resources also exist for the individual branches of the military, including the Association of the United States Army, the Association of the United States Navy, the Marine Corps League and the Air Force Association. By contacting these organizations, you can learn about their benefits of membership and participation. Most VSOs, including those listed, have local offices, chapters and posts where you can make in-person connections in your new community.

With so many VSOs offering support and opportunities to connect, it may be difficult to know where to start and which VSOs can be trusted. The VA publishes a list with contact information for officially recognized VSOs and for those that are not officially recognized by the VA but do represent the interests of American veterans. This resource can provide a launching point to find an organization that speaks to your interests, passions and needs. Note that each organization may have different eligibility requirements, and some have a cost associated with membership or involvement.

The National Resource Directory is another source of trusted information about VSOs, their mission and their contact information. The NRD is a resource website that is a partnership between the Departments of Defense, Labor and Veterans Affairs. You can use the website to locate programs and services that can offer your family recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration support at the national, state and local levels. Links to resources include VSOs, non-profit organizations and educational institutions. By going to the NRD website and inputting a subject, keyword or location, you can get a list of veteran organizations that meet your search criteria. You can also filter the type of organization with which you would like to connect, such as a government organization or non-profit organization.

Your family can count on the many veteran organizations to preserve your bond to military service, to help you feel appreciated for your service and to provide help and support if you need it. Use the list published by the VA and the NRD website to find the right VSO for you.



Steps to Consider

These “Steps to Consider” are not meant as a checklist. Use the suggestions to facilitate a discussion with your service member.

- **Talk with your service member and your family about the benefits you may gain from joining or working with one or more veteran organizations. Some questions to consider include the following:**

- Are you looking for in-person connections and ways to build relationships in your civilian community by becoming local ambassadors for the military or by volunteering for public-service projects?

- Would you like to connect with a group of military-connected people who share your interests, such as motorcycle riding, fitness or veteran or military family advocacy?

- Does your service member need [help](#) preparing his or her disability claim for VA benefits, appealing a VA claims decision, reopening a claim or filing a new claim? Chartered VSOs have accredited Veteran Service Officers who can help.

- Could you or your service member benefit from receiving help with employment, adjusting to being back in school, addressing housing issues or navigating health care after transition?

- If you are a parent, do your children need help finding meaningful connections in your new community? Would you like to encourage them to find resources in your new community to get or stay on track to attend college or career technical training?

- Perhaps your family is part of a special population, such as a specific ethnic group, cultural group or military specialty, and you would like to connect with people with similar experiences. If so, consider that some VSOs serve specific populations of veterans, for example women veterans, veterans who served in the special operations community, or veterans and families who have traditionally been underrepresented.

- **Research the many veterans organizations available to your service member and family. Use the VA’s [Veteran Service Organization Directory](#) and the [National Resource Directory](#) to connect with the VSOs that match your needs and interests.**

