



## Developing Partnerships

The success of Public Media initiatives are better leveraged when they involve partners. There are many different types of partnerships that can make up any one initiative and the National Center for Media Engagement has an excellent primer on partnerships and engaging community.

<http://mediaengage.org/tools/identifying-partners>

Their preface to partnerships asks these questions:

- What groups or individuals are connected to the issue?
- Who is connected to your target audience?
- Who are you trying to engage?
- Who are your “natural partners”?

The Wisconsin Vietnam War Stories Project and LZ Lambeau were monumental undertakings far beyond the resources, reach and skill set of Wisconsin Public Television. We sought out partners who would help us reach veterans and their families, who could help us do the work of a large community event and who would inform that work.

### Key Partners

This project continued a partnership with the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs along with their Wisconsin Veterans Museum, the key partners for Wisconsin WWII Stories and Wisconsin Korean War Stories. These partners had collaborated on fundraising, promotion, making connections, community engagement, publishing a book on the Korean War and conducting community events. While that put us in a good position for something as ambitious as our Vietnam project we were only able to achieve our goals for Vietnam by forming a wide array of additional partnerships around the state.

### Vietnam Veterans

First things first: You need to connect with and enlist the participation of Vietnam veterans. While we found positive response to our Vietnam project nearly everywhere else, we initially saw mostly resistance from the Vietnam veterans themselves. Many Vietnam veterans are leery of “the press” and “the media,” and while you’ll have early adapters, it is very important to demonstrate your seriousness, commitment and why your project is important. Everything that our producer Mik Derks learned about working with Vietnam veterans in [producing the documentary](#) applies to establishing partnerships as well. To help you identify Vietnam veterans in your life, look for their service ribbon. You’ll see it on cars, pins, caps and jackets, and once you learn to look you’ll see it everywhere.

#### Vietnam War Service Ribbon



The idea of honoring and

recognizing Vietnam veterans has



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such a tremendous appeal that we'd suggest thinking very broadly. While your initial thoughts would rightly include veterans groups and veteran support groups, we found a positive response in many other places as well. Seeing our role as a catalyst leading our state in preserving, honoring and remembering our Vietnam veterans, we approached partners for outreach participation, support for our events, promotion and anything and everything needed for a project on this scale. That approach opened a lot of doors and inspired an unprecedented number of partners to participate.

As you launch this project, engage your close friends – share your ideas with your staff, board, volunteer leadership and key funders. The Vietnam War touched an extraordinary number of Americans and you'll likely find veterans and their family members who can and will advocate for you. Plus, you never know who knows whom. We couldn't have done LZ Lambeau without the knowledge, experience, and incredible talents of Project Director and Vietnam veteran, Don Jones. We were introduced to him through the spouse of a board member.

### Veterans Groups

**To help with: leadership, volunteers, promotion, identifying resources, connecting with veterans, outreach activities.**

Veterans groups and veterans support groups can take on significant elements of a project. We relied on veterans to organize a good number of exhibits and activities at LZ Lambeau, including the four days of activities at the Moving Wall™, a military vehicle and aircraft display, artifact exhibits and the Motorcycle Honor Ride. There are natural affinities like having the Disabled American Veterans organize outreach, transportation and help for the disabled, or having the USO work on entertainment/performers. However, having said that, everything really depends on the individuals leading the local chapters of those organizations. Just because a partnership seems logical doesn't mean it will work.

Vietnam veterans are not avid "joiners," so no single veterans' group will give you access to the hundreds of thousands of veterans in your state. But veterans groups can be extremely helpful in reaching actively engaged veterans who can organize things, offer critical feedback, act as leadership volunteers, and marshal volunteer forces to act as promotional outlets in helping you connect with Vietnam veterans.

Every state has hundreds of local veterans groups. Most communities of any size have an American Legion and/or a VFW post, and each state will have a state organization for these groups. They are not hard to find. Veterans groups generally meet monthly and it is fairly easy to locate the leadership of these organizations. **BUT** as you look for connections and partners, you should know that there has been tension between some Vietnam veterans and the traditional veterans groups, especially the VFW and the American Legion, because many Vietnam veterans were not welcomed by them when they



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returned home from Southeast Asia. While most of these groups are now run by Vietnam veterans, the American Legion is not necessarily the obvious path to engaging Vietnam veterans.



The largest Vietnam Veterans group is the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) <http://www.vva.org/>. You can find a list of chapters here: <http://www.vva.org/chapters.html>. As you ask around you may also find regional or state Vietnam veterans groups. These groups may have the most credibility among Vietnam Veterans.

Larger national Vietnam veterans groups or groups started by Vietnam veterans include:

VietNow <http://www.vietnow.com>  
Rolling Thunder <http://www.rollingthunder1.com>  
Veterans for Peace <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/>  
Veterans of the Vietnam War <http://www.vvnw.org/>  
Vietnam Veterans Against the War <http://www.vvaw.org/>

Other national organizations include:

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|---|---|
| <a href="#">American Ex-Prisoners of War</a>                    | <a href="#">Military Order of the Purple Heart</a>          |
| <a href="#">American GI Forum</a>                               | <a href="#">National Association for Black Veterans</a>     |
| <a href="#">American Gold Star Mothers</a>                      | <a href="#">National Veterans Organization, Inc.</a>        |
| <a href="#">American Legion</a>                                 | <a href="#">Navy Club of the U.S.A.</a>                     |
| <a href="#">American Veterans (AMVETS)</a>                      | <a href="#">Paralyzed Veterans of America</a>               |
| <a href="#">Army and Navy Union</a>                             | <a href="#">The Retired Enlisted Association</a>            |
| <a href="#">Disabled American Veterans (DAV)</a>                | <a href="#">Veterans of Foreign Wars</a>                    |
| <a href="#">Gold Star Wives of America</a>                      | <a href="#">Veterans of Modern Warfare</a>                  |
| <a href="#">Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America</a>        | <a href="#">Vietnam Helicopter Crew Members Association</a> |
| <a href="#">Marine Corps League</a>                             | <a href="#">Women's Army Corps Veteran's Association</a>    |
| <a href="#">Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)</a> |   |

A larger list of veterans groups is maintained by the US Department of Veterans Affairs:  
<http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm?template=view&SortCategory=4>

### Veterans Support Groups

**To help with volunteers, leadership, connecting to support services, outreach activities, promotion.**



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There are a number of major organizations to support veterans. While some may be more focused on current service personnel, many of these organizations are run by Vietnam veterans and all are familiar with the issues facing Vietnam veterans.

Each state has a **Department of Veterans Affairs** affiliated with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). While states are organized differently, these departments are generally organized within state government and are charged with advocating for veterans and providing benefits. Here's a link to their national organization: [National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs](#).

Veterans support is offered to regions within each state, often by county, through offices and staff most commonly named **County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs)**. <http://www.nacvso.org/> Many Native American nations have **Tribal Veterans Service Officers (TVSOs)**. These CVSOs and TVSOs, usually veterans themselves, are charged with helping veterans and veterans' families access their benefits. They have extensive connections to veterans in their area. They are a very useful resource for finding veterans and understanding veterans' issues. Most of these organizations will have state meetings. We partnered with the CVSOs and TVSOs in Wisconsin for our initial veteran listening sessions held regionally throughout the state. Active CVSOs and TVSOs recruited Vietnam veterans to participate in those sessions. CVSO connections by state can be found here: <http://nacvso.org/find-a-service-officer/>

The US Department of Veterans Affairs operates a network of **VA Hospitals** [http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/division\\_flesh.asp?dnum=1](http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flesh.asp?dnum=1) and **Vets Centers**. [http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter\\_flesh.asp](http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter_flesh.asp) These are excellent resources for finding experts in your area on issues like PTSD, Agent Orange and veterans counseling. The Vets Centers were created to provide a place for veterans to seek counseling without being in the VA system.

**Helpful hint:** Many Vietnam veterans have been very frustrated by the limitations of the VA system. While most are generally pleased with their care for combat injuries, veterans have been fighting for years to have the health implications of Agent Orange and PTSD fully recognized. It helps to be aware of these tensions and distrust.

You'll also find non-profit groups whose mission is to serve veterans, such as the USO . <http://www.uso.org/>

### Active Service Military

**To help with: Volunteers, honor activities, advocating for the project, marshalling large numbers of trained people to construct things, for safety/security**

There is a strong connection between Vietnam veterans and active service personnel, especially Desert veterans. Desert Vets and Veterans of Modern Warfare are the common names for veterans serving in



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combat theatres from the 1<sup>st</sup> Gulf War to the present wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Vietnam veterans have been very active in welcome home activities and advocating for improved veterans benefits. Many people have an image of the Vietnam veteran as a reluctant warrior drafted unwillingly into service, but that's not a complete or necessarily accurate picture. Many people who served in Vietnam are from families with strong military traditions, and regardless of whether they have sons, daughters, nephews or nieces in service, they will have strong concerns about the health and welfare of our active service personnel.

Also know that the branches of the military are very proud of their history and traditions. Current military personnel are acutely aware of what happened to Vietnam veterans when they came home, and how today's homecomings are dramatically different in large part because of Vietnam veterans. We found these groups, such as the Desert Vets, highly motivated to help.

Check for military bases in your area. [http://themilitaryzone.com/military\\_bases.html](http://themilitaryzone.com/military_bases.html). You can find local National Guard units here: <http://www.nationalguard.com/life/unit-finder>

**Helpful hint:** When hearing about a project to honor Vietnam veterans, many will wonder why this energy isn't being devoted to helping our current troops. Many of the military and veterans group leaders with whom we worked believed strongly that healing the wounds of Vietnam is one of the most important things we can do as a nation to support our active service personnel and younger veterans. Having current service personnel available to advocate for the importance of this movement and to help veterans go forward is very beneficial.

### Media Outlets

Because of the strong general interest in LZ Lambeau, we had a tremendous response from newspapers and commercial radio and television stations. An important partner for us was the Green Bay Press Gazette, who we approached early as a content partner, and who invited us to present at the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Newspapers Association. The Gazette ran a series of articles in the months leading up to LZ Lambeau, and other newspapers had great pick-up of the event and stories from veterans in their area. These stories proved to be an excellent way to extend the mission of the project and get the word out to veterans.

**Helpful hint:** Newspapers, radio and television talk shows were more receptive when we had stories of veterans from their home town. Track your story ideas; you'll have lots. A database of participating veterans will prove very helpful. Having veterans actively engaged in these activities, and in all promotion, is important. Because of the skepticism of the press among Vietnam veterans, it was extremely beneficial for anyone who spoke to the media on behalf of the project to themselves be Vietnam veterans.

### State and Local Government



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**To help with: getting the word out, dealing with logistical and regulatory challenges of a large community event, to make your event or activities an official activity of your city or state**

In Wisconsin we made an early overture to the Governor's office and the legislature. In our case, we were creating Wisconsin's official "Welcome Home" for Vietnam veterans. Having the participation of the Governor and the legislature as the office and body that best represented the people of Wisconsin was extremely important. The Governor helped us with an official announcement of the event and personally extended a "Thank You" and "Welcome Home" from the people of Wisconsin.

**Helpful hint:** Vietnam veterans are very leery of politicians and political activities. We therefore limited such participation severely. The Governor was invited to join the official announcement of LZ Lambeau and to speak (for only a couple of minutes) at LZ Lambeau in our Tribute Ceremony. Our volunteers managing The Moving Wall™ invited the Green Bay mayor and Brown County Executive to participate in the opening of The Moving Wall™. Beyond that, we invited politicians to be at LZ Lambeau, but we declined their offers (often very *insistent* offers) to speak or have any official role at the event.

### History Groups and Museums and Other Content Partners

**To help with: materials for exhibits, establish connections to veterans groups, and knowledge of veteran artists, performers and military scholars in your area**

For a community event of any scale, military museums are very good partners. If you don't have a military museum in your area, you may find that your local history museum has military collections. Those museums might also like to partner in your project to expand their collection of artifacts from Vietnam veterans.

The American Museum Association's database can help. Use their search tool to select the category Military Museum to find member museums:

<http://iweb.aam-us.org/Membership/MemberDirectorySearch.aspx>

There are a number of Vietnam exhibits that travel and are available for events: The Moving Wall™, the Agent Orange Quilt, the Canadian Red Wall, and collections from The National Veterans Art Museum in Chicago. Generally, like other travelling exhibits, they come with a price. For LZ Lambeau, working with our partners enabled us to identify a number of wonderful exhibits that were available in our region. Having about 18 months to plan our event allowed us to get our event penciled into the schedule of all the exhibits that we engaged. In addition, our volunteers created a number of original exhibits for LZ Lambeau like *The Paper Wall*, a Wisconsin Library Association project that compiled and displayed all the newspaper obituaries of Wisconsin's 1,244 KIA and MIA.

**Helpful hint:** We would encourage you to carefully curate exhibits and to be prepared to say no. We had several veterans groups request to hand out materials. To their credit, they agreed when we



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explained to them that we did not want veterans attending the event to be overwhelmed with flyers as if they were at a trade show. We provided one location for all veterans groups to have their materials on display, and then we carefully managed the exhibits to weed out any that were not of broad enough interest, were too political, or requested donations. We did not want the veterans being asked repeatedly to donate their support, so except for The Moving Wall™, we declined exhibits with this stipulation or encouraged those presenters to find an event sponsor.

### **Universities, Colleges and Libraries**

#### **To help with: scholarly presentations, outreach to certain years' alumni, hosting community events**

The Wisconsin Library Association and the University of Wisconsin System were excellent partners for organizing documentary screenings, veterans' forums and lectures. These were often conducted in conjunction with local veterans groups who helped identify veterans to participate and promoted the event in the veteran community.

Because some of the strongest negative response to Vietnam veterans occurred on college campuses, there was significant interest within the University to reach out to their veteran alumni. The UW Alumni Association included a feature of UW grads/Vietnam veterans in their magazine and, along with the UW Chancellor's office, hosted an opening reception for our *Back in the World* portrait exhibit with a preview of the documentary for veterans and legislators.

### **Other partners**

We found a number of organizations with a statewide presence to help us get the word out about LZ Lambeau. A partnership with Miller Brewing and the Wisconsin Tavern League helped get event posters in members' businesses and other locations in their communities. Large employers – especially those active in National Guard activities – shared information in their employee newsletters and other communications. Participating energy companies, banks and credit union associations included event promotions in their billings. One grocery chain did fundraising in their stores, and another company printed all the materials for its promotion. That not only raised over \$30,000 but also got information about the event into thirteen high-traffic stores across the state. The regional Taco Bell franchise adopted this project and had promotional materials including posters and table top displays in restaurants in three states. Taco Bell even purchased three billboards to promote LZ Lambeau. Again, think broadly. Imagine some things that you wouldn't normally think possible. With this project they are possible.

### **Diversity**

To deal with the Vietnam War in a comprehensive way necessitates significant effort in connecting with diverse populations. Every ethnic group in your audience should feel that their personal story has been



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included. In addition to the fact that Public Broadcasting has embraced diversity as it enriches our work, the issues and tensions of race are central to the story of the Vietnam War because it was such an important issue in this country in late '60s and early '70s. Providing a voice to the diverse people and families affected by that war is essential. Over 3.4 million Americans served in Southeast Asia, including 275,000 African Americans and 170,000 Hispanics. And as a consequence of the war, significant Vietnamese and Hmong immigrated to the United States. The impact on Vietnamese Americans and Hmong was enormous. Low estimates suggest that 1.5 million Vietnamese were killed during the war. Estimates also suggest that 10% of the Hmong population was killed during the war.

The largest organization of African American veterans is the National Association of Black Veterans (NABVETS) <http://www.nabvets.com/>. You can find a link to their regional chapters here: <http://www.nabvets.org/index.php/membership-chapters/nabvets-chapters-state-commands/>

The most prominent Hispanic veterans group is the American GI Forum <http://www.agifusa.org/>. You will find their chapter listing here: <http://www.agifusa.org/chapters>.

Wisconsin has a very significant Hmong population and we were successful in finding a Hmong veteran to interview for our documentary and a Hmong military organization to be involved at LZ Lambeau. Because of the Hmong role as an American ally in the war, many Vietnam veterans have a strong emotional connection to them, so it was important that the Hmong have a strong presence at LZ Lambeau. Connecting with community groups that were active in working with the Hmong was essential. Hmong veterans are organized as the Lao Veterans. <http://www.laoveterans.org/> At LZ Lambeau we organized a presentation on the role of the Hmong in the Vietnam War and provided them space for a display. We know that this specific activity inspired many Hmong veterans and families to attend. One of the Hmong leaders told us that LZ Lambeau was the first cross-cultural event where their veterans were honored side by side with our Vietnam veterans.

**Helpful hint:** Hmong veterans from around Wisconsin were very clear that they needed an authorization from the state leader of their veterans group to participate in our event. So learning a bit about how the veterans groups are organized and a face to face meeting with the Wisconsin head of the Lao veterans was critical to enlisting their participation. Understanding a bit about their culture is also critical for successful communication.

In Wisconsin we had less success connecting with Vietnamese veterans and their families, even after conversations with Vietnamese college students we were able to find through the UW Madison Southeast Asian student group. There is still tension in the Vietnamese community about the war and concerns for family members living in Vietnam. WGUV, the organizers of LZ Michigan, connected with a person at Grand Valley State University in the Office of Multi-Cultural Affairs who is Vietnamese and helped them identify veterans through the Vietnamese American Association of Michigan. There are hundreds of these local groups organized by states or cities.





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**Helpful hint:** With the Hmong and Vietnamese veterans you will have language barriers. WGUV developed a focused promotion campaign in Vietnamese with flyers and some targeted print ads. They also requested a letter of support from community leaders to help participants know that WGUV was a trusted partner with the Vietnamese community.

### Veterans Families

Like every war, the Vietnam War profoundly affected veterans and their families. With more than 58,000 American deaths in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, plus early deaths from suicide, Agent Orange exposure and other health problems, the Vietnam War has impacted millions of families. Your project will touch some extraordinarily deep emotions and profound feelings from parents, siblings, spouses, children and friends of Vietnam veterans. It was very important to our veterans that we reach out to the families. To this end, all our promotion described LZ Lambeau as an event for Vietnam Veterans and their families. We also encouraged families to participate in LZ Lambeau together. It proved to be an extraordinary experience with many Vietnam veterans sharing, for the first time, their stories about Vietnam with their loved ones.

Some groups that can help you make those connections include:

American Gold Star Mothers <http://www.goldstarmoms.com/>

Gold Star Wives of America <http://www.goldstarwives.org/>

Blue Star Families <http://www.bluestarfam.org/>

**Helpful Hint:** We found that many veterans participated in our event at the urging of their wives and daughters. We would encourage targeting those populations for every promotion. We were able to use sewing and quilting lists to reach out to women in the right age range who have husbands, brothers and friends who served in Vietnam.

### Organizing our Partners

As our extensive list of interested partners grew, we knew that we were developing a tremendous resource, and with such an ambitious project as LZ Lambeau we knew that we needed those organizations to take on a significant amount of the work. To enlist their ongoing help and guidance, we invited a representative or two from each veterans group and veterans support group to join our steering committee, dubbed "The Allies." The Allies met in various locations around the state approximately every other month for a year. Our requirement for inclusion in this group was that they each take responsibility for some aspect of the project and that they always speak their minds.

Early meetings focused on sharing information about our plans and inviting their feedback. From these discussions we identified areas of need and groups began to form up into committees focused on specific aspects of the event, such as volunteers, the motorcycle ride, food, access issues and particular



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exhibits such as the aircraft, The Moving Wall™ and vehicle exhibits. Increasingly the meeting agendas began to focus on each group reporting on the progress of their particular project.

A critical issue was to find someone to recruit and manage volunteers. We found two leaders who created a committee that solicited volunteers in the Green Bay area and then filled assignments as defined by each committee. Active outreach to veterans groups around the state helped us fill over 1,100 volunteer slots during our weekend of activities.

The meetings took place on Saturday mornings and lasted into the early afternoon. Later meetings typically included committee meetings to start the day and then everyone meeting together in the early afternoon to get updates from the partners and discuss key issues.

The Allies group grew and grew. It was a great venue for discussing ideas, for energizing volunteers and for generating tremendous buy-in to what we were planning. It paid off with a large ambitious event that was tremendously well organized.

**Helpful Hint:** We knew that even with the Allies we didn't have the technical skills to run such an ambitious event and so we contracted for some work and hired some additional staff. One important decision was to hire an event management company in Green Bay to work on LZ Lambeau with our event director, Don Jones. Their local contacts and experience were invaluable in staging and organizing the event. We hired them about seven months before the event, and they were actively engaged in each of the Allies meetings leading up to LZ Lambeau.

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