



Heroes Outreach Program Starting a new Gathering

First, let me start by saying, thank you. Thank you for showing interest in starting a new Gathering of the Heroes Outreach Program in your city or local area. It's inspiring to see so many people recognizing the need for our program in addressing the growing devastation caused by PTSD in our Veterans and First Responders. Believe it or not, it is actually pretty easy to start a new Gathering anywhere in the world. Below is a short, and simple checklist to get you up and running in no time. As always, keep in mind, the national staff are always here to help in any way we can.

1 Locate a suitable location for the Gatherings.

A The location needs to be a place of peace and safety. An auditorium, a cafe or restaurant, a school classroom, a community center, a club house, or perhaps the same location as the AA Gatherings. The key is that the location has to be peaceful and disarming. Two things to keep in mind while selecting a location for the Gatherings, 1) There can be no alcohol served at the location, even if in another room. Many veterans have issues with alcoholism and simply the smell of alcohol can cause an issue with a vet struggling with PTSD and alcoholism. Also, there can not be a separate bar area in the establishment. If a restaurant serves beer or wine with a meal, that will be acceptable, but the serving of alcohol can not be a primary money maker for the business. 2) A non-religious affiliated location. Many vets tend to use rather 'salty' language. While this behavior should not be promoted, many vets would feel uncomfortable in a religious setting.

B The location has to be large enough to accommodate the attendees, but not too large as to lose it's 'coziness'.

C The location is something that has to be taken into consideration. It needs to be in an easily accessible location, not only with handicap access, but easy driving and not in the middle of a large population area, such as a busy shopping mall area or theater area. Individuals suffering with PTSD often avoid crowds. If you hold a Gathering in a busy area of town, your attendance may suffer.

D The first Gatherings held in the Heroes Outreach Program occurred in a small town cafe that was open only for breakfast and lunch. They closed at 2 pm every day. The owners of the cafe were generous enough to provide the location one evening a week as well as catered every Gathering free of charge. We provided a receipt to them at the end of every year for the value of the location rental and catering.

2 Find a Veteran to host and lead the Gathering.

This is very important. Veterans feel comfortable around their fellow Veterans. Many Vets don't

attend or seek counseling because they are not comfortable discussing their issues with a counselor who they feel can't understand what they have been through. Having a Vet host and start the Gathering will put everyone at ease from the start. In addition to the Gathering Coordinator, you need to select a backup Gathering Coordinator in case the Primary Gathering Coordinator is unable to attend a scheduled Gathering or event. These Gathering Coordinators need to understand that they are making a commitment to be available every week for a Gathering.

3 **Always have food and refreshments available at the Gathering.** 'Breaking bread' has historically been a way of showing friendship and kinship. Chatting around the snack table has always made people feel comfortable.

4 **Always keep in mind, keep everything as relaxing and comfortable as possible.** There will be no alcohol or intoxicating substances consumed at any Gathering. No one will be called out for being late or not being dressed appropriately. Everyone will be greeted and welcomed to attend the Gathering. There will be no smoking at the Gatherings, but inform everyone they are welcome to step out at any time for a smoke. Also, if you are holding a presentation during your Gathering, and if the group is large enough, schedule a break here and there to allow the attendees time to mingle and build a repartee with each other.

5 As the program has progressed, we have found that holding Gatherings in a familiar restaurant or cafe is most conducive to talking and sharing among the vets and first responders. We have found that a small cafe with a separate back dining area is ideal. It also helps to have the same wait staff every week. This builds a comfort level and brings them into the trusted circle of a Gathering. You will find that as time goes on, the attendees will begin looking for their usual waiter or waitress. It is a good idea to include them in any presentations or activities. The more you can make the rest of the attendees comfortable with the environment, the more successful your Gatherings will be.

6 **Request Program Debit Cards.** The program uses a business card service called Bento for Business. They provide prepaid debit cards that are funded by the Heroes Outreach Program. Once you decide to begin holding Gatherings, request a Bento card from your City or Regional Coordinator. It will be their responsibility to ensure sufficient funds are available for your Gatherings.

7 **ACCOUNTING!** As you can imagine, accounting of all funds is very strictly enforced. Each Gathering Coordinator is responsible for paying the bill for the Gathering and for providing receipts to the National Organization. As the Heroes Outreach Program is an IRS recognized 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we have very strict accounting requirements that must be met. Every Gathering Coordinator will ensure that they receive a physical, hard copy of a receipt for every expenditure and that every receipt is sent to the National Headquarters at the end of every month. The organization has very good controls that can be placed on the Bento cards, so expenditures outside the normally scheduled Gathering will not go through. It is imperative that every receipt be forwarded to National every month to ensure compliance with IRS regulations.

8 **Fliers and Reference Material.** You can find the latest, updated flier for the program on the organization's website under "Reference." Feel free to download this flier and have as many copies printed as you may need. You will also find a copy of the IRS 501(c)3 Determination Letter that includes our EIN in case someone wants to claim a donation to our organization on their taxes. All donations are tax deductible. You will also find the Missouri State Sales Tax Exemption letter stating that we do not pay sales tax on any items necessary for the running of the program. Please provide a copy of this to the location providing the catering of your Gatherings.