

Virginia Board of Veterans Services

Veterans in the Arts Working Group - Final Report to the Board, 29 June 2021

Working group members: Ms. Julie Waters, Chair

Mr. Carl Bedell

Mr. Victor Angry

Summary of Findings:

The Veterans in the Arts Working Group was convened in September of 2018 to examine the landscape of arts resources for veterans and their families in the Commonwealth and to make recommendations to improve those resources and/or access to those resources. The Working Group broadly considered the field of the arts to be comprised of the traditional fine arts as well as the performing arts, filmmaking, fashion, creative writing, music, comedy, and the culinary arts. It also determined that arts resources for veterans include art as therapy, art for enjoyment or community, and entrepreneurial or vocational art programs.

The Working Group surveyed existent arts programming accessible to Virginia veterans and military families, and found a plentiful and diverse variety of programs available to serve the community. The programs ranged from veteran-focused organizations that also provide arts programs (.ie. the Virginia War Memorial and Veteran Care Centers), dedicated arts programs (i.e. the Hylton Center's Veterans and the Arts Initiative, RIFF and the Virginia Film Institute, and the Virginia Arts Commission), national programs (i.e. the Armed Services Arts Partnership), and countless private and public nonprofits and organizations of all sizes involved with veterans, the arts, or both.

Ultimately, the Working Group found that the missing link for arts programs for veterans and their families is the difficulty in connecting those needing or wanting services to the services themselves. Because there is no central clearinghouse or agency tracking arts programming for the military and veteran community, a potential beneficiary of an arts program or service - especially those provided by smaller organizations - needs to either be deliberately searching for a specific service or, to put it plainly, get lucky and stumble upon it. While a robust and broad spectrum of services exist in the Commonwealth (and beyond), what is needed is a way to track and compile programs and then connect the veterans and family members who want or need arts services to the right program.

Recommendations:

1. That the Veterans in the Arts Working Group be disbanded following the Board's acceptance of this report.
2. That offices and divisions within the Department of Veterans Services strive to partner with other arts organizations and/or continue to seek out ways to use the arts to serve Virginia's military community.
3. That, when the budget allows, DVS consider adding a part- or full-time arts coordinator to its staff to better track available arts programs and opportunities and connect individuals with the best programs to fit their needs. Alternatively, DVS could consider restructuring the duties of current staff to allow for oversight of arts programs.