

Veteran Pinning Ceremony Guide

This guide provides an overview of the suggested process for conducting a Veteran Pinning Ceremony. Your organization may tailor ceremonies to best fit the needs of your patients, staff, and communities.

Purpose

Veteran Pinning Ceremonies provide an opportunity to acknowledge the military service and sacrifices made by a Veteran and their family. Hospice organizations are uniquely situated to offer a final expression of gratitude and appreciation for a Veteran's service. This act of recognition and appreciation can provide a Veteran with a sense of meaning and purpose at end of life while simultaneously providing comfort and closure to a Veterans' loved ones.

Types of Veteran Pinning Ceremonies

Planned Ceremony - A planned ceremony is scheduled in advance to honor a Veteran's service and enable as many family members, friends, and staff as possible to be in attendance. Planned ceremonies may be preferred for patients expected to remain on hospice service for an extended time. Given the unpredictable nature of hospice care, we encourage you to plan ceremonies at the beginning of a patients' hospice admission. Planned ceremonies can also serve as an opportunity for an organization to recognize Veterans not in hospice care such as family members, nursing facility residents, or other community members. These ceremonies can be held to recognize a holiday such as Veterans Day or Memorial Day.

Spontaneous Ceremony – In some cases, spontaneous ceremonies will better fit the needs of a Veteran. For instance, a spontaneous ceremony may be needed if a patient is experiencing a sudden decline or if you encounter a Veteran unexpectedly during an event or facility visit. Use your judgment to know when the right time to complete a pinning is. It is best practice to keep a small supply of pins and/or certificates on hand in the event that a spontaneous ceremony is needed. Spontaneous ceremonies may be smaller due to their unexpected nature; however, it is ideal to assemble a small audience of available individuals when possible (i.e. ask facility staff to be present, call a Vet-to-Vet volunteer to join in over the phone or via video call, etc.).

During the Ceremony

Pinning Ceremonies can be facilitated by your organization's WHV primary contact, hospice volunteers, Veteran-to-Veteran volunteers, or any other member of your organization that has been educated on Veterans end of life needs and is adept at hosting this ceremony. [Certificates of recognition](#) are also available on the WHV site and can be presented as part of a pinning ceremony.

Suggested Pinning Ceremony Script

"Ms./Mr. [Veteran's name], on behalf of [our staff, the VA, ___ Hospice, etc.], we want to thank you for your service to our nation. Thank you for the sacrifices you made and your willingness to serve our country. You endured hardships and you were willing to risk your life to maintain our freedom. Please accept our deepest thanks and gratitude. As a symbol of our appreciation, we would like to present you with this pin. When you see this pin, know that your service to the nation is deeply appreciated. We thank you."

During the Ceremony Continued

The host might also consider asking the veteran:

- Would you be willing to tell us about your experience in the military?
- When / where/ for how long did you serve?
- What do you remember about your service / your peers / the location you served in?

The host should:

- Listen non-judgmentally to the Veterans' shared experience and ask questions that promote meaning-making.
- Offer to take photographs or videotape the ceremony, with permission from the Veteran and their loved ones.
- Prioritize the experience of family and friends by allowing loved ones to ask questions, make comments, and provide additional information.

After the Ceremony

Follow Up

After a Pinning Ceremony, consider how you can continue to provide specialized support to a Veteran and/or their loved ones.

- Following up with a patient might include: offering to connect a Veteran patient with a Vet-to-Vet volunteer, offering space for a Veteran to recall their military experience during subsequent visits, presenting a [Veteran-to-Veteran letter of thanks](#), etc.
- Following up with a loved one might include: providing space for the friend or family member to recall how the Veterans' service impacted their life, connecting a family caregiver with [resources for Veteran caregivers](#), presenting a friend or family member with a photo of the Veteran at their pinning ceremony following their death, etc.

Keep a Record

Be sure to maintain your own records of the number of pinning ceremonies your organization facilitates each year. This is a great figure to include in your agency's annual reports! Additionally, if you are pursuing Level 5, we require you to report the number of Veterans you have pinned each year!

Share Their Story

With permission from the Veteran patient and/or their family, consider sharing this story across your organizations' communication or social media platforms! You can also submit your [story to WHV](#) or read about other organization's pinning events on the [WHV Blog](#)!