



Joining Forces For Women Veterans

Summit Toolkit

Section I: Introduction & Overview

We appreciate your interest in hosting a Joining Forces for Women Veterans (JFWV) Summit, and are pleased to share this toolkit with you to help you plan and conduct a Summit at your workplace or in your community.

This Toolkit has six individual sections:

- Section I: Introduction & Overview**
- Section II: Issue Briefs (Homelessness, Reintegration, Careers & Employment, Mentoring)
- Section III: Inaugural Summit Report
- Section IV: Media Guide
- Section V: Event Planning Guide
- Section VI: Webchat Guide

We have also included these additional Business and Professional Women Foundation resources:

- JFWV Talking Points
- JFWV Logo
- JFWV Advisory Council List
- JFWV Website: www.WomenJoiningForces.org
- JFWV Summit YouTube
- JFWV Summit Webcast
- JFWV Recommended Reading List

This first section provides an organizational overview for undertaking a Joining Forces for Women Veterans (JFWV) Summit, including:

- A. How to use this toolkit (p. 2)
- B. Purpose and benefits of a Summit (pp. 2-5)
- C. History and role of BPW Foundation in working with women veterans (pp. 5-6)
- D. Contact Information (p. 6)

A. How to Use this Toolkit

We encourage you to use this toolkit to plan and conduct your event, whether you are looking to develop a formal Summit, small group discussion at work, or local BPW Foundation presentation.

In preparation for your Summit discussions, provide your invitees with the four issue briefs contained in Section II. Each brief covers one of our four suggested Summit topics:

- Family and community reintegration
- Homelessness
- Employment and Careers
- Mentoring

These briefs provide an introduction to the topic, overview of key issues, and examples of promising practices. The briefs conclude with a few probing questions to help you explore possible support strategies within your own work environment, as well as your own community/region. If your Summit attendees arrive at the event with basic knowledge and background about the issues women veterans face, they will be prepared to consider questions and applications within their own organizations/companies and communities. The briefs can also be used as discussion guides to keep conversation on track during your Summit. An important goal is to focus the discussions and format in a way that addresses the pressing issues women veterans face in your organization and/or community.

A more detailed description of each of these issues, including the findings from BPW Foundation's Inaugural Summit, is contained in Section III, the JFWV Inaugural Summit Report.

Section IV is a comprehensive overview of how to incorporate the media into your Summit. Sections V and VI provide detailed logistical and administrative guidelines for the planning of your event, including how to incorporate a webchat into part (or all) of your Summit. These are the "nuts and bolts" details on how to organize your unique event.

As you decide on the size and scope of your discussion, select those sections of the planning guide most useful to you. Finally, please share your experiences and feedback with BPW Foundation on the "Planning Team Evaluation Form" (Section V, Attachment F), so we can continue to improve this program and share best practices with others.

B. Purpose and Benefits of a Summit

Hosting a [Joining Forces for Women Veterans Summit](http://www.WomenJoiningForces.org) raises awareness of the issues impacting women veterans and begins community-level involvement and problem-solving. Communities can't effectively address the challenges women veterans face without first identifying and assessing the problems they encounter. Summits can frame the key issues, support discussion, and crystallize ideas to enable women veterans,

employers, and others in the community to partner in improving opportunities for women veterans as they reintegrate into civilian life. The goal is to share:

- What we know about women veterans' transition challenges and outcomes;
- Why those outcomes are important for the social and economic prosperity of our nation; and
- How government, business, and community leaders should respond to (and support) women veterans' successful post-military reintegration.

What is the problem? [Throughout American history](#), women have made huge personal and family sacrifices to serve our country in times of peace, war, and conflict. For far too long, though, women veterans have been invisible. It wasn't until the 1980 Census that women were asked if they had served in the U.S. Armed Forces. When finally asked the question, more than 1.2 million women responded "yes."

Too often, women return home from the military but do not receive the recognition, benefits and services they have earned. Women represent 15% of America's military and are the fastest growing veteran population, yet support programs are largely designed with men in mind, and do not meet the unique needs of women veterans. And, women veterans are four times more likely than non-veteran women to experience homelessness – there are more than 100,000 homeless veterans on our streets and 13,000 of them are women, many with children. The military expends great resources training its service members to be skilled, efficient, disciplined and adaptable employees. Yet, when soldiers return home, they often have difficulty translating their skills into the civilian world. It is a struggle for women veterans to find the employment services they need to guide and mentor them in searching for and securing meaningful jobs. A woman veteran, speaking at BPW Foundation's Inaugural Summit explained that while she held a top secret clearance and worked at a major military command center, she was told she only qualified to be a waitress or a file clerk upon leaving the service.

Key Findings from Inaugural Summit: Key findings from the [October 2010 BPW Foundation Inaugural Summit](#) illustrate the critical need for identifying and implementing solutions to support women veterans, and underscore the need for holding local Summits across the country. [Click here](#) for the Summit report detailing each of these findings.

1. There is an economic and moral imperative for addressing the distinct challenges women veterans face.
2. Women veterans lack awareness of and/or access to benefits, services, and programs that address their unique needs.
3. Efforts to address obstacles to women veterans' transition must include dual focus: support for women veterans and capacity-building for organizations.
4. Actions and solutions that address women veterans' transition challenges should be informed, holistic, collaborative, and community-based.

How can we help? While national in scope, solutions can only be implemented locally, where women veterans live. Women veterans return to their home communities, and it is here where employers, service providers, and networks must be leveraged to support their return to civilian life. Grassroots Summits are critical to accomplish this, and by holding a Summit, you can localize important research and work on behalf of women veterans in your community. Simply beginning these important conversations in your community will go a long way toward advocating for women veterans. For example:

- What are the challenges facing women veterans in your community?
- Are any women veterans homeless?
- Are they finding jobs?
- Do employers understand the value of hiring women who have served in the military?

These questions are just the start. Your Summit is a call to action, where business, government, military, and community leaders will gather together to discuss specific challenges women veterans face as well as opportunities they offer in the workplace. Solutions will be investigated and introduced to ensure community support, suitable housing, good jobs, and overall success as civilians.

In April, 2010, BPW Foundation, in conjunction with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the First Lady's Office at the White House, initiated plans for a mentoring effort targeted to women veterans and military spouses. The idea for this [mentoring initiative](#) emerged from discussions at BPW Foundation's Inaugural Summit: Joining Forces for Women Veterans. This new program will match women mentors with women veterans and military wives in communities and businesses across the country.

By holding a Summit, you can advance this and other important work on behalf of women veterans in your community. Your community's Summit can focus on any or all of the issues discussed in the briefs, including how to connect women veterans with local mentors.

Benefits: There are many benefits to conducting a Summit in your community. Raising awareness of the homelessness rate among women veterans can enable local government and community organizations to work together to address this problem and secure the necessary resources to support these women. Employers can learn about the benefits of hiring women veterans who are highly trained, qualified, and reliable. Most importantly, your attendees can hear directly from women veterans about what has worked for them (and what has not), and share ideas for implementing solutions locally. Community organizations (Chambers of Commerce, social services organizations, employers, institutions of higher learning, etc.) can benefit from participating in a Summit by increasing their corporate partnerships and taking a leadership role on issues that impact women veterans in their community. The following is a brief summary of the many benefits to conducting a JFWV Summit.

Benefits of a Joining Forces for Women Veterans Summit:

- Highlight the scope of issues and challenges facing women veterans for all stakeholders—business, government leaders, community organizations, and others— and share solutions.
- Educate employers about the value of hiring military trained women—the leadership, teamwork, resourcefulness, efficiency, and personal attributes that make them great workers and managers.
- Build a collective vision and mission to serve and employ women veterans in ways that will advance their professional and personal goals and enable them to contribute fully to their community.
- Become a leader in the community in welcoming women veterans home and bringing their issues to the forefront.
- Identify and partner with employers and organizations to learn best practices in hiring/retaining women veteran employees.
- Showcase and share your company’s policies and best practices for hiring and on-boarding women veterans.
- Access a local BPW network and gain valuable insight to opinions and information that will benefit all stakeholders.
- Broaden visibility and reach of the issues and solutions through local (and potentially national) media coverage.

C. History and Role of BPW Foundation in working with Women Veterans

Why BPW? BPW Foundation is the first foundation to focus its research and programs on working women. We continue to study women in non-traditional occupations as well as how to prepare women for those jobs. BPW Foundation’s role in working with women veterans is a natural extension of the organization’s [100-plus years of leadership on working women’s issues](#), beginning with research on working women during World War I and continuing through the present day on behalf of women veterans.

Both employees and employers benefit from BPW Foundation’s experience and unique role as a neutral convener of employers and employees, since we focus not only on challenges and problems working women face but also examine issues impacting employers. By including community and educational organizations in the discussion, all relevant stakeholders come together to create collaborative solutions to the day-to-day problems working women struggle with.

BPW Foundation’s October, 2010 [Joining Forces for Women Veterans Summit](#) brought together more than 80 business, government, military, and community leaders to seek solutions to the specific challenges women veterans face, including [homelessness](#), [reintegration](#), and [post-military employment issues](#). Results from that Summit include the release of a comprehensive [Final Report](#), and the launch of a national campaign, [Joining Forces for Women Veterans](#), to support women veterans in their transition from military to civilian life. The Summit report builds on the [first-ever survey of women veterans](#), conducted four years ago by the BPW Foundation, a survey of 1,600 women

vets in 2007. That report identified the gap in programs and services for women veterans, and was the catalyst for the meeting last October.

The Inaugural Summit sparked a new awareness across a wide range of business, government, and community leaders, and bolstered recognition by women veterans that BPW Foundation and its partners are eager to help them through their difficult readjustment.

We are pleased to share this Summit Toolkit with our grassroots partners, and hope it helps you get the conversation started in your community to support local women veterans. Thank you for your help in recognizing and serving the needs of women veterans.

D. Contact Us:

For more information about planning or sponsoring a Joining Forces for Women Veterans Summit, or other BPW Foundation programs, please contact us at:

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