

Facilitator's Guide for The Veterans Club Coffee Meeting Program

Welcome — and Thank You

As a facilitator, you play a vital role in shaping the experience of each Veterans Club coffee meeting. These gatherings are meant to feel **welcoming, steady, and hopeful** — a place where veterans and first responders can connect, reflect, and move forward together.

This guide is here to support you. It's not about rigid rules — it's about **setting a healthy tone**, encouraging meaningful conversation, and making sure everyone leaves feeling better than when they arrived.

Purpose of the Meeting

The Veterans Club Coffee Meeting is a **structured yet relaxed** gathering designed to:

- Build community and camaraderie
- Honor shared experiences of service
- Encourage reflection that leads toward growth
- Create momentum for involvement, purpose, and connection

Hard stories are welcome here — but the meeting is not meant to live in darkness. The goal is always to help the group **land on resilience, hope, and forward motion**.

Your Role as Facilitator

Your primary responsibility is to **protect the emotional tone of the room**.

You are not here to:

- Shut people down
- Avoid difficult topics
- Act as a therapist

You *are* here to:

- Keep the space inclusive and respectful
- Prevent negativity from spiraling or taking over
- Gently guide conversations toward strength, perspective, and connection

Key reminder: Your job isn't to stop hard stories — it's to make sure the room doesn't stay in a hard place.

Guiding Principles

Keep these values front and center:

- **Honor Service** – Every journey matters
- **Promote Positivity** – Growth and hope are always the aim
- **Uplift the Room** – Don't let negativity spread
- **Encourage Participation** – Everyone should feel welcome
- **Stay Non-Political** – Shared service, not partisanship

Suggested Meeting Flow

1. Introductions

Prompt:

“Let's go around and introduce ourselves — name, branch or department, and years of service.”

- Encourage smiles, handshakes, and light humor when appropriate
- This sets the tone for everything that follows

2. Invocation or Moment of Reflection

- Invite the Chaplain, if present, to offer a brief invocation
- If no Chaplain is available, ask for a volunteer to lead a moment of reflection

Keep this respectful and brief.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

- Stand together and recite the Pledge
- This helps center the group around shared values and purpose

4. Announcements

- Upcoming events and gatherings
- Volunteer opportunities
- Community news
- Allow brief member announcements as well

Tip: Keep this section upbeat and efficient.

5. First Discussion — Reflective

Example prompt:

“Tell us about someone you met during service who made a lasting impression.”

- Encourage storytelling
- Listen closely to the emotional tone

If a story begins to move toward trauma:

- Thank the member for sharing
- Acknowledge the weight of the experience
- Gently redirect with questions like:
 - “What helped you get through that time?”
 - “Was there someone who supported you when things were hard?”

Tip: Hard stories are welcome — just help the group arrive at resilience, growth, or insight.

6. Recognition & Transition

- Acknowledge birthdays, milestones, or achievements
- Welcome late arrivals
- Signal a shift in focus:

“Let’s take a moment to look ahead and talk about what’s coming next.”

7. Second Discussion — Action-Oriented

Example prompt:

“What’s something you’re looking forward to right now?”

Encourage conversation around:

- Hobbies and interests
- Family and friendships
- Community involvement
- Service opportunities
- Future plans or ideas

Invite suggestions for group outings or activities.

8. Wrap-Up & One-on-One Time

- Briefly recap highlights
- Invite members to stay and talk informally

“Some of the best conversations happen after the meeting — don’t rush off if you can help it.”

Helpful Facilitation Techniques

When a Story Gets Heavy

Use gentle redirection:

- “That’s a powerful story — how did it shape who you are today?”
- “Who here has seen something good come out of a tough situation?”
- “That’s an important topic — let’s follow up one-on-one after the meeting.”

Keeping Things Light

- Appropriate humor is encouraged
- Self-deprecating humor works well
- A light personal story can help reset the room

Laughter restores balance.

Avoiding Common Pitfalls

- **No political debates**
“Let’s keep this non-political so everyone feels comfortable participating.”
- **No personal attacks or harsh language**
Model respect — the room will follow your lead

Encouraged Themes

- Camaraderie and brotherhood
- Family and support systems
- Leadership and mentorship
- Community involvement
- Skills gained through service
- Reconnecting with purpose
- Health, hobbies, and humor
- Faith, resilience, and hope

Final Notes for Facilitators

You are the **guardian of the room's emotional tone**. The Veterans Club exists to help people heal through connection — not to reopen wounds without support.

If someone appears to be in emotional distress:

- Speak with them privately after the meeting
- Offer to connect them with support resources (Chaplain, Vet Center, counselor)
- Never let someone leave feeling unseen or alone

Thank you for stepping into this role. Your steady presence matters more than you know.