



Give Veterans A Smile

Program Planning and Promotion Guide

Honoring Our Veterans | Providing Dental Care



Be part of the **GVAS** movement!

Give Veterans A Smile

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Welcome to Give Veterans A Smile!



The American Dental Association Foundation is pleased to have you and your program as part of the Give Veterans A Smile family! You are joining the nation’s dental community in providing free oral health care services to thousands of underserved veterans across the country.

Give Veterans A Smile (GVAS) is the centerpiece to the ADA Foundation’s Veterans Day celebration and is recognized nationally every year on November 11th, commemorating the Treaty of Versailles that ended “the war to end all wars” in 1918. GVAS was initially launched in 2022 to raise awareness of the oral health needs of those who have served our country in the Uniformed and Armed Services, and focuses on the need to provide free screening, treatment, preventive and restorative services and identify a dental home to veterans in need.

In addition to helping underserved veterans, Give Veterans A Smile’s intent is to highlight for policy makers the ongoing challenges that some veterans face in accessing dental care. The overarching message of GVAS is that even the high level of charitable care delivered by dentists and dental team members every year will not solve the problem of untreated dental disease among the nation’s veterans. So, a major purpose of the program is to influence government and society at large to work with dentistry to craft common-sense, market-based solutions to access disparities.

A Little Background Information...

The ADA has long supported the Uniformed Services. In 2022, the ADA held the Give Veterans A Smile Summit which brought together many stakeholders committed to improving the health and oral health of our Nation’s veterans. The ADA Foundation’s role in the national GVAS program is to function as an umbrella for the numerous charitable education, screening, prevention and comprehensive treatment programs already in existence, and to aggregate the results of these endeavors for the ADA to effectively communicate them to policy makers. (This is why we may ask you to report your actual data after the conclusion of your program.)

The ADA Foundation provides this Program Planning Guide and a full array of tools, many of them web-based, to support the GVAS program and to make it as easy as possible for volunteers to participate. The ADA and ADA Foundation are also working to ensure maximum positive coverage and perception by media, government and opinion leaders, and to assist volunteers in those efforts.

How to Use This Program Planning Guide

Whether conducting an access event is something you have done in the past, or whether it is a new activity for you, the keys to success are organization, planning, execution, publicity and evaluation.

The GVAS Program Planning Guide is an excellent resource to assist you in planning your event whether it is your first time or if you are a veteran program coordinator. The guides, sample forms, letters and other informative materials provide a step-by-step timetable to guide you through planning, implementing, and promoting your GVAS event.

This toolkit is highly customizable to your Give Veterans A Smile program. The materials included were developed with ease of use in mind. They can be easily updated to reflect your unique approach and are formatted in a way that makes them ready for use with minimal adjustment.



How to Have a Successful Give Veterans A Smile Event



Getting the most mileage for your Give Veterans A Smile event will take planning and organizational skills. In the next few sections we will highlight eight steps to help make your GVAS event a success.

Step 1: Selecting Your Steering Committee

One of the keys to your success is to build a committed, enthusiastic steering committee that will be responsible for overseeing program planning, budgeting, promotion, and evaluation. The steering committee should also help coordinate the efforts of your volunteers.

Consider inviting individuals from any of the following groups to participate on your steering committee:

- ★ Dentists
- ★ Dental Societies/Associations
- ★ Dental Hygiene Associations
- ★ Dental Hygienists
- ★ Dental Assistants
- ★ Members of the Alliance of the ADA (spouses of dentists)
- ★ Dental and dental hygiene school faculty and students
- ★ Dental officers from local military bases
- ★ Department of Veterans Affairs representative
- ★ Public health representative
- ★ Medical profession
- ★ State Office of Oral Health representative
- ★ Veterans Service Organizations (there are over 100 – American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, etc.) – see www.va.gov/ve/docs/traditionalVeteranOrganizations.pdf

Try to reach beyond the immediate dental community and include business or civic leaders, elected officials, non-dental professionals, veterans' organizations, or the media. Even if their roles on the committee are mostly ceremonial, involving these people can help heighten your event's profile.

To create a successful campaign, individual committee members often are designated to manage different aspects of the campaign. Depending on your needs, steering committee positions may include the following:

General Chairperson:

Oversees meetings, program development, budget, record keeping and reviews the state dental practice act.

Program Chairperson:

Oversees development and implementation of program activities.

Budget Chairperson

Manages the promotion budget.

Arrangements Chairperson

Secures space for the type of access event being planned, audiovisual equipment, microphones and refreshments.

Publicity Coordinator

Arranges for media coverage of access-to-care events by writing and sending press releases and feature articles; secures media placements for the media spokesperson.

Media Spokesperson

Provides interviews to local newspapers, television and radio stations about the promotion and the particular activities that your group is featuring.

Recruitment Chairperson

Secures and organizes volunteer support.



Step 2: Consider Your Event Options — Education, Screening and/or Treatment Event

Programs come in all shapes and sizes, and the first task of your steering committee is to ask the questions below and to consider the following options.

- ★ What is the intended purpose of the program (treatment, education, advocacy, etc.)?
- ★ What size program would we like to do? (large, small, etc.)
- ★ How many patients can the program realistically see in a day?
- ★ How many volunteers will we need to conduct the program?
- ★ Where will we conduct the event?



Educational Event

Offer presentations to veterans groups (VFW, DAV, etc.) that discuss the importance of regular dental visits, the relationship between oral health and overall health, and oral issues commonly faced by veterans. These events should also include referral resources for those veterans in need of oral health care services.



Screening Event

Screening events can take place in a variety of locations such as veterans’ organizations, community health fairs, county fairs, or anywhere veterans may congregate. A visual oral screening can include a soft tissue exam, hard tissue visual exam, denture evaluation, and an oral cancer screening. These events should also include referral resources for those veterans in need of oral health care services.



Preventive/Restorative Event

Organizing a large-scale Give Veterans A Smile event that offers treatment/restorative care poses a number of challenges, but they are all surmountable, and the payoff in terms of exposure to the media and lawmakers can be significant. Treatment/restorative events can take place in small or large settings. For example, individual dental offices and dental schools have both provided comprehensive treatment for GVAS participants.



Choosing a Site in Which to Deliver Clinical Care

Keep in mind that providing care for veterans at a Give Veterans A Smile event involves exclusively pro bono (free) services. If your event will provide clinical restorative and/or surgical services, select a venue that can accommodate a medium or large size event, without billing you or any agency for the space or the services.

Some publicly supported clinics (e.g. Federally Qualified Health Centers, community health centers, state and local government clinics) operate on a revenue-neutral, non-profit basis. Those clinics may not be in a position to surrender a day of revenue to be a Give Veterans A Smile site, and this is understandable. There are usually a variety of sites available where you can hold clinical events. Ask volunteers, partner agencies and organizations for ideas.



Step 3: Plan Your Event

As you begin planning your event, think about these four questions:

1. What date should the event be scheduled?

Even though the national GVAS kickoff day is recognized annually on November 11th (Veterans Day), you can have your event any convenient day during the year.

2. How will you identify veterans for your event?

One of your most important decisions is whether to pre-identify veterans for your event or to open the event on a first-come, first-served basis. All of the planning and promotion, as well as the logistics, hinge on the answer to this question.

3. Where will I conduct my event?

Possible program locations include your dental office, a veterans’ organization building, or a larger building for large, non-treatment-based events.

4. What supplies will I need and where can I get them?

At this time, each program is responsible for securing dental equipment and supplies for its own GVAS event. The ADA Foundation hopes to be able to provide donated dental supplies from our national sponsors in the near future.



Step 4: Recruiting Volunteers

There are three basic components to securing GVAS volunteers:

- 1. Recruiting those interested in participating
- 2. Retaining those volunteers for future events
- 3. Researching the needs and wants of those who do and do not volunteer



Recruiting Those Interested in Participating

When preparing GVAS volunteer recruitment materials, make sure to address the purpose of the program, the commitment needed, the benefits of volunteering (networking, advocacy, community involvement, etc.), and don’t forget to include quotes from current volunteers about their participation.

Offer various volunteer levels so even dental offices that are unavailable for GVAS can participate. For example, an office could donate money to GVAS to purchase supplies for the patients and other volunteer offices. Some offices may be interested only in speaking at veterans’ organizations while others may choose to open their office and provide treatment for a smaller number of veterans.

Volunteers want the process to be as easy as possible, and through the help of a state/local dental association this can happen. A state organization may be able to provide news articles, a volunteer application and a resource book for GVAS volunteers to follow.





Retaining those volunteers for future events

Once a program has volunteers, the key is to retain them for the next event. Remember to thank all volunteers who participate. Write a personal thank you note to each volunteer office letting them know how much you appreciate their dedication and commitment to the program. This tactic takes time, but a personal note of appreciation can go a long way in keeping volunteers for the future. Other ideas include listing all volunteers in a state newsletter and/or journal, giving each volunteer a certificate of participation and giving away a GVAS award to volunteers in recognition of their participation (5 years, 10 years, etc.).

Researching the needs and wants of those who do and do not volunteer

This third point is extremely important to any GVAS program because coordinators need to understand what motivates people to volunteer for GVAS and why others are hesitant to participate. By addressing the concerns of those not participating, coordinators can build their program and encourage more volunteerism through the program’s ongoing changes. Let the potential volunteers know you understand their concerns and are researching ways to address them.

This same concept is true for current volunteers. If regular volunteers have concerns about the program, ask for their suggestions on improvements; let them be part of the solution to constantly improve the program. People that feel their opinions are heard are more likely to participate in future events.



Step 5: Promoting the Event

Media coverage of Give Veterans A Smile events offers a wonderful opportunity to educate reporters about the need to improve access to oral health care for those who have defended our Nation.

While it’s true that Give Veterans A Smile will provide some desperately needed oral health services to many underserved veterans across the country, the real story to convey to the media is that this access to health care event will never be enough and that dentists alone can’t solve the health access crisis for our Nation’s veterans. Improving veterans’ access to health care is everyone’s business — not just dentists.

This section of the guide will help you promote your event to the media and provide you with key messages about WHY Give Veterans A Smile was created and WHAT dentists across the country would like to see happen to improve access to oral health care.

Our overriding message is, “It is simply unacceptable that thousands upon thousands of our Nation’s veterans, those who have selflessly defended our country in times of peace and war, have experienced inadequate access to oral health care.



Improving veterans’ access to health care is everyone’s business — not just dentists.



Step 6: Conducting Your Event

Sound planning will help ensure that your event runs smoothly. While some logistical issues may be similar to other events you have conducted, the nature of a screening or direct care event presents some particular challenges. Here are a few tips:

- ★ To avoid no-shows and underutilization of volunteers, consider over-booking. It can be very discouraging for volunteers to be ready to help and have no opportunity to do so.
- ★ If you are providing care to a veteran with cognitive impairment (dementia, etc.), consider having their caregiver, if they have one, accompany them to the event. In such cases, provide follow-up instructions to both the caregiver and the patient (do not ignore the patient as you may not know the extent of the cognitive impairment).
- ★ If you are providing care to a veteran with a physical disability, work with them and the host organization (if there is one) to make reasonable accommodations to provide care to the veteran. Many veterans of wars over the last two decades have prosthetic limbs and/or severe disabilities that may make simple functions like walking, lifting an arm, tilting the head back, or even opening the mouth seemingly impossible, so take time to learn what modifications might be needed to provide optimal dental care to the veteran.
- ★ If you are working with a host organization—i.e., veterans’ organization or Dental Lifeline Network—follow their lead on how to route veterans through for treatment. Respect that you are working within the confines of that host organization.
- ★ If the facility in which you are delivering care is large, be sure that your volunteers who are coordinating care have cell phones with them or rent a walkie-talkie system to avoid wasting time looking for someone.
- ★ Conduct a survey to get feedback (dentists, organizers, non-dentist volunteers). If your event occurs over multiple days, meet with your team at the beginning of the second day to get feedback and make any changes necessary to improve delivery of care during the second day.



Step 7: Evaluate Your Event

Knowing how well you met your program goals and objectives this year will be of great help for future planning. Unfortunately, this important step often is overlooked. Consider a brief post-survey to your volunteers and attendees with open-ended questions that can help you improve your next GVAS event!



Step 8: Thank Everyone!

Last but not least, remember to THANK all who contributed their time and/or resources toward the program. Recognizing those special people will not only make them feel appreciated but will encourage them to participate again the following year. A personal letter of thanks from the steering committee chairperson is a nice way to recognize the contributions of your committee. A page in the local/state dental journal with a list of participants and sponsors would also be a nice way to thank those who graciously contributed their time and/or resources.



Program Planning and Promotion Timetable



Getting the most mileage from your Give Veterans A Smile event takes planning and good organizational skills. This checklist will help you to effectively manage time and resources. **Consult the current GVAS Important Dates flyer for updated deadline information.** Items that will help plan your promotion campaign for your program are in blue below. Be sure to visit the GVAS website frequently at ADAFoundation.org/GVAS for updates on the program.

5 Months Prior to Your Event

- Designate a chairperson, possibly a dentist or dental office staffer with prior program planning experience.
- Appoint a steering committee. The most efficient size for this type of committee is 5-9 persons.

4 Months Prior to Your Event

- Request supplies and materials by contacting various dental companies, local businesses, etc., for donations.

3 Months Prior to Your Event

- Establish subcommittees if necessary. Each planned activity should include a coordinator from the steering committee and an appropriate number of subcommittee members.
- Consider your options and select one or more activities suitable for your group.
- Decide whether you will pre-identify veterans for your event or whether it will be first come, first served.
- Review your financial resources and determine your budget. Solicit funding if applicable.
- Communicate your activities to dentists in your area through your state and local dental publications and online resources. Encourage community support for the GVAS event.
- Remember: If you have not already done so, fill out the Give Veterans A Smile participation form by going to the GVAS website: ADAFoundation.org/GVAS.
- Identify one or more spokespeople for your event and begin working to get them comfortable talking about access problems and solutions in your area.
- Invite elected officials to attend your GVAS event.

2 Months Prior to Your Event

- Finalize budget and timetables.
- Recruit volunteers from dental specialty groups, related dental organizations, dental and dental hygiene schools, community and veterans' organizations.
- If you are pre-identifying veterans for your event, contact local veterans' organizations to help. Provide them with a photo release form that names your organization, the ADA and the ADA Foundation as a permitted user of the photos (use the release form in the Toolbox).
- Reserve any needed space, equipment or other materials.
- Finalize details for each activity and event.
- Schedule speaking engagements with community or veterans' groups to help spread the word.



- Enlist support from elected officials by obtaining their commitment to attend your event, issuance of a proclamation acknowledging the event, or asking a prominent individual (such as the governor’s spouse or other dignitary) to serve as honorary program chair.

- Secure any other vendors you may need for the event (food, caterer, sound system).

- Prepare your Give Veterans A Smile press materials (e.g., press release, media alert, public service announcements, etc.). It is critical that you tailor the materials to fit your local event. Journalists are more likely to ignore generic press materials that are not relevant to the communities they cover.

- Check to see if any veterans or veterans’ organizations involved in your upcoming Give Veterans A Smile event would be willing to share their story with reporters. A moving story of an underserved veteran helps to bring the issue to life for reporters and the public.

- Make sure your spokespeople are familiar with the points you want them to make, as well as some stories about local veterans who lack access to care, state or local statistics related to access to oral health care and whether an elected official will be attending your event.

- Choose and script the three key points that you want to get across in interviews or in discussions with elected officials and other influential persons, so your program presents a unified vision of what you are trying to accomplish concerning access to care in your area.

- Follow up with the press officer for each elected official you invited to your Give Veterans A Smile event to see if they will attend event. (Note: Many elected officials will not confirm until immediately prior to your event.)



1 Month Prior to Event

- Decide on three key points that you want to make in media interviews or discussions with policy makers about how to improve dental access for veterans in your area. Brief your media representative on topics about which he or she may be interviewed.

- Follow up with phone calls to invite media to cover your Give Veterans A Smile event.

- Distribute your press materials.

- During the second week of the month, follow up by calling reporters to make sure they received the materials and to talk about why this is an important story for your community. For example, while you have the reporter on the phone, share some patient stories (without mentioning specific names) and offer to put the reporter in touch with veterans who have agreed to speak with the media about how the lack of access to oral health care has affected them. A personal story about a veteran without access to care is a powerful way to convince a reporter why dentists are trying to raise awareness of this issue.



2-3 Weeks Prior to Your Event

- Give your cell phone number to reporters so they can reach you the day of the event. Some reporters may not decide until the last minute whether they want to cover your story, so it’s imperative they can reach you on the day of the event.

- If an elected official will be attending your event, contact his or her office and ask if they will be notifying political/public affairs reporters about it. You should follow up with these reporters, too, because it gives you the opportunity to give them the details about your event as well as explain to them the larger issue of access to oral health care.



On Site at Your Event

- Conduct your Give Veterans A Smile Event in November or whatever month works best for you!
- Have several sets of press materials available on site. Though you've already sent these to media outlets, the reporters or photographers assigned to the story may not have received them, and they would likely appreciate having the background information.
- Greet reporters who cover your event, and show them around. As you walk with them, be sure to talk about the need for access to oral health care and that dentists want to be part of the solution.
- Ensure that all photo release forms are collected and matched with images for submission to the ADA Foundation for use in GVAS promotions.
- Do not take photographs of a veteran undergoing treatment for your group's newsletter or website without first obtaining a signed photo release form from the parent or guardian. You do not need to concern yourself with media photographers. They will handle photo releases on behalf of their media outlets.
- Give reporters and photographers your cell phone number and your business card in case they have any follow up questions.

After Your Event

- Watch for media coverage of your event.
- Keep a list of media outlets and the reporters who covered your event so you can approach them to cover Give Veterans A Smile next year.
- GVAS programs are invited to send photographs from local events to the ADA and ADA Foundation after their event. Photos will be used for archival purposes and some may appear in the ADA News, online on ADA.org or in other ADA publications. Digital photos are preferred. Email photos to the following:
 - GVAS@ada.org** (GVAS program)
Files should be 300 dpi, with no single email larger than 9 MB. Please include completed photo release forms. Identify the individuals in the photo and indicate where and when it was taken.
 - adanews@ada.org** (ADA News)
Files should be 300 dpi, with no single email larger than 9 MB. Identify the individuals in the photo and indicate where and when it was taken. (Photo release forms are not required for ADA News.)

1 Month after Your Event

- Acknowledge everyone who assisted with your event with a letter of thanks or certificate of appreciation.
- Review your event and related activities. Prepare a summary report of activities, expenses and other meaningful data including recommendations for next year.

Social Media Posts



Social media can drive awareness of your Give Veterans A Smile event to both local and national audiences. If you have a Facebook page, X account or another type of social media channel for your society, consider using them to promote your events and to share why these efforts are important for the dental health of the community.

Due to its real time nature, social media may helpful to for the following:

- ★ Recruiting volunteers
- ★ Promoting media coverage of the event
- ★ Driving public attendance (if attendance is unexpectedly low)
- ★ Communicating a last minute detail (such as a location change or inclement weather)

Below are sample Facebook posts and X posts for your use. Feel free to tailor them to meet your needs and to use them as you see fit. Generally, social media posts are more engaging, meaning that they are more likely to be shared and seen by a larger audience, when a photo or link for more information is included. If you choose to include photos, confirm you have signed consent waivers for everyone pictured prior to posting. As a good rule of thumb, veterans included in posts should only be referred to by their first name, and photo waivers must be signed by the veteran.

Sample X Posts

- ★ *Thx to all our [INSERT EVENT NAME] volunteers who spent [#] hours providing free dental services 2day! #GVAS (Tweet with or without volunteer photo)*
- ★ *Smiles were plentiful today at the [insert event name] GVAS day. #GVAS (tweet with photo)*
- ★ *Great story from @ [INSERT LOCAL TV STATION OR NEWSPAPER HANDLE] about [INSERT EVENT NAME]. [INSERT LINK TO STORY] #GVAS*

Sample Facebook Posts

- ★ Post during an event to attract attendees if needed.
 - *Today from [INSERT EVENT HOURS], local dental professionals are volunteering to provide dental health services free of charge at [INSERT EVENT NAME, LOCATION] to veterans in need.*
 - *Please note, this is a first-come, first-served program. Pending the volume of patients, there is a possibility that you will not be seen.*
- ★ Post with a photo of a volunteer and person who received care, either during or after the event (make sure to have signed photo release waivers).
 - *[INSERT VETERAN FIRST NAME], age [X], and Dr. [insert name], a GVAS volunteer from the [INSERT PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATION], share a big smile at the GVAS dental care event in [INSERT CITY].*
- ★ Post with a photo of event volunteers, after the event has ended.
 - *Thank you to all of the volunteers and sponsors who made the [INSERT THE OFFICIAL GVAS EVENT NAME] a great day for dental health. Your collective efforts provided free dental care to more than [INSERT NUMBER] veterans in our community.*

Conclusion



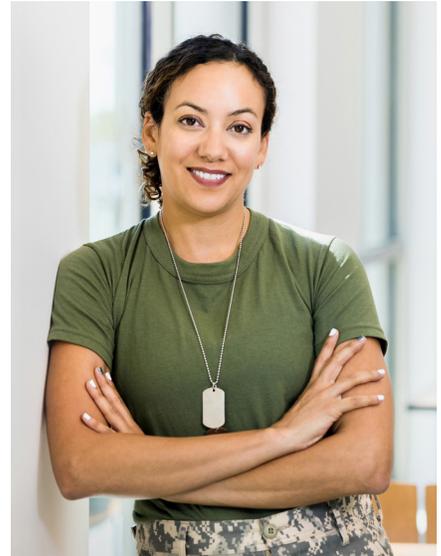
Give Veterans A Smile is an opportunity to raise awareness about the unmet oral health needs of veterans and to take action by connecting veterans with dentists.

We are very proud of what the Give Kids A Smile program has done to improve the health of millions of children over the years, through thousands of volunteers and sponsors, and trust that the same measures can be taken to improve the health of millions of veterans. Few things in life are as rewarding as helping to restore someone's smile. The reward is made even greater when we catch a glimpse of the radiant smile of that veteran.

That is the essence of the ADA Foundation's Give Veterans A Smile program — helping to ensure that every veteran has a healthy smile.

And now as we launch this new exciting program, we hope that you will join us and Be Part of the Movement!

Questions? Contact the national ADA GVAS team at GVAS@ada.org.



“*Today, the power of our community - defined by caring, kindness, and a willingness to go the extra mile - is on full display as we gather to broaden our positive impact, work together on solutions and elevate our talents to improve the health and well-being of our nation's veterans.*”

— Cesar R. Sabates, D.D.S.
American Dental Association, past president