



Veterans Book Group Program Information

This Maine Humanities Council program for Veterans began in 2014. The goal of Veterans Book Group is for Veterans to connect with one another, build relationships, and share their experiences. In the Book Group, Veterans engage with materials (books, stories, poems, essays and films) that will offer opportunities to make connections between their own experience and the experiences of others across time and culture. This program creates a space for Veterans to give voice to and reflect upon issues of particular interest or concern. The program builds community, fosters meaningful connections, and is fun!

Veterans Book Group is based on these ideas:

1. This is not group therapy. Participants will not be pressed to talk about their service experience
2. It's not a class
3. This is a book group for Veterans. The focus is on the reading and discussion of a range of literature as well as relevant thoughts or experiences participants may want to share
4. It is offered to Veterans only
5. We do our best not to make any particular assumptions about Veterans, their beliefs, experiences, or state of wellbeing
6. There is no political agenda for the program
7. The program won't be overly academic
8. The groups won't just read war literature, and discussion won't focus solely on combat experiences

Veterans Book Group usually lasts 5-6 weeks, with five discussion sessions, once per week, held in a community space that is accessible and centrally located. Veterans Book Group is often held at the local public library. Each discussion lasts 1 ½ to 2 hours and is accompanied by snacks or a light meal, provided by the Maine Humanities Council.

Who participates in Veterans Book Group?

Participants are self-identified Veterans/ former Service Members.

- The best size for Veterans Book Group tends to be between 10-12 participants. The aim is to have sufficient perspectives for a robust conversation, on the one hand, and sufficient space for all present to speak, on the other. The group must have a minimum of 6 veteran participants (not counting the Facilitator, Site Coordinator, or Veteran Co-Facilitator) and must not exceed a maximum of 15 participants.
- Veterans Book Group is offered to Veterans/ former Service Members only. We may opt to have a group open to all Veterans, or only to a specific group (Women Veterans, Combat Veterans, Veterans of a specific conflict, Veterans now pursuing higher education, Veterans engaged in the Co-occurring Disorders Court etc.) based on the best fit for the Veterans in your area.
- The Veterans Book Group is offered free of charge to participants.
- Participants should ideally commit to attending all the sessions

Who makes Veterans Book Group happen?

The Maine Humanities Council works to assemble a Veterans Book Group team. The team works together to coordinate the Book Group, make it work as smoothly and productively as possible. Below is an overview of the roles on the team:

- *Maine Humanities Council Program Officer:*

MHC will build the team: recruit facilitators, collaborate to create a reading list, support publicity efforts, track registration, provide all books and readings, provide snacks/light meals, and generally coordinate the Veterans Book Group. MHC is available to trouble shoot and support the program throughout.

- *Site Coordinator/Veteran Co-Facilitator:*

The Site Coordinator/Veteran Co-Facilitator should be someone well respected and connected in the organization and the community, with the time and interest to do the work required. The Site Coordinator/Veteran Co-Facilitator helps MHC identify issues and themes important to participants, assists with logistics such as identifying meeting dates/times and space. This person works to recruit participants through their networks and to collaborate with MHC on publicity for the Book Group. This person should attend all sessions and be ready to jump-start the discussion by preparing some questions or thoughts in advance. The Site Coordinator/Veteran Co-Facilitator often also serves as the support person for the group as there may be times when the texts raise difficult issues. This person should have some basic knowledge about community resources available, but need not be a clinician.

- *Scholar Co-Facilitator*

The Scholar Co-Facilitator is the humanities expert in the material and must make the reading material comprehensible and relevant while keeping the goals and focus of the program in mind. The Scholar/Facilitator works with the team to select the reading list, co-facilitates the five sessions, and creates a comfortable atmosphere for open conversation.

Some of these roles may overlap. The Scholar/Facilitator may be a Veteran, etc.

Other details

- *Readings*

MHC will work with the team to develop a reading list to invite consideration of large issues relevant to the lives of Veterans from a wide range of perspectives and voices in ways that surprise, enliven, inspire, inform, and expand understanding. MHC provides all readings (books, stories, poems, and essays) free of charge to participants.

- *Facilitated Discussion:*

The Facilitators create and maintain a good atmosphere for discussion in which all participants have the opportunity to share their ideas and questions, and invites depth and breadth of thinking. Participants may find it helpful to prepare for discussions by making brief notes on their reading, flagging pages or passages, or writing down questions or thoughts that arise as they read.

The aim of Veterans Book Group discussions is joint reflection – finding words that express the thoughts, ideas, and question that a reading gives rise to; listening as others find words for their own experience.

Questions? Contact the Maine Humanities Council:

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