



MAKE IT *YOURS*™

MILITARY MATTERS

**Partnering with military groups
to extend community engagement**





Introduction

Actively engaging our surrounding communities in campus life is a pillar of the Division II athletics experience.

For Division II, community engagement is about building lasting relationships. Our unique approach flips the paradigm by encouraging Division II athletics programs (and their schools in general) to become members of their communities rather than merely asking their communities to support athletics.

The payoff is that communities willingly support colleges and universities where effective outreach has occurred because they feel greater ownership. That translates to a stronger “town/gown” relationship, and greater community attendance at your athletics events!

The military is a key partner that often gets overlooked when it comes to community engagement. More than half of Division II colleges and universities are located within 50 miles of a military installation or base. Many others have a connection or partnership with the National Guard or other military branches, or have an active ROTC on campus. And almost all Division II schools have students who are either actively serving or in the reserves.

It only makes sense to partner with military constituencies as an extension of Division II’s community engagement philosophy. The following resource to help schools either start or enhance those efforts is a product of the Division II Military Pilot Project Team, Augusta University, the Peach Belt Conference, and Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia.

Why military matters

Division II athletics, higher education and the military share several attributes, from health and wellness and physical and mental toughness, to building and training future leaders.

Additionally, in the same manner that Division II athletics is often misunderstood, many times so is the military, National Guard, or the life of a veteran. Why not partner to share our stories, create a connection and tighten the bond?

Ultimately, these partnerships are natural because of the shared values – the virtues of leadership, loyalty, teamwork and honor that both enterprises try to instill in young people. Further, many veterans leave the service intending to use their GI Bill to get an education. Our partnership can create a relationship that eventually guides those veterans through the next stage of their life.

What you’re trying to capture in NCAA athletics programs are the very same things we try to instill in young soldiers. It’s part of our daily lives to be athletically inclined, competitive, and have a sense of team.

– Col. Samuel Anderson
Garrison Commander
Fort Gordon

Benefits of engagement

DIVISION II SCHOOLS AND CONFERENCES

- ◆ Tell the story of the Division II brand of intercollegiate athletics
- ◆ Exposure to military-trained leaders, structure and methods
- ◆ Understanding of military and veteran life
- ◆ New audience and fan base
- ◆ Increase student retention and opportunity for future students (enrollment driver)
- ◆ Potential competition opportunities
- ◆ Recognize, honor and give back to an important community stakeholder

MILITARY, NATIONAL GUARD AND VETERANS

- ◆ Tell the military story (its purpose and mission)
- ◆ Military personnel see the opportunities in higher education
- ◆ Educate the community about military life
- ◆ Integrate the military, National Guard and veterans into the community
- ◆ Recruitment access
- ◆ Volunteer base
- ◆ Competition opportunities for military personnel
- ◆ New audience and fan base





Developing a plan

Here's what you need to know when you decide either to begin your community engagement with military groups or enhance your current initiatives:

- ◆ Determine whether offices, departments and services currently exist on campus that interact or support the local military or veterans. Ask whether the athletics department can be better partners in these school-wide efforts.
- ◆ Determine the entities and individuals on campus who should be involved and, through presidential leadership, develop a coordinated effort with them. Consider establishing a planning group.
- ◆ Determine whether the institution offers classes on a base or installation, and whether the school has an office on the base or another outside location.
- ◆ Establish a means by which to track military students. This helps strengthen communications and provide for their needs.
- ◆ Identify faculty and staff who are veterans or have been involved with military. Make them known and aware (they may even serve as liaisons in your efforts).
- ◆ Identify businesses or corporate partners in the community that support veterans and the military. This could translate into job sharing, cross-promotion of events and activities, and fundraising opportunities with potential partners.
- ◆ Identify alumni and boosters who are veterans or are involved with the military and determine how they can engage in the efforts.



Ideas for engagement

Now that you have a plan, take action! Here are some ideas to get your creative juices flowing on events, activities and other outreach initiatives:

- ◆ Conduct exhibition contests or scrimmages between military installation teams and Division II varsity, intramural or club teams.
- ◆ Many installations and bases have youth sports for family members. Consider hosting a youth clinic on the military installation or base.
- ◆ Host a Division II game (exhibition or regular season) or conference championship on a military installation or base.

TWO TIPS:

- Be sure to provide joint interaction between the military and student-athletes/coaches and administrators – don't keep everyone separated.
- If on the military base or installation, ensure that student-athletes are exposed to other parts of the installation, such as the barracks and other facilities, and ensure they are spending time with the soldiers in order to understand life on the installation.

- ◆ Stage a Veterans Appreciation Day or Military Appreciation Day on campus held in conjunction with a home contest:
 - Free admission to veterans and their families
 - Donation of camo-jerseys to be auctioned off as a military fundraiser
 - Formal recognition at halftime with color guard
 - Choir for national anthem (include any cadets on campus or ROTC members)
 - Helicopters and other military vehicles onsite (e.g., Humvees, robotics) for public to see
 - Have a military band play the national anthem and partner with the university band during the game
 - Use a large flag to cover the field or court
 - Honorary coin toss
 - Select a member of the military to tell their story to the crowd
 - Provide a table with giveaways and information about the military and for the school to talk about becoming a student
 - Consider reserved seating for invited military personnel, veterans and their families
 - Vouchers for refreshments
 - Ceremonial first pitch or jump ball
 - Flag football game before the game
 - Complimentary basketballs, footballs, soccer balls, etc.
 - Honorary captains and head coaches from the military or veterans groups
 - Pregame and halftime interviews with the military or veterans on campus radio stations
 - Shoot off cannons when team scores



More ideas...

- ◆ Donate sports equipment to the installation for youth events.
- ◆ Do a donation collection (e.g., coats, shoes, perishable items) at home events to provide to local shelters catering to veterans.
- ◆ Have student-athletes, coaches and staff take part in leadership training or a ropes course on a base or installation.
- ◆ When coordinating events for student-athletes around leadership training, resume/career building, academic advising, etc., invite and include veterans or ROTC members/military on campus to the events.
- ◆ Offer priority registration for veterans to ensure they get into classes necessary to fulfill GI Bill requirements.
- ◆ Share with soldiers the educational opportunities available to them, similar to presentations given at high schools. Could these occur at the military installation or the National Guard?
- ◆ If your school is hosting a job fair, invite the military base or installation and local National Guard to attend.
- ◆ Pair an experienced veteran student with an incoming veteran student. This provides an immediate connection on campus.
- ◆ Consider local military or veterans serving as interns, or as assistant/graduate assistant/volunteer coaches.
- ◆ Through the athletics department, consider potential part-time employment internships or work study for veterans and ROTC members.

TWO TIPS:

- Ask your military or veterans service office on campus if it coordinates work-study programs for veterans and determine whether athletics can structure a work-study program.
- Members of the counseling center may have received training to support veterans on campus. Learn about this training and provide information to coaches, administrators and student-athletes before interactions.



Methods for promoting your event or activity

- ◆ Athletics and school websites
- ◆ Flyers
- ◆ School's daily newspaper or email
- ◆ List-serves
- ◆ Military base or installation newspaper, email or website
- ◆ Social media
- ◆ Radio
- ◆ SAAC promotion to other student-athletes
- ◆ Don't underestimate word of mouth!



Tips from the experts

Need more help? We asked members from Division II colleges and universities that currently engage with the military about what to keep in mind when working with the military and veterans groups. On the next page are their suggestions.

- ◆ Be organized, know your audience, and articulate the purpose and outcome of the partnership.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to open the dialogue – find community liaisons to help explain the misconception of civilians not being welcome on bases or military installations. On the contrary, the exact opposite is true!
- ◆ Seek to discover the needs of the military and veterans and ask how the school can meet them.
- ◆ Respect the culture and understand the chain of command. There is a set language, jargon and protocol – ask questions if you don't understand. As with any organization, there are complexities and bureaucracy.
- ◆ Ensure proper planning time with advance notice and preparation. Approval from the military authorities may take several months.
- ◆ Determine whether a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is necessary between the school and installation in order to conduct the activity/event.
- ◆ Steward the relationship throughout the year and not just during events or individual activities. Don't underestimate a physical “meet and greet” – sometimes it is better to build the relationship in person than over the phone.
- ◆ Build ongoing relationships! Contacts with the military will change due to reassignments. It is important to connect with the organization so that as personnel change, a relationship has already been established and can continue despite the changes.
- ◆ Try not to schedule events around holidays.
- ◆ Above all, honor their service.
- ◆ Remember that things can change quickly (e.g., if something happens and the base goes on lockdown, soldiers will be unable to attend).
- ◆ Don't panic if turnout is poor at first – it takes time to get programs implemented and for word of mouth to spread.
- ◆ Ultimately, be patient and push through – no matter what!

Higher education institutions want to be more diverse, and veterans add to that diversity. Veterans participate in class discussions, online discussion boards, group projects, research, student government ... The life experience and perspective these students bring with them is invaluable.

– Linda Bleicken, president, Armstrong State University

