

Hidden Wounds of War 2023: Vet Collaboratory

What issues and opportunities exist for veterans and first responders in West Michigan?

This year we're trying something a bit different on the afternoon of the conference: A Veteran Collaboratory.

What is a Collaboratory?

It's a participant-driven meeting where the attendees decide on the agenda, discussion topics, and workshops. **The format provides an excellent opportunity for attendees from diverse disciplines to work collaboratively on topics of common interest.**

Basically, it is an informal and flexible program that allows participants to suggest topics of their own interest and choose sessions accordingly.

We all know that the best conference connections and conversations happen during the breaks. So the Veteran Collaboratory (also known as an “unconference”) aims to **make the whole event the best conference coffee break ever!**

For this particular collaboratory, we will be discussing issues specifically related to the veteran and first responder community.

Why a Collaboratory?

Advantages of the Collaboratory format include:

- Focus on topics that are relevant to YOU
- Build community beyond the conference
- Create productive collaborations among attendees
- Increase professional development and networking opportunities
- Allow attendees to 1) connect with others 2) learn something they can bring to other parts of their lives
- The sum of the expertise of the people in the audience is greater than the sum of the expertise of the people on stage

How the Collaboratory works

This year's Collaboratory theme is:

What issues and opportunities exist for veterans and first responders in West Michigan?

At the beginning of the morning session, YOU — the participants — will let us know what topics you're interested in by stopping by the Collaboratory table, located near the registration desk.

The Collaboratory itself (which will **only be available to in-person attendees**) will start after the afternoon keynote, **at approximately 2:15pm**.

You can also submit topic ideas ahead of time via the form below.

What topics/ideas are you interested in?

Sample ideas might include:

- Housing
- Employment/career
- Education & training
- Access to justice
- Grants & research
- Supporting various veteran subgroups:
 - Student veterans
 - Women veterans
 - Disabled veterans
 - Combat veterans
 - Families & spouses
- Mental health
- Physical fitness
- First responders
- **WHAT ELSE?**

Once we have a good idea of the topics with the most interest, we'll create the "breakout" sessions of the Collaboratory and post a list of sessions (between 10-15) and room numbers publicly.

You can join any session you'd like. There will be one 90-minute session, and for each session, the group will need to assign a note-taker to document the process (you might decide to do this on the whiteboard in the classroom where you meet).

(Want to volunteer to facilitate a session? Let us know on the conference registration form!)

In each session, we'll ask you to **prioritize conversation over presentation**. Try not to let one or two people dominate the conversation.

Ask each other: what can we do to further educate/collaborate on this topic? How can we make the world a better place for veterans and first responders? No idea is too trivial!

If a session isn't working for you, you have a responsibility to engage where you can best contribute (which may mean leaving). No hard feelings!

At the end of each session, you may want to exchange contact information (writing your name and email on the whiteboard so folks can snap a photo with their phones, might be the easiest way to do this). What you decide to do after the conference is up to you (but keep us updated if you do decide to continue to work together!)

After the conference

Any given event will rarely provide the time needed to take a goal or project from beginning to end; however, our hope is that the Collaboratory will serve as an excellent way of brainstorming, developing initial plans, creating the outline for a project, and gathering a group of enthusiastic collaborators.