

Veteran Voices: Library Impact on Veterans



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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement:

There is a growing body of literature about outreach to veterans but has anyone actually asked them what they want from libraries?

Project Development:

Multiple outcomes from a single interview:

- Use the question set provided by the Library of Congress and then deposit with them.
- Add a question set around library usage and reading in order to gauge usage and interest.
- Create an exhibit in the main hallway in the Main Library called "Stories of Service".



Stories of Service Library Guide:

<http://guides.library.illinois.edu/storiesofservice>

METHOD

Data collection utilized the interview format.

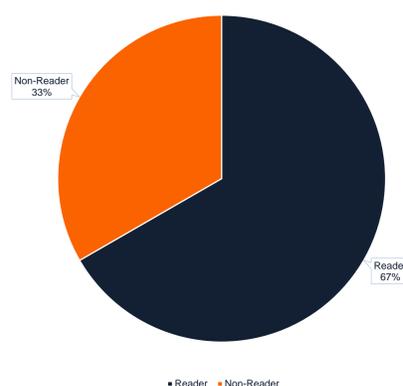
- Interviews were completed over a 4 month period from August to November 2017.
- Interviews were audio recorded.
- An assistant was on hand to take detailed notes and manage the audio recorder and paperwork.
- A small set of 6 questions that focused on veteran experiences in the library, was added to the Library of Congress question set.
- The recorded interviews were deposited in the Library of Congress as well as the State Library of Illinois if the veteran opted in for deposit.

RESULTS

- 24 interviews were conducted.
- 20 men, 4 women.
- All branches of the service were also represented: Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

When you were in the service, did you read for pleasure and if so, what?

Reading versus Non-Reading



Genres Read in the Service



So, the shipboard library, presumably that was more recreational than job-related.

"Yeah, there was one library for the ship. The closest comparison that I can think of is a prison library. Lots of kind of donated books or people who bought books and said 'Okay, I've read, here I'm gonna stick it in the library.' God knows what you would find. So it was a lot of stuff that 18-22 year old guys would read, minus the pornography." -SK

So, what has the experience been like going to the public library especially as a veteran?

"I don't think it's any different. I stick out more than most because of my prosthetic arm, but it's not bad. I think we have a very good library system in this area....I try not to draw attention to myself as much as possible." -GA

In general, what has the experience of using the library been like as a veteran?

"That's interesting because it's not that much different. I mean what was my experience of using the library like as a college student? What was my experience like using the library as a Pisces? I mean, it's a library." -SA

WHAT DO VETERANS WANT?

As a veteran, is there something you wish you could change about the library that would enhance your enjoyment of it?

"No, I find them warm, welcoming, engaging...I'm glad they've added caffeine....They have a good internet connection. They have enough computers that if you are at all an early person, they're still vacant. I still wake up at 5:30 and I'm out of bed by 6:15 so it's easy to beat the crowd."

-ML

Genres Wanted

- Biographies
- Military History
- Sports
- Cooking
- Transition home
- Therapy books
- Economics
- Career books
- Mysteries

Other Services

- Social Workers
- Movies
- Programming that fosters community and communication

CONCLUSIONS

What veterans did and did not say tells us a lot:

- Generally, don't want special programming.
- Library use tends to be as a community member or parent.
- Veterans generally like libraries.
- Some veterans enjoy books on military history but most didn't have a desire for them.

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