

# ***Suggestions for Opening a New OAS Facility***

***PLEASE NOTE: MOST IMPORTANTLY, REMEMBER THAT EACH FACILITY IS UNIQUE!*** No two will ever be the same. What works at one location may not necessarily work at another. The following comments are general observations and suggestions by OAS founder and NSSAR Co-Chairman Carl Bedell, who opened the first OAS facility at the Walter Reed Army Hospital, now the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at Bethesda, MD.

1. Ensure there is a ***WILLING VOLUNTEER BASE***. The local chapter(s) must have a ***core group of volunteers*** who are:

(a) Interested and willing to commit to starting and operating the program. Monthly sessions (even more, if possible!) work best. The interest builds on itself, so the more often and consistently events are held, the more popular and better attended they will be.

(b) Knowledgeable about genealogy and the resources available to the program. Obviously, **Ancestry.com** is a huge tool, but it's not intended to be the ONLY tool! People researched their genealogy long before the internet and outside of libraries. The bottom line, volunteers need to know genealogy and how to turn that knowledge into assistance. For example, simply taking a four-generation pedigree chart to the participants, talking them through it, helping them contact their relatives to fill in the blanks, and then conducting off-site research could very well be the basis of a program. But even for this to succeed, the volunteers must have a basic knowledge of genealogy and available resources.

2. Ensure there is an ***INTERESTED FACILITY*** for the program and that it has the population that lends itself to a more successful program. Not every military medical facility has a population that would benefit from the program. OAS is primarily intended to give wounded warriors (and their families who are there taking care of them) something to do while they recover.

Likewise, not every hospital with an appropriate population will be willing to participate. It takes some effort on their part to provide a facility, encourage attendance, and allow access. For that reason, the easiest and most successful way is to work through the **Volunteer Coordinators**. The **Warrior Transition Brigade** or a similar group usually coordinates events and activities for the Wounded Warriors. Other possible ways to approach facilities are through chaplains, mental health providers, installation or hospital library, USO's, etc.

3. ***SET EXPECTATIONS***. Most events may only have a handful of participants. Volunteers get frustrated if they show up and there is nothing for them to do.

4. ***CONTINENTAL UNIFORMS*** draw attention and interest. They are always good to have around.

5. ***LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION!*** The more successful programs are in locations where there is a lot of foot traffic. The Wounded Warriors have a lot going on in their lives and a lot on their minds. Although the events are announced in advance, they attract a lot of walk-ins. That usually occurs only if people are around.

***Other recommendations for your program's SUCCESS include the following:***

1. More volunteer trainers make it easier to teach the programming material.

2. A computer lab with multiple workstations and high-speed internet access is the best venue for the program.

3. Establish an OAS program committee.
4. Since OAS is a team effort, the program committee should delegate responsibilities among committee members. Possible sub-committees could include logistics, volunteers, publicity and promotion, instructional materials and handouts, speakers, program resources, fund-raising, etc.
5. Attend base shows, concerts, family days and all other events that draw crowds.
6. Always follow-up with program participants with emails and phone calls.
7. Report progress of OAS program to local point of contact on a regular basis.
8. Scheduling regular meeting dates and times (e.g., second Wednesday of each month at 2:00 p.m.) makes it easier for the program participants to remember them.
9. Schedule guest speakers on topics of special genealogical interest, e.g., researching your African-American or Native American ancestors.
10. Assign a volunteer Battle Buddy (mentor) to each soldier.

***You should make every effort to AVOID the following pitfalls:***

1. Scheduling meetings and work sessions against other competing and conflicting events.
2. Low turnout and lack of attendance (both by volunteers and participants) are frustrating for all.
3. Lack of a website to announce meetings and provide regular program news, information and updates.
4. Lack of additional means of providing information.
5. Lack of continued volunteer commitment and engagement.
6. Computers break down or system and email do not function properly.
7. Wounded warriors and caregivers who have signed up have conflicting medical appointments or other issues and do not attend meetings. (Typically, the soldiers and family members who DO attend still outnumber the SAR volunteers!)