**Press Release**

**New Platform Bridges the Gap Between Volunteers and Veterans**

*The San Luis Obispo Country Veterans Service Office has launched a new user-friendly application to connect Veterans and local volunteers, encouraging returning service to Veterans and building a stronger community*

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***[Summary]*** SLO TRIBUNE | VETERANS SERVICES – The San Luis Obispo Veterans Service Office has partnered with the Cal Poly Digital Transformation Hub (DxHub) powered by AWS to launch **Vetering**, a platform to connect local volunteers to Veterans, returning the service they deserve. Veterans can list volunteering opportunities through a mobile application, call center, and in-person to be pushed out to thousands of local volunteers. Additionally, Vetering has also partnered with Cal Poly, Cuesta, and numerous high schools throughout the county to accredit required volunteer hours to students through their platform. Ultimately, Vetering’s goal is to connect more youth and veterans together to strengthen local community and foster a culture of returning service.

***[Opportunity/Problem]* –** According to the US Census, there are over 17,100 veterans living in San Luis Obispo County, a large portion being older Vietnam veterans and disabled veterans. Older and disabled veterans are met with more obstacles than the given challenges after leaving service; jobs around the house, driving, or filing VA benefits. [**insert study from surveys veterans about what their biggest struggles in life are]**  These veterans have given years of their service to our country, yet receive no return of service from their community after their time in the military. However, there is no lack of support in the community; it is simply being underutilized because of a technology gap. SLO County is home to over 10 high schools, multiple community colleges, and a large state university in Cal Poly. All of these organizations require student service hours for graduation requirements, scholarships, or organizations. However, many students struggle in obtaining enough volunteering hours and barely manage to scrape buy. [**show student survey of service hours and ask if they feel like they are making a true impact from what they are doing]**  Regardless of the abundant volunteers in SLO County, veterans lack an easy and effective way of connecting to desirable and eager volunteers, and continue to struggle with their daily needs as a result.

***[Approach/Solution]*** Developed on AWS services, Vetering matches students from the rich volunteer population in SLO county to meet the needs of the 17,000+ local veterans. Veterans can post jobs they need done around the house like mowing the lawn, moving boxes, or needing a ride to a doctors appointment, all to the vast resource of local volunteers. For there, volunteers can accept jobs, coordinate details with the veteran, and complete them for accredited service hours. To ensure accessibility to the platform for a wide range of veterans, there are three ways of accessing Vetering. First, veterans on smartphones can list opportunities on an user-friendly cross platform mobile application developed with React. For older veterans who use landline phones, Vetering utilizes Amazon Lex and Connect for a cloud contact center, allowing all veterans to call in volunteering jobs that will be listed on the market. Lastly, for old-school veterans, local Veterans Halls can assist veterans in listing volunteering opportunities in-person through Vetering. All three method of listing jobs sends opportunities to the same market with the same volunteers. The SLO Veterans Service Office has pledged resources to Vetering, helping maintain the platform and resolve any conflicts occurred during volunteering jobs to keep the platform easy, safe, and impactful. Additionally, Vetering plans to partner with local companies to sponsor competitions for leading volunteers and organizations to encourage more involvement on the platform and in the community. Through this connection of youth and veterans, Vetering hopes to strengthen the ties in our local community and give back the service that is owed to the veterans.

***[Customer experience]*** *[Fictious story from SLO vet]* “*For years I’ve struggled with random things around the house like moving Christmas decorations in and out of the attic, landscaping, and getting rides to appointments across town. A couple years ago, I met two high schoolers to help me with jobs around the house. Their work for me was a massive help and we became great friends in the process. However, they are now in college and I’m now in my 90s, leaving me with less help and more problems. Vetering was my solution and a direct replacement of the help I was once receiving. I can easily call in to request help, and it’s fulfilled in a timely manner with local students I always enjoy. I’m also happy the volunteers can check off service hours for their schools and organizations. For a Vietnam vet like myself, Vetering has truly been a blessing, and more and more of my friends from the Post 66 Legion join every month. – SLO Veteran*

***[Customer quote]*** *[Something from Morgan Boyd] said SLO County Veteran Service Officer Morgan Boyd.*

**Customer FAQ (who)**

Q: How much does it cost?

A: Vetering is a completely free platform and requires no payment for signup, posts, or jobs. If you wanted to give volunteers a tip or hire them on the side in the future, that’s fine too!

Q: My volunteering opportunity is very odd, can I still post it?

A: As long as your job is appropriate **according to our terms and conditions**, feel free to post it. This platform is built around helping veterans with odds tasks around their house and day to day lives, so feel free to seek assistance in whatever that might be.

Q: I don’t use a smartphone, will I still be able to use Vetering?

A: Yes! Through AWS Lex and Connect, Vetering has built a cloud contact center to allow Veterans to call in from any phone to list a volunteering opportunity they need. From there, it will be seen by all volunteers and the SLO Veterans Hall will call you back to confirm the booking once a volunteer has signed up.

Q: If I want to book in person, can I go to the Veterans Hall to do it there?

A: Yes. You can always drive into the local Veterans Hall and be assisted by the front desk worker to post your volunteering opportunities.

Q: How do I sign up as a Veteran?

A: You can easily sign up through our mobile application or by going into your local Veterans Hall where you will be assisted in your sign up.

Q: To make sure I’m getting a great volunteer, will there be a way to rate volunteers?

A: Yes. If you wish to leave a review on your volunteer, you can write a quick note about what they did and how they performed. Additionally, they can write reviews on veterans, and both parties can report each other if there is misconduct. From there, the Veterans Services Office will investigate the report and act accordingly.

Q: What happens if something goes wrong on a job and there is damaged property, stolen items, or an injury?

A: If there are any issues with your volunteering job, please reach out to the Veterans Services Office, and they will investigate your incident. **According to the Vetering Terms and Conditions, the volunteer assumes no responsibility for any damage to property, but can be reported and banned from the platform if seen fit by a Veteran Service Officer.**

Q: Will my information be kept private and only known by the volunteer that I pick?

A: Your personal information and location will be kept completely private from the entire platform and will only be given to the volunteers that sign up for your job. However, you will have a profile page where you can display information like you branch of service, name, interests etc.

Q: Is there a limit on how many volunteer hours I can use?

A: Currently, there is no limit on how many hours you can request. However, Vetering is investigating this issue and will apply regulations accordingly if necessary in the future to avoid abuse on the platform.

**Stakeholder FAQ (who)**

Q: Will there be training for volunteers before interacting with veterans?

A: Yes. Before any volunteer officially signs up for Vetering, they must complete certified trainings provided by the SLO Veterans Services Office and VA. Additionally, all Veterans will also have to undergo a review of the policies and rules of the platform before listing any jobs.

Q: Why is accrediting required service hours a big deal?

A: Vetering believes that incentivizing more users to the platform will ultimately lead to more service return to veterans. By offering accredited service hours, Cal Poly and Cuesta students apart of clubs, organizations, and Greek life that all need service hours can easily and quickly find opportunities through Vetering. Additionally, many high schools in SLO county require a minimum of 20 service hours to be complete as a graduations requirement, opening the platform to thousands of other students all looking to volunteer.

Q: Is there room for a veteran to abuse the system and take up too many volunteer hours?

A: Yes, there is a possibility for platform abuse to occur by a Veteran taking advantage over free volunteering. However, Vetering plans to not enforce limitations until they believe it is interfering with the other veterans struggling to book volunteering opportunities.

Q: Will veterans be able to volunteer for other veterans?

A: Yes. Veterans can always sign up as a volunteer to help other veterans around the house or even with earning VA benefits and more.

Q: How will the Vetering be maintained after release?

A: **SLO Vets hall/ aws?**

Q: How do you plan to grow your user base?

A: Through industry sponsor prizes, competitions, and advertising, Vetering hopes to grow their platform in San Luis Obispo County to bring more assistance to more veterans. The SLO County Veterans Service Office will also advertise our platform through KSBY and news letters to encourage more Veterans to join the platform.

Q: Is there a scenario where volunteers could be paid in the future?

A: Yes. Members of Cal Poly’s Center for Military-Connected Students can be paid $15 per hour for their involvement in Vetering.

Q: How do you guarantee safety of both the veteran and volunteer?

A: Through required trainings, we hope to prepare both veterans and volunteers for use on the platform to limit incidents keeping the platform a safe space. However, if there was an incident, veterans and volunteers can both report any incidents to our platform where they will be immediately reviewed by the Veteran Services Officers. From there, users can be banned from the platform and reported to the police if necessary.