

MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT GROUP HANDBOOK

Dear Leader,

This handbook is designed to assist you in developing, implementing, and leading a sustainable military psychology student group on your campus. The task ahead of you may be complex, time-consuming, and even frustrating at times. We hope that it also proves to be exceedingly rewarding, and gives you the invaluable opportunity to share newfound knowledge, opportunities, and experiences with your peers and future colleagues. If you work diligently and thoughtfully, and lay the proper groundwork for establishing a sustainable organization, your group can thrive beyond your graduation and continue to help prepare future psychologists to work with military service-members and veterans.

Note that this document is not a “manual,” but a “handbook.” It was developed by a Task Force comprised of, and advised by, fellow graduate students who have experienced the joy and challenge of developing military psychology student groups at their own campuses. Reference it for guidance, ideas, tips, and tricks-of-the-trade earned with sweat and forged in blood. (OK, not *really*.)

Each reader of this handbook is responsible for adapting the guidelines contained herein to his or her unique operational environment. What does that mean in civilian-speak? You won't find rules in this document. Be creative! Be flexible! Use trial-and-error. Some of our suggestions may not work or even apply at your school, so tweak these guidelines and share what works with your fellow leaders in other programs. Most importantly, give us feedback so we can continue to improve and expand this handbook for future military psychology student leaders!

The decision to dedicate your career to serving our men and women in uniform is a noble one, and it requires both careful consideration and great dedication. We hope this process and overall experience fans the flames of your passion, and facilitates the spreading of your enthusiasm across campus. We are proud to serve alongside you in this endeavor, and are committed to assisting you each step of the way.

Welcome to the team!

Sincerely,

Jennifer Barry, David Barry, & Angela Legner

American Psychological Association Division 19 Student Affairs Committee 2014

Introduction

The Military Psychology Student Group Handbook is divided into two main parts: Development and Operations. In the Development section, you will learn how to plan your strategic advance and map your tactical terrain. The Operations section will provide further guidance on navigating the day-to-day functions of the group and your duties as its leader. Additionally, this section will help you to establish your group's presence on campus for years to come.

Digital versions of useful documents mentioned herein and developed by an existing military psychology group are available directly from the current APA Division 19 Student Affairs Committee. Edit the documents (i.e., change the name of the school, contact info, etc.) or modify them as you see fit.

DEVELOPMENT

Map your battlespace!

You are about to become intimately familiar with your school, and for good reason! Not only does mapping out your operational environment help you to develop fine-tuned situational awareness for group development, but it also helps build the reputation of your group within the surrounding community.

"Approximately how many students are enrolled in your program?" "Do a lot of your graduates go into the military?" "Does your school have a lot of student veterans?" You will be asked these questions and many more! It's a great idea to begin researching your school's history and involvement with the military, and the level and types of support your school offers student veterans and military dependents.

Always keep in mind that your group represents your university! You are the leader, and it is imperative that you be a subject matter expert (SME) about your program. As often as you will be asked questions about the military by individuals ON campus, you will also be asked questions about your program when OFF campus. Also ensure that members of your leadership team have a solid working knowledge of your group's current statistics (e.g., semester the group was founded, approximate number of members). Be prepared for military psychologists, training directors, invited guest speakers and others to ask about your group!

Recon

At some point during the development process, you will undoubtedly find yourself wondering how many other students are even interested in military psychology. You may think to yourself, "this seems like an awful lot of work if only a few students join." This is a reasonable concern, and a preliminary interest screen may provide you with needed insight into your peers' potential level of interest and the likelihood of their regular attendance and participation. First, a few thoughts to consider:

"You don't know what you don't know"

Students may not yet have discovered an interest in military psychology, especially if they have never been exposed to it. Your group may very well serve as their first experience, opening students' eyes and minds to a new potential career path. This is even more likely the case if you do not have a military psychologist or veteran serving as faculty in your department, or if your school is not located near a major military installation. In short, a preliminary interest screen may underrepresent what the true level of interest might be.

"The road to military psychology is paved with the best intentions"

You may also find the opposite problem to be true. Many students will express an interest in your organization but will eventually exhibit poor follow through. These "ghost members" will remain on the email list but never attend meetings or other events. This may occur because people are being nice and exaggerating their true level of interest. It may also be that graduate students are notoriously busy and some are less skilled in time management. These students may still benefit from, and quite enjoy, the emails you send out with valuable information, resources, and notifications of goings-on in the military as well as with your group. In this instance, a preliminary interest screen may over-represent how many individuals will truly partake of your hard work in planning, coordinating, and executing group activities.

"Ugh, another survey in my inbox"

How many survey requests regularly land in your inbox? Chances are, as a graduate psychology or counseling student, probably a lot! Whether our departments want information on student programming, our faculty wants courses to be evaluated, or advanced students need research subjects, we are forever being asked to fill our surveys and questionnaires. How likely do you think that yours will be ignored, or put off for later and then forgotten about, by a significant number of your peers? Another option to assess interest may be to host a Military Psychology informational meeting during which you present relevant information on career opportunities and training, and elicit desired information from attendees. How many students will wish to attend but cannot, though? Perhaps you may offer two of these meetings on different days/times, and repeat them at the beginning of each Fall semester.

Getting a true read on how interested your peers might be in joining a Military Psychology group is a challenging and often misleading task. Chances are, if YOU are interested enough to be considering starting such a group, there will be others at your university who will welcome the opportunity to learn more about the field of Military Psychology. It is our belief that no group is too small to benefit from the creation of a Military Psychology organization. After all, how many patients will just one psychologist treat during the course of his or her career? Multiply that figure by the number of peers you expect might join your group, then imagine that all those patients are military service members and veterans in need of behavioral healthcare!

Meet with the elders & local leaders: Obtain university, departmental and faculty support.

Your reconnaissance task includes a thorough analysis of your entire operational environment, which includes how likely your group will thrive within your department, college, and university structure.

University

Most universities and colleges offer a wide array of student groups and activities. You can find information about these organizations through such departments as Student Activities, Student Services, or Student Affairs. An important ally will be the Student Services Director or other administrator who oversees student organizations. This individual will ensure that your group is official and legitimate with the university. He or she will also work with you to complete necessary legal documentation and will provide on-going guidance and oversight of your group's activities, website, funding, etc. Seek out and forge an alliance with the Student Services Director early in the development process. The vital information and advice you will receive will help you to set things up properly from the onset, saving you from the possibility of having to restructure your organization later.

Department

Make an appointment to meet with your department chair to discuss your group's mission and objectives. Be concise, confident, and respectful. You are creating an organization within his or her department and whether the university requires the department chair's permission to create the group or not, it is a professional courtesy to engage him or her in the process. Some department chairs may want a great deal of information and communication, while others may simply appreciate an occasional update. Offer the minimum necessary information and then allow your department chair to ask whatever questions they have. Be sure to offer a convenient channel of communication (e.g., your primary email address) and an open invitation for him or her to attend your group's meetings. Also, notify your department's secretary about your group. He or she will likely be the individual who approves flyers and forwards email announcements of group meetings and events to all students within your department. If not, he or she will know who that individual is and can facilitate an introduction.

Faculty

Depending on your university's policy regarding student organizations, you may or may not be required to obtain a faculty advisor for your group. Regardless, it is imperative that you obtain one. Faculty support is pivotal for your group's success. A group advisor who has experience with military service members or veterans is preferable, but any faculty member who is excited about your cause and passionate about mentoring students will be a valuable ally. A group advisor can provide advice and insight into operating successfully within your department and college. They may know other military psychologists who can serve as guest speakers or provide other support. Your group advisor will also serve as an

advocate for your organization, which can be especially important during times of budget concern or when making non-traditional requests.

The first meeting

Your first event should always be an **informational meeting (Appendix A)** designed to introduce the student body to the group you are creating. During this initial meeting, you will unveil your group's purpose (i.e., mission statement), objectives, goals, leadership team, and benefits of membership. Explain why the creation of your group is relevant for the field of psychology, and more importantly, why your attendees should join and participate.

Advertising

As a general rule of thumb, it is wise to provide at least two weeks' notice to your peers of any upcoming event. (Note: If an event is off campus and requires travel, or will last longer than an hour or two, you may wish to give a month's notice instead.) Post colorful flyers around campus with the date, time, and location of your event. Don't forget to use large text to capture students' attention as they walk to class! Send email notifications (with an attached flyer) to group members letting them know about the upcoming event. Also, forward an email advertisement and electronic flyer to your department secretary for mass distribution to all students in your program. Doing so will not only advertise your event, but serve as advertisement for group membership as well! (Tip: You may want to request that students RSVP to events. Department staff members may wish to know how big of a classroom you require for an event, and guest speakers sometimes ask how many attendees to expect in order to prepare copies of materials.) Giving your peers ample time to adjust their schedules and advertising via multiple mediums will ensure that you have a reasonably sized crowd at activities that you have worked hard to create!

"What's the 'so what'?"

You must provide your peers with reasons to join your group! Why should they join your Military Psychology group and not some other club or organization on campus? Students have very little spare time. Why should they give it away for your group? Will they learn valuable information they can't learn in class? Will they have fun? Will they make friends? Will there be ample networking opportunities that will help them secure an internship, fellowship, or job upon graduation?

Collect data

Find out what's important to your peers and tailor your group to meet its members' needs. The best way to do so is to ASK THEM. Prepare an **interests questionnaire (Appendix B)** to disseminate at the informational meeting and to all new members upon application to your group. On this questionnaire, ask new members what benefits they wish to derive from group membership. Include a checklist of possible benefits and special topics that can be

covered by the group (e.g., combat PTSD, military sexual assault, repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”).

A checklist is a valuable tool to utilize. Individuals may not be able to verbalize their interests on command, but they will certainly recognize what interests them when they see it. Also, it is not their place to come up with reasons to join. That responsibility lies with you! Keep in mind that students will only be interested in topics to which they have been exposed, so don’t be taken aback if you see fewer check marks than you anticipated. For example, it is difficult to be interested in TAP if you have never heard of it! (Hint: TAP is the Transition Assistance Program for service members who are transitioning out of the military.) For this reason, members’ interests may change over time. You may wish to consider having group members update their Interest Questionnaire each year so that your group’s programming continues to be relevant and valuable to your membership.

Take attendance

Lastly, make sure you collect all attendees’ names and contact information. It’s a good practice to pass around [sign-in sheets \(Appendix C\)](#) at all events. This will ultimately show you which days of the week and times of the day are the most heavily attended, as well as which topics seem to be of greatest interest to your peers. (Tip: If attendance does not correlate with the data from your Interests Questionnaire, then you likely hosted an event during an inconvenient day/time, and vice versa. Take note of that information and avoid that time period in the future!) Also, a sign-in sheet is a great way to follow-up with potential future members. If there are attendees who are not current members of your group, reach out to them after the event and solicit their feedback, express your gratitude for their interest, and offer to share some info about the group. Opening group events to non-members is a great way to increase membership and advertise your organization!

Leave them wanting more

Before you end your informational meeting, be sure to discuss future meetings and activities that are in the planning stages. This shows that you’re not all talk and you will deliver on your promise to offer exciting learning opportunities and fun events. It’s not enough to encourage people to join your group; you must entice them to actively participate and reap the benefits of membership! Don’t forget to collect attendees’ Interest Questionnaires before they leave!

Debriefing

Follow-up with your attendees within 48-72 hours after your informational meeting. Thank them for attending and for their interest, questions, and participation during the meeting. Offer to provide additional info and updates about the upcoming events you mentioned. Attach a formal application for group membership to your email. (You may have paper applications available during the informational meeting, but ensure your peers don’t feel pressured to sign it on the spot!)

OPERATIONS

You're up and running! Now what?

Events

Now that your group is formed, you will need to plan events and activities for your group members. A good place to begin is by bringing in a military psychologist as a guest speaker to your campus. Ask him or her to discuss the many opportunities available within the military for psychologists, as well as his or her own training and career. If you don't know any local military psychologists, ask around! Begin with faculty at your school, then contact your nearest military base hospital and Veterans Affairs (VA) medical center. These places should also have websites with contact information for staff psychologists available. Utilize the Division 19 Listserv to request information and network with local military psychologists.

Meetings

The frequency and style of meetings for your group are your choice! Group meetings may occur routinely (e.g., the first Tuesday of each month) or sporadically. They may only occur when business (i.e., the group's operations) must be discussed, or in conjunction with special events, such as a presentation by a guest speaker. Perhaps each meeting is its own special event with activities planned such as presentations, discussion groups, workshops, or games.

It is highly recommended that your group hold *at a minimum* one business meeting per semester. Your school may have different requirements for student groups, so it's important to check with the Director of Student Services for guidance. At business meetings, group operations are discussed. This may include the presentation of reports submitted by all officers, a recap of previous events, brainstorming and updates on ideas for future events, funding issues, officer elections, etc. Detailed records of the meeting's proceedings should be kept by the group's secretary or officer holding a similar position.

Leadership team development

One of the most important functions of your group is to DEVELOP LEADERS. Military psychologists are first and foremost, military officers. Even civilian military psychologists are leaders at work as well as in their communities. Your group should provide ample opportunities for leadership positions and associated tasks. Give your officers responsibility and hold them accountable!

By now you have undoubtedly realized that creating an organization from scratch is a great deal of work, requiring significant preparation before the first meeting is even held. If you already know of other students who have an interest in military psychology, you may wish to enlist their assistance in getting the group established. A word of caution: Delegating work is a vital leadership skill and is important for self-care, however, too many "cooks in

the kitchen” with conflicting visions for the group may subvert the development process. It may be confusing for faculty and administration to have more than one individual approaching them with questions and information about the new Military Psychology group. A single leader, (probably you!), should oversee this process, remaining the point of contact around campus for all information about your new group.

That being said, if any peer approaches you to help, don’t turn them away! This individual has just shown great leadership potential, and you will want to keep them interested and engaged until such time that you can create a more formal leadership position for them to fill. In the meantime, feel free to delegate administrative and organizational tasks to an assistant (e.g., creating flyers) but to avoid confusion, ensure that he or she knows to direct all questions to you.

In the beginning, your leadership team should consist of you, your faculty advisor, and if possible, one other person to assist you with logistics. Show respect for your leadership team by keeping your expectations reasonable, being mindful of their busy schedules, publically thanking them for their assistance and hard work, and always remembering that they are helping you bring your goal to life!

Funding

This may be tricky as many universities are suffering from a shortage of funds designated for student group operations. Not only may your school have very little to offer your group financially, but you may be barred from creating and hosting fundraisers that could raise valuable money for your group. What do you do if you receive little to no funding to support your group? Find free trainings, lectures, and workshops on the internet. Invite guest speakers to your campus. Make carpool arrangements when taking your group members on a field trip. It never hurts to ask Student Government or the Student Services Director for assistance with specific items, such as parking reimbursement for guest speakers or snacks for an event on campus. (Tip: Offering food typically results in increased attendance!)

Scholarships/Financial Aid

Familiarize yourself with the many financial incentives of military service for psychologists, including the pay scale, housing allowance, incentive pay and specialty pay (e.g., for board certification). Learn the intricacies of the Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP) and understand the differences in the program between the various branches of service. (Note: HPSP is a scholarship program that can help your group members afford grad school. It pays a doctoral student’s tuition for a designated number of years as well as a monthly stipend to offset the student’s cost of living. Students remain in the Reserves until graduation at which point they become active duty military officers with a service requirement. Depending on the branch of service, pre-doctoral internship may or may not be guaranteed.) Invite the medical corps/behavioral health recruiters to do presentations on HPSP and other programs at your school near the beginning of each Fall

term, ensuring that all three branches are represented. Students will need plenty of time to complete the lengthy application process so the earlier, the better!

Collaboration

It takes a neighborhood to raise a child, as well as a Military Psychology group! Many, many non-members will serve an important role in the development and operation of your group. As mentioned previously, this may include university faculty, department chairs and deans, administrative personnel, and all of the military and civilian professionals that you will call upon to be guest speakers, mentors, and points of contact. No individual, team, or group can exist and thrive in a vacuum; it's important to make contact and form mutually beneficial working relationships with other individuals and groups both inside and outside of your school. This will ensure that your Military Psychology group maintains a continual flow of resources as it grows and adapts to an ever-changing operational climate over many years.

Outside Campus (OCAM)

- *Recruiters* – Military recruiters are an excellent source of information and materials. Seek out and maintain contact with these individuals early in your group's formation as there may already be student members who will benefit from recruiting information and guidance. Locate the "Medical Corps" or "healthcare" recruiters as general recruiters will not have specific information about becoming a military psychologist. *Ensure that you maintain contact with recruiters from **all three** branches of service (Air Force, Army, and Navy) so that your group members are always being presented with well-rounded and unbiased access to information.*

Some areas may have a recruiter specific to the Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP), so it's advised to ask who the recruiter who handles those applications is. If these recruiters don't regularly visit your campus, request that they put your school on their list of recruiting locations and invite them to do a presentation for your group members. Not only will they discuss the various pathways through which graduate students may become uniformed military psychologists, but these recruiters will also be a continuing source of information, support, and assistance throughout the application process for military scholarships, internships, fellowships, and direct commissioning.

- *Training Directors* – Start building a list of names and contact information for the various training directors who oversee military internship sites. This list will include the directors of internships at your nearest military training hospitals and VA medical centers, as well as the national training directors for the Air Force, Army, and Navy. Be advised that the active-duty military training directors rotate out of these positions approximately every three years, so it will be necessary to keep this list of contacts up-to-date. If you are maintaining solid, positive relationships with the training directors, however, you will know if/when this is due to occur!

Training directors are an invaluable source of information for group members and when their busy schedules permit, look forward to speaking with groups of students about training opportunities at their particular site. Inviting training directors to speak at your campus also allows your group members to put in some valuable “face time” with seasoned military psychologists who might be willing to serve as references for motivated students. Keep in mind that ALL military psychologists with whom you interact may one day be your superior, so always treat them with the respect, collegiality, and graciousness they deserve!

- *Military Psychology groups at other schools* – Other Military Psychology student organizations are a terrific resource and “force multiplier,” especially if they are located near your campus. Contact the leader(s) of these other groups and forge an alliance. Share information and resources. Open events to each other’s student members and consider hosting “joint operations” and events, then divide and conquer the workload. Graduate students are some of the busiest people around, (as you well know!), so take every opportunity to utilize the great work of others. Don’t forget to show your thanks and support in return!
- *Division 19 Student Leadership* – As always, the APA Division 19 (Society for Military Psychology) is an excellent source of ideas and support for students. Your first point of contact should be one of the National Student Representatives. The D19 Student Reps are current graduate-level students whose purposes include 1) representing the needs, concerns, and best interests of student members to the division’s governing body, the Executive Committee (EXCOM); 2) providing direct and indirect support to D19 student membership; 3) representing D19 student membership to the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS). As fellow students, the Reps can more easily understand and appreciate your “boots on the ground” perspective and experience. Reach out to these individuals as they can help you navigate your operational terrain and connect you with important and useful resources.
- *Division 19 Website & Student Page* – The internet links us to endless amounts of information, but how much of it is accurate? Where do you look first? The Division 19 website is chock full of valuable information about Military Psychology including a Student Page that features tips on how to become a military psychologist and links to useful websites that contain innumerable resources for students of military psychology.

Campus (CAM)

- *Student Government & other student groups* – Most universities have a student government organization that represents the needs and desires of the student population to the school’s leadership council. As the leader of a student group, it is imperative that you forge an alliance with your student government organization.

Requests for funding, catering, and use of space and/or equipment may need to go through Student Government.

Even if this is not the case at your school, it is advantageous to build a solid relationship with other student leaders around campus. There is power in numbers, and you may need Student Government to advocate for your group in the future. Why should they care about your group if you have never taken the time to attend their meetings or otherwise participate in student governance? It is your responsibility as a student leader to advocate for your group *as well as other groups on campus*. There may be little funding to go around, so you may find yourself in direct competition for dollars with other student groups. Looking out for the best interests of your group is solid leadership but that does NOT entail being greedy! Teamwork is vital to success on the battlefield AND in life. Lead by example and form allies, not enemies!

Student Veterans – Many civilian students wishing to become military psychologists have a difficult time accessing military personnel, especially for direct research or clinical purposes. Whether your school has a student veterans organization (SVO) or not, you may be surprised by the number of current- and prior-service military personnel in your midst. These folks are your resident experts on the military! Reach out to student veterans and ask them to share their knowledge, experiences, leadership ability, and suggestions. If there is an active SVO, consider hosting joint operations and invite their members to your group's events. Perhaps you can pair up members from each organization and begin a dialogue about behavioral health services in the military. Discuss current events and hot topics important to both military personnel and psychologists, such as stigma about mental illness and help-seeking behavior.

There is so much a student of military psychology can learn from veterans. As an organization whose members are passionate about serving the needs of military personnel, it is imperative that your group advocate for the needs of military personnel locally and on campus, especially student veterans. Reach out to them and maintain a healthy respect and appreciation for their service and unique experiences!

- *School Officials/Departments (Financial Aid, Clinical Training)* – Invite the Financial Aid staff member who primarily handles military scholarships to do a presentation for your group at least once a year, preferably shortly after the beginning of Fall Semester. Ask him or her to discuss HPSP, Post-9/11 GI Bill, Yellow Ribbon Program, and other forms of military financial aid. Ask if there are any scholarships provided by the school for veterans or their dependents (i.e., qualifying spouses, former spouses, and family members). Many students may not realize that they qualify for certain scholarships and other forms of aid, especially dependents or family members of Reservists and National Guardsmen, so it is imperative that students are presented with this information early in the academic year and regularly thereafter.

Familiarize yourself with these programs as many of your group members may be prior-service military personnel or *future* service-members. Invite a military healthcare/behavioral health recruiter to discuss ways the military can pay for school, such as HPSP, the GI Bill, and loan repayment programs. Assistance with affording graduate study and paying down existing student loan debt is an attractive benefit of joining the military (though it shouldn't be the only one)!

Clinical training opportunities (i.e., practica and internships) that provide access to and experience with military personnel are few and far between. Civilian graduate students often find themselves competing with one another for coveted training slots at VA medical centers, base hospitals, or military academy counseling centers. Make it known to your program's clinical training department that your group will provide specialized educational opportunities on military psychology to your group members. The training department's goal is to match qualified students to practicum sites based on best fit. Keep the department abreast of hosted events, including field trips/tours, guest lectures, movie screenings, discussion groups, etc. These opportunities ought to make your group members more qualified than their non-member peers to obtain rare military psychology training slots. Lastly, advocate on your group's behalf for more military-related clinical training opportunities. The training department may not realize the strong interest in working with military populations that exists among the student body!

Sustainability - How to keep the group thriving

Leadership rotation

Frequent turnover of leaders creates a chaotic and unpredictable environment that is not conducive to learning OR fun. On the other hand, the United States typically doesn't support dictatorships! Student organizations provide opportunities for motivated students to develop as LEADERS. Similarly, military psychologists are leaders on the job, within the military, and/or within their respective communities. Active duty military psychologists are first and foremost, military OFFICERS. Leadership ability is the fundamental trait that will determine success and longevity in a military officer's career.

Create opportunities for your group members to develop as leaders! As the group grows in size, you should be adding leadership positions to reduce the work load of your current officers. If you have a particularly motivated student member who seeks leadership opportunities when there are none available, consider creating a new position based on the member's strengths and experience.

Optempo

How often should you hold meetings or host events? This is entirely up to you. Overly frequent events may be burdensome for students' schedules. Too few scheduled activities may result in waning interest-levels. In the beginning, aim to host one large/complex

activity (such as a field trip or other event that requires significant planning) *and* one small/simple activity (e.g., “brown bag” discussion) per month. Keep the days and times variable so your group members can feasibly attend at least one of the events. Through trial and error, you’ll eventually find the right rhythm for your group; that is, you will discover the pace at which you tend to have the maximum number of attendees regularly attending your events. (Tip: Be mindful of Midterm and Finals weeks when scheduling activities, as well as Comprehensive Exams. Also, don’t assume that students won’t attend events planned during breaks between semesters, though holiday weekends should probably be avoided.)

Membership growth & retention

An organization is a living, breathing thing. You must continually tend to it, always providing nourishment and TLC. Not only should you advocate for your current members and provide them with learning activities, fun events, networking opportunities, and leadership development, but you must also recruit new members! Graduate students have a tendency to graduate, so a bit of regular advertisement and marketing of the group’s mission and benefits is required for its long-term survival. At the very least, you should host a *yearly* informational meeting (similar to the one you already did) during mid- to late Fall Semester. Too early in the Fall will not likely capture many new members as new first year students are still getting their bearings in new, sometimes overwhelming surroundings. Waiting until halfway through the semester when students’ academic lives feel more manageable may be advantageous.

It is recommended that your leadership team include a Membership and Retention Officer (MRO) who maintains an updated roster (with current contact information) of members. You may choose to place the MRO in charge of all recruiting and advertisement activities. In addition to occasional informational meetings, the MRO may develop brochures, flyers, a website, or other marketing materials for your group. The sky’s the limit!

Engagement

There’s little worse than investing valuable time and energy into planning incredible events for your group, only to have a few people actively attend. It is also embarrassing and unprofessional when a guest speaker takes time out of his or her busy schedule to travel to your university and give a presentation to an empty classroom. Consider developing incentive for your members to regularly attend group events. You may or may not request that group members RSVP for certain events; occasionally you may need to provide a head count for certain events but typically speaking, graduate students don’t often know if they will be available to attend until the week of an event. Send event reminders via email a week before, and two days before each event. Consider requesting 48 hours’ notice from group members if they cannot attend after all. Even if a head count is not required, it is good practice to let a guest speaker know in advance how many attendees they may expect.

Closing

This handbook is our first edition, and very much a work in progress. The information presented is based on the collective experiences of a small handful of existing military psychology student group leaders who banded together with the collective goal of communicating our experiences with others who share our passion and enthusiasm for this field, as well as our respect and pride in our country's military veterans. We hope it is useful to you as you establish and grow your own group. More than anything, we hope you will share your feedback and stories with ALL your fellow military psychology student group leaders across the country so we can learn and grow from each other's experiences.