



# WARRIOR ENGAGEMENT HANDBOOK

# Warrior Engagement

Arthritis Warriors are the heart of the Walk to Cure Arthritis (WTCA) event, they are the face of Arthritis and why we walk.

At the Arthritis Foundation, we are charged with expanding the experience for our Warriors both prior to and beyond the WTCA event itself. Warriors know firsthand the importance of the Arthritis Foundation's lifesaving work, and they have the unique opportunity to become ambassadors for the Arthritis Foundation and the WTCA movement by sharing their personal stories and the value of our mission.

In looking at best ways to engage Warriors in WTCA, we should embrace three key elements: Pre-event, Warriors, and their supporters. The pre-event work is critical to lay the groundwork for overall Warrior engagement and experience.

**Understand Live Yes! Arthritis Network's connection and role.** We should directly connect Warriors with the mission that drives everything we do. Connect them with others in the community touched by arthritis; encourage them to utilize LYAN's programs and services; and rally those passionate about the cause to join their local Walk to Cure Arthritis event.

**Amplify the Arthritis Foundation through the Warrior's personal story.** Help Warriors share their personal story and its connection to the Arthritis Foundation and its mission.

**Promote fighting back against arthritis by fundraising on a Walk To Cure Arthritis team.** Encourage Warriors to take part by forming a team or joining one to raise funds to support the Arthritis Foundation's lifesaving mission.

Warriors and their supporters want to celebrate their arthritis journey both at the event and throughout the year. Local events should engage Warriors on Event Leadership Teams, as Team Captains, and as part of the planning process. Though the Warriors and their supporters may take the initiative with this effort, Warrior engagement is such an important part of the event experience that it should be part of all that we do.

This guidebook will assist Warrior and their supporter leads with their efforts, but it is meant for every Event Leadership Team member. Event Leadership Team members working on Warrior engagement are focused on:

- Recruiting and retaining Warriors with the event
- Providing meaningful engagement for Warriors at the event
- Providing meaningful engagement for Warriors throughout the year

For every committee member, the key to success is remembering that Warriors' involvement with WTCA is much more than an event. Their Walk to Cure Arthritis experience is about connecting with others and community resources, and we should continuously seek opportunities to connect Warriors in various ways to do that. For some, that committee may mean attending a Warrior reception; for others, it may mean joining the committee or becoming involved in the Live Yes! Arthritis Network as

a facilitator, leader, or participant. It's important to provide an opportunity for everyone to support our cause in some way.

## Roadmap to Success



Read the flowchart starting at the bottom. We can only effectively engage Warriors throughout the WTCA event if we have engaged them throughout the year. We can only engage Warriors throughout the year if we put energy toward recruiting and retaining them. We can do this by building various partnerships at the local level, where everyone sees the value of the Arthritis Foundation and our mission (through the Live Yes! Arthritis Network). Most importantly, people cannot see the Arthritis Foundation's value without those in the community sharing their personal stories and connecting them back to the organizational mission.

## Telling and Selling the Arthritis Foundation

### Making the Ask

**WHAT DO I SAY?** Whether you are asking someone to sponsor you, join your team, start a team, or participate as a Warrior, we need to feel comfortable with the ask. Try to recall who encouraged you to check out WTCA for the first time? Do you remember what they said or what they did? How did you feel when you received the ask?

**THE ASK!** This should be a memorable 60-second sound bite to succinctly introduce yourself, the event, and why you participate in the WTCA or why the Arthritis Foundation and the fight against arthritis are important to you. The ask should end with a short and concise question. Overall, it introduces you, highlights the WTCA, and opens conversation to the person of interest.

## **SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO GET STARTED:**

### **1. Learn about the impact of the Arthritis Foundation in your community.**

Talk to your staff partner to learn about the ways that the Arthritis Foundation is making a difference in your community such as the impact of Arthritis Foundation programs and services in your area. It is important to know what is happening locally, so you can speak to people about their experience.

### **2. Be prepared.**

Make a list of all the possible ways this contact might find a connection to the WTCA event. When talking with a Warrior, it's easy to give them an invitation to your Warrior reception. But it's important to really listen to what their interests are because they may want to get much more involved in the event.

### **3. Opening**

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am participating in our community Walk to Cure Arthritis of \_\_\_\_ event. Have you heard of it?"

Pause for response....

If no, possible response could be:

"It is truly an incredible experience! Walk to Cure Arthritis is community-driven event that celebrates arthritis Warriors and their supporters, and fights back by raising money and awareness in the fight to cure Arthritis. I look forward to it each year!"

If yes, ask about their experience! How did they hear of the Walk to Cure Arthritis program? Were they involved? If so, how?

### **4. Tell your story.**

Paint a picture of why you are involved. Some possibilities could include:

- How arthritis has affected someone you care about
- How the Arthritis Foundation has helped you or a loved one
- Speak to some of the mission focuses of the Arthritis Foundation
- Your favorite part of the Walk to Cure Arthritis event

An example: I got involved with my Walk to Cure Arthritis event after my friend was diagnosed. I saw firsthand how the funds raised were put to good use! She was able to utilize many of the Arthritis Foundation's programs and services that helped her through her arthritis journey. I am happy to share she is doing well and will be joining my team!

Whatever part of the Arthritis Foundation and the Walk to Cure Arthritis brings out a passion in you, that's the part you should share!

## 5. How has arthritis impacted you or your family?

Be sure to listen to the respond that is shared.

## 6. The ask

Here are some ways to ask Warriors to get involved with the Arthritis Foundation and/or the Walk to Cure Arthritis event by using asks connected with opportunity statements.

For example:

- "There are many ways you and your family can join the fight to cure arthritis."
- "I was wondering if you would consider joining my team?"
- "You are living proof that arthritis CAN be beaten. Will you consider coming as my guest to the Warrior reception? "
- "I am trying to raise money to help fund the mission of the Arthritis Foundation, and I was wondering if you would consider making a donation to support my efforts?"

Whatever you determine your approach is remember to pause and wait for an answer. Give the person an opportunity to respond and then reply appropriately based on answer.

Making the ask and closing the deal is critical in recruiting for your event. So, let's look at the three-step approach outlined here:

### **I. Seek specific commitment; be open to alternatives.**

- Be clear about what you are asking and ensure that they understand so that there are no surprises later.
- Understand where you can allow flexibility in the roles to fit the person you are asking and where you cannot.
- Have in mind a deadline needed for their response and immediate action plan following their acceptance.

### **II. When the answer is no; have a plan to overcome objections.**

- Listen intently to understand the underlying reason for their objection. Do they need more information? Is something else on their mind? Maybe another volunteer role would be a better fit.
- Be equipped with the possible responses and options.
- Understand that a "no" can mean "not right now." Keep the door open for future involvement.
- Be prepared to offer them something even if the answer is no. Always leave them with something positive to take away from the meeting.
- Even if the answer is no, ask for a referral for another contact.

### **III. When the answer is yes be clear about the expectations.**

- Provide a one-page outline of the role, timeline, and communications plan.
- Ask them what they need from us and address any concerns or questions.

- Give them the contact person's information for the role they have selected.

Follow up with a thank you email and include the contact person and staff.

## 7. **Ending**

Leave information including contact info, meeting dates, and times. Finally, thank them for their thoughtful consideration of this request.

**Helpful hint:** Practice the ask with a friend or family member so you feel more comfortable with making the ask! Think positive! Most people will say yes!

## Recruitment for Warriors

Local Event Leadership Teams work hard to plan and execute amazing Walk To Cure Arthritis event experiences for all participants and especially Warriors. When planning your event, consider the following to ensure that we honor and engage Warriors in all capacities.

- Analyze your event's current involvement. By knowing the data around your event, you will have an idea of where to focus your time and effort.
  - Use available data. Pull a Warrior report. This report can be run for the current year and the previous year. Include Warriors and anyone identified as having arthritis.
  - How many Warriors are new to the event? How many are returning?
    - Are the Warriors attending your event reflective of your community? Keep diversity and inclusion in mind such as geography, race, religion, gender, age, etc.
    - Create a retention plan.
  - Send a specific message to Warriors to give them event-specific updates about Warrior activities, ask them to sign up again, or event ask for feedback about what they would like to see at the event in the coming year.
  - Create a timeline for a few touchpoints with Warriors throughout the year. Perhaps it's a birthday card or even a Valentine's Day card – it's a way to let our Warriors know we're thinking about them throughout the entire year.
  - Create a recruitment plan.
  - Identify some places in your community that can help with the recruitment of Warriors such as support groups, places of worship, hospitals, doctor's offices, and local treatment centers.
  - There is power in numbers! This is a time to get together during or after an Event Leadership Team or Team Captain meeting to canvas the community by calling and reaching out to newly registered Warriors or those who have not registered yet from prior years. Let's make sure to let every Warrior know we care about their participation in our event.

## Warrior Engagement at the Event

Consider these ideas to help as you brainstorm all the possible ways to engage Warriors through a meaningful experience at your event.

- **Warrior reception:** Depending on the time of your event, your event may host a Warrior dinner or a Warrior lunch, but both are great opportunities to show special attention to our honored guests. Work with local restaurants to get food donated. Talk to your staff partner about what can be offered to a restaurant in return for catering the Warrior dinner. Depending on the value, it could get them some nice recognition at the event!
- **Warrior Wall:** Warriors can put their handprints on a designated wall or sheet of paper as they enter the Warrior tent. Their supporters can join and put their handprints on the wall as well, around their Warrior's hand print but in a different color.
- **Warrior Photo Booth:** This can be done with a professional who is willing to donate his or her time or any volunteer with a smartphone. Have an area set up with some fun props and a background for Warriors and their supporters to take pictures. It's a great way to not only engage people during the event but also to keep in touch afterward. When sending thank you cards after the event, you can send the pictures out to those who took them (just remember to keep track by name of whose pictures you are taking). If you can print and mail them that's a great bonus, but if not, simply email the photo with a note.
- **Virtual Warrior Program:** Sometimes their supporter may be present at an event, but his/her Warrior may not physically be there. Perhaps they are not well enough to attend, or they live too far away. Whatever the reason, allow supporters to honor their Warrior at the event through a virtual Warrior program.
- **Bring in the Community:** Have a local retirement community bring their arthritis Warriors and supporters over for the event and involve them in expo activities as well as Warrior activities ensuring they get the most out of the event.
- **Lead with LYAN:** At each meeting, open with a mission moment. Have member of your Event Leadership Team volunteer to share their story or relation to arthritis as a way to remember why we are each involved in the fight.
- **Social Media:** Add Warrior campaigns into your social media presence. Example - #WarriorSunday have a weekly spotlight on a Warrior that is connected to your event, either as a loved one of a participant or a participant themselves.
- **Send cards:** Send holiday cards to the Warriors on your list from prior year events. Use this as an opportunity to announce when your next event would be held, along with an invitation for them to attend.
- **Adopt-A-Warrior:** Have teams adopt Warriors who are coming to the event that don't have a team of their own. The teams can make posters recognizing their Warriors, socialize with them throughout event, and provide support. Engage Warriors in all parts of your team including telling their story, fundraising, and sharing Warrior photo on team website.