Make and Donate Fleece Blankets to Shelters that Serve Veterans

One way to show veterans you care is to organize a project and make fleece blankets, hats or scarves which you can donate to local shelters that serve veterans. Showing you care will make veterans feel appreciated and will improve their morale. In addition, fleece is an easy to work with material; it is durable and soft, and will certainly improve the quality of life of those in need.

**Type of service:** done-in-one-day project, group volunteering, family/guest volunteering

**Objectives:** Help homeless veterans and their families stay warm

**Difficulty level:** easy to medium

**Special skills:** Dexterity, ability to work with others

**Resources:**

- Fleece (can be purchased at sewing and craft supply stores); fleece is soft, comfortable to wear, and warm without being heavy; it is considered environmentally friendly because it is partially made from recycled plastic
- Embroidery thread or other accessories (optional)
- Sewing machine (optional, since there are many no-sew fleece projects)
- Sharp scissors
- Tape
- Paper clips
- Trash bag
- Water
- Snacks

**Project instructions:**

Encourage others to volunteer and to be involved in planning and executing a day of shadowing. Volunteer positions include participating on a planning committee, PR committee, set-up and clean-up committee, sewing alongside participants or dropping off donations.

*Step 1: Identify the Workspace*

Identify a space at your office where you can teach other volunteers how to make items from fleece. Ideal locations will have large tables and chairs for volunteers to spread out their fleece (such as a rearranged large conference room). How much space you need depends on how many volunteers you are expecting. It is best to have more space than you need, just in case.

In case it is not possible to execute the project at your location, reach out to a nonprofit partner.

*Step 2: Identify the Beneficiary*

Next, identify a facility that serves veterans. Contact them and ask them if they would be willing to be the beneficiaries of the donations. Ensure that they have adequate access to veterans who need these products. You can also ask for a list of the first names of the veterans and maybe even a short bio of the individual so that the volunteer can make the gift more personal. This will also help the volunteer feel more connected to their service and the impact that it has on the lives of veterans.

*Step 3: Recruit Volunteers*

Depending on the size of your project (amount of blankets you are planning to make), you can consider organizing the service project after work or even during lunch (you can have teams of volunteers come in
and volunteer for an hour at different times throughout the day). Advertise the event by posting fliers in designated areas.

To maximize volunteer participation, you might consider hosting the project on Saturday or Sunday, as more people are likely to attend. Host an information session to inform potential volunteers on the benefits of fleece – including the fact that it’s made from recycled bottles – and how items made of fleece such (blankets, hats, scarves, etc.) help keep homeless veterans, men, women and children warm. Make sure to leave time at the end of the information session for questions. Remember that the personal “ask” is always most effective.

Be sure to secure any supplies you will need for the event ahead of time. Create a budget that allows you to spend money on supplies. Reach out to local fabric and craft stores and explain your service project event and ask for donations or supplies. You can also ask employee volunteers to bring any of the needed supplies from home.

Be sure to buy the needed amount of fabric based upon how many volunteers there are. For every one person to make four blankets, buy eight yards of fabric per person.

**Step 4: Carry Out the Project**

Making a fleece blanket is very easy. You can even avoid using a sewing machine. Above all, make sure you lead your team in a safe and fun project.

Once the volunteers have checked in, review sewing safety tips and get started sewing. Since the project involves the handling of scissors and possibly other sharp objects, make sure you have liability waivers signed before the project begins, including parental consent and/or liability forms. Ask volunteers to work with children and assign them easy-to-do tasks. Make sure they are supervised throughout the project.

Give each volunteer two piece of fleece fabric. Lay blankets evenly over each other and clip them together with a paper clip. Then, sew along the edges of the blanket on all four sides. It’s as easy as that!

Here are the basic steps you need to follow:

1. Purchase anywhere from 1.5 to 3 yards (1.3-2.7 meters) of each fleece. 1.5 yards makes a decent size throw, 2.5-3 yards makes a nice twin size blanket.
2. Consider the area you have available to spread out your material. If you don’t have room to spread out the whole material, you can adapt by using a table or available floor room to cut and tie your fleece.
3. Spread out the material so that the softer or more brightly colored sides face out and match both up at one end and sides as far as they lay flat. Trim if needed.
4. Consider how you will measure the cuts to make the ties. They don't have to be exact. When cutting against the nap (usually the narrower end) the strips need to be a little longer (about 4-5 inches/11-14 cm), than along the long sides, (about 2.5-3 inches/7-9 cm) because they don't stretch as much while tying.
5. Use something rectangular in shape, if not using a ruler to measure. If you have trouble seeing the graduations on a ruler, a card cut to the right measurements (for instance 3"x5"/9x14 cm) is easier to use to make corner cuts even and strips uniform in length. Use the long edge of the card for the longer strips and the short edge for the shorter ones.
6. Cut out a rectangle from both corners with a pair of scissors. Make sure you are cutting through both pieces of fleece.
7. Cut strips of approximately one inch from each corner down the end and the sides for as long as the material lies flat. They don’t have to be exactly uniform, but should be approximately the same size. Small irregularities will not be noticeable in the finished product. An easy way to measure is by using your thumb. If your fingers are larger, use the width of your thumb, if your fingers are smaller, use from tip to first knuckle.
8. Tie the corner strips together first using a simple knot to attach the bottom layer to the top layer.
9. Tighten the knot, if you have trouble getting the knot tight due to arthritic or weak fingers, by holding the end of one tail of the knotted pair with one hand and sliding the fingers of the other hand up to push the knot tighter.
10. Tie the strips at the end between the two corners next in the same way.
11. Don't worry if the fleece puckers.
12. Use flat hands to stretch and smooth the material so it lies flat again.
13. Tie the strips down each side for as long as it is cut and flatten as before.
14. Fold the tied portion up and move the fleece down so that more of the material lies flat (trim if needed) and repeat steps seven through nine until about 2/3 of the blanket is tied.
15. Turn the blanket around and spread out so that the remaining end is flat.
16. Trim end and sides if needed and repeat from step six until blanket is finished.
17. Notice how all those little imperfections seem to magically blend into the pattern.
18. Fold blankets and place them in the designated area to be prepared for packing.

View our instructional video to help you make a fleece blanket in no time.

After you are done, have a volunteer drop off the fleece blankets and donations. Make sure that before the drop off all the goods are counted so that a measure of success can be reported back to the volunteers. You can ask your Volunteer Leader to help you write or guide you how to write a letter accompanying the drop-off. This will make your service more personal.

Step 5: Cleanup

Make sure to clean the working area upon completion of the project. Be sure and salvage as much of the fleece as possible for the next project.

Step 6: Reflection and Recognition

After your volunteer project, it is important to reflect on the experience and think about the impact of the project on the community as well as what you learned about yourself and others. Here are some suggested activities:

- Tell your co-workers, family and friends about something you have learned and how you will continue to help others.
- Communicate about your experience. Write a blog post.

If you are working with a group of volunteers on this project, lead a group discussion with questions such as:

- Why did you volunteer today?
- What did you learn or what do you know about veterans?
- What is the one thing that you will remember most about this service activity?
- How can you continue to make a difference in our community and in the lives of veterans and military families?

Additional Resources

- HandsOn Network [www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)
- Community Blueprint [www.the-communityblueprint.org](http://www.the-communityblueprint.org)
- HandsOn Network instructional video on how to make a fleece blanket: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QgXXwFRg2k&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QgXXwFRg2k&feature=youtu.be)