

Clay County Veterans Center CDBG Campaign Strategic Plan

2026 – 2031 Community Development Block Grant Plan

Prepared by:

Clay Veterans, Inc. and Veterans Council Clay County, Florida

March 2026

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Clay County Veterans Center CDBG Campaign Strategic Plan

1. Executive Summary

Clay County is home to more than 30,000 veterans and their families. Despite this significant population, the county currently lacks a permanent, centralized facility dedicated to supporting veterans through resource navigation, community programs, and coordinated access to services.

The Clay Veterans Center opened in April 2025 as a community-based initiative designed to provide veterans and their families with a welcoming place for connection, information, and assistance. Programs such as Coffee Break, benefits navigation support, and digital access assistance have already demonstrated strong demand within the community.

This strategic plan outlines a coordinated effort to include a Veterans Center facility in the 2026–2031 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consolidated Plan for Clay County. Inclusion in the plan would allow the county to allocate federal CDBG funding toward the development or expansion of a permanent Veterans Center facility.

2. Strategic Plan

Purpose

Ensure Veterans Resources are included in the Clay County 2026–2031 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Plan.

Primary Goal

Secure inclusion of a Clay County Veterans Center project in the 2026–2031 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consolidated Plan administered by the Clay County Board of County Commissioners and funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development CDBG Program.

Secondary Goals

- Increase awareness of veteran needs in Clay County
- Demonstrate community demand for veteran-focused services
- Build a coalition of organizations supporting the initiative
- Mobilize public participation in CDBG hearings

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3. Planning Timeline

Phase 1 – Research and Planning (March–April)

- Organize planning committee & meetings
- Volunteer recruitment
- Confirm county CDBG planning timeline
- Gather veteran population data
- Prepare Veterans Center concept proposal

Phase 2 – Coalition Development (April–May)

- Recruit Organizations
- Collect letters of support from veteran organizations
- Build coalition

Phase 3 – Public Awareness (May–June)

- Launch messaging to inform veteran community
- Engage partner organizations
- Encourage veterans to attend CDBG public hearings

Phase 4 – Public Comment (June–July)

- Organize attendance hearing
- Prepare speakers (talking points & coordinated messaging)
- Demonstrate public support

Phase 5 – Proposal Submission (July–August)

- Submit Veterans Center proposal to county staff
- Present proposal to county commissioners

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Phase 1 – Research and Planning (March–April)

Planning Committee Structure

- Initiative Coordinator: Coordinates the campaign and meetings.
- Coalition Coordinator: Builds partnerships and gathers letters of support.
- Communications Coordinator: Handles messaging and outreach.
- Volunteer Coordinator: Organizes volunteers and attendance.
- Public Engagement Lead: Prepares hearing speakers and messaging.

Volunteer Recruitment

Help Bring Veterans Resources to Clay County

Clay County is home to more than 27,000 veterans, yet there is no centralized hub where veterans and families can connect with resources.

Volunteers can help by:

- assisting with outreach
- sharing information online
- attending public hearings
- contacting organizations

Committee Timeline

Month 1 – Organization

- Form committee
- Assign roles
- Begin outreach

Month 2 – Coalition and Awareness

- Expand partner organizations
- Launch messaging
- Identify speakers

Month 3 – Mobilization

- Recruit volunteers
- Prepare speakers
- Attend hearings

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Phase 2 – Coalition Building (April–May)

Campaign Influence Map

Tier 1 – Veteran Organizations: Veterans Council Clay County, Clay Veterans, American Legion, VFW, DAV.

Tier 2 – Civic Groups: Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs, Kiwanis, civic associations.

Tier 3 – Business Community: Chamber members, veteran-owned businesses, major employers.

Goal: 25–30 organizations publicly supporting the initiative.

Coalition Organizations to Recruit

The following organizations represent potential coalition partners who could support the Veterans Center initiative through public comment, partnership programs, or letters of support.

- American Legion Posts (Clay County)
- Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Posts
- Disabled American Veterans (DAV)
- Marine Corps League
- AMVETS
- Wounded Warrior Project (regional presence)
- Operation Lifeline
- Operation Barnabas
- Rotary Club of Orange Park Sunrise
- Rotary Clubs across Clay County
- Lions Clubs
- Kiwanis Clubs
- Clay County Chamber of Commerce
- Local veteran-owned businesses
- Faith-based community organizations
- Local law firms supporting veterans
- Black Rifle Coffee Company (community partner)
- Healthcare providers serving veterans
- Local colleges and workforce training programs
- Community foundations and philanthropic groups

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Coalition Outreach Letter Template

Subject: Support for Clay County Veterans Center Initiative

Dear [Organization Name],

Clay County is home to more than 30,000 veterans and their families, yet our community currently lacks a permanent Veterans Center facility.

We are working with community partners to ensure that the development of a Veterans Center is included in Clay County's upcoming Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) five-year plan.

We respectfully ask your organization to support this effort by providing a letter of support and encouraging participation in upcoming public hearings.

Together, we can help ensure that Clay County veterans have a place where they can access resources, connection, and community.

Sincerely,

[Name]

Clay Veterans, Inc. / Veterans Council Clay County

Coalition Goal

Recruit 25–40 organizations to publicly support inclusion of Veterans Resources in the Clay County 2026–2031 CDBG Plan. Coalition partners can provide letters of support, participate in public hearings, and assist in community outreach.

Phase 3 – Public Awareness (May–June)

Marketing and Communication

Key Message: Clay County has more than 27,000 veterans and should prioritize resources that support their well-being.

Communication Channels: Social media, Community newsletters, Veteran organization emails, Local media

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Phase 4 – Public Comment (June–July)

Public Comment Mobilization Plan

Public hearings are a critical part of the CDBG planning process. The goal is to demonstrate visible and organized community support for the Veterans Center project.

- ❖ 20–40 veterans and supporters attending hearings
- ❖ 10–15 individuals providing public comment
- ❖ Participation from multiple veteran organizations

Speaker Themes:

- Clay County has a large veteran population
- Veterans need centralized resources
- Existing programs demonstrate demand
- The center benefits low-income and disabled veterans
- CDBG funding would strengthen the entire veteran community

Examples of speakers:

- Veterans
- Spouses
- Caregivers
- Nonprofit leaders
- Community leaders
- Veteran service organization representatives

Public Hearing Speaker Talking Points

- 1 Clay County has 30,000 veterans
- 2 Veterans need a central hub
- 3 Current programs already demonstrate demand
- 4 A Veterans Center supports community stability and independence
- 5 CDBG investment would serve low-income and disabled veterans

“Help us expand the Veterans Center that already exists and is serving the community.”

Clay County Veterans Center CDBG Campaign Strategic Plan

Clay County is home to more than 30,000 veterans, yet the county does not currently have a permanent Veterans Center facility dedicated to serving them.

The Clay Veterans Center has already demonstrated demand by assisting hundreds of veterans and families through programs focused on connection, benefits navigation, and community engagement.

Including a Veterans Center in the county’s Community Development Block Grant plan would provide lasting support for veterans, particularly those with low incomes or disabilities.

We respectfully request that Clay County include a Veterans Center facility project in the 2026–2031 CDBG plan.

Phase 5 – Proposal Submission (July–August)

Commissioner Request (One-Page Overview)

Purpose:

The Clay County veteran community is requesting that the County include a Clay County Veterans Center project in the 2026–2031 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consolidated Plan. Inclusion in the plan would allow Clay County to allocate federal CDBG funds toward development of a permanent community facility serving veterans and their families.

Why This Matters:

- Clay County has more than 30,000 veterans.
- Many veterans are seniors, disabled, or living on fixed incomes.
- Veterans need assistance navigating VA benefits and digital systems.
- Social isolation and caregiver stress are growing concerns.

Indicator	Estimated Value
Total Veterans	27,000+
Veterans Age 65+	~40%
Disabled Veterans	20–25%

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Existing Momentum

- Clay Veterans Center opened April 2025.
- 205 veterans and family members participated in Coffee Break gatherings since January 2025.
- 140+ documented veteran interactions through the center.
- Veterans Council Clay County has contributed approximately \$13,500 in operational support.

Request

We respectfully request that Clay County include a Veterans Center facility project in the 2026–2031 CDBG Consolidated Plan so that federal funding may be used to develop a permanent community hub serving Clay County veterans.

NOTE: Projects must meet one of three national objectives set by HUD:

- 1** Benefit Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) persons
- 2** Prevent or eliminate slums/blight
- 3** Meet an urgent community need

For a Veterans Center, the strongest justification is: Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons

Examples HUD accepts: Community service centers, Senior centers, Workforce training centers, Counseling / support hubs

A Veterans Resource Center fits well if framed as: Benefits counseling, Workforce assistance, digital access, peer support, navigation of benefits, caregiver support

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Clay County Veterans Center Proposal

Comprehensive Capital Project Proposal

Prepared for Clay Veterans, Inc. and Veterans Council Clay County

Supporting Inclusion in the Clay County 2026–2031 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Plan

March 2026

TOC

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Executive Summary

Clay County is home to more than 30,000 veterans, representing one of the largest veteran populations in Northeast Florida.

Despite this significant population, Clay County does not currently have a permanent centralized Veterans Center where veterans and their families can access coordinated resources, services, and community programs.

The Clay Veterans Center opened in April 2025 in Middleburg and has already demonstrated measurable demand for services.

Programs including Coffee Break gatherings, VetTech digital assistance, and the Open-Door peer engagement program have connected hundreds of veterans with community resources.

This proposal presents a comprehensive proposal for establishing a permanent Clay County Veterans Center to serve as a hub for veteran support services, community collaboration, and public engagement.

Clay County Veteran Demographics

Estimated Veteran Population Statistics

Total Veterans: 27,000+

Veterans Age 65+: ~40%

Disabled Veterans: ~20–25%

Veteran Households: Thousands across the county

Primary Veteran Population Areas:

- Orange Park
- Middleburg
- Fleming Island
- Green Cove Springs
- Keystone Heights

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[Insert GIS Map: Clay County Veteran Population Density]

Clay County Veteran Population Statistics

Indicator	Estimated Value
Total Veterans in Clay County	27,000+
Veterans Age 65+	Approx. 40%
Disabled Veterans	Approx. 20–25%
Veterans Living on Fixed Income	Significant portion of retired population
Veterans Served Through Clay Veterans Center Programs	Hundreds annually

These statistics illustrate the significant veteran population in Clay County and the importance of having a centralized facility where veterans and their families can access resources and community support.

Clay County Veteran Population Distribution (Concept Map)

This schematic illustrates the primary population centers of veterans in Clay County. Actual GIS mapping can be added later, but this conceptual map helps show why a centrally located Veterans Center would be accessible to veterans across the county.

[Insert Clay County Veteran Population Density Map Here]

Primary veteran population areas:

- Orange Park
- Middleburg
- Fleming Island
- Green Cove Springs
- Keystone Heights
- Lakeside
- Oakleaf
- Penney Farms

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A centrally located Veterans Center positioned between Orange Park, Middleburg, and Fleming Island provides the most balanced geographic access for veterans living throughout Clay County.

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Veteran Needs Assessment

Common challenges identified through direct engagement include:

- Navigating complex VA benefit systems
- Technology access barriers (VA.gov, ID.me, Login.gov)
- Social isolation and reduced community engagement
- Caregiver support needs
- Access to coordinated information about resources

A centralized Veterans Center would provide a single point of connection for veterans seeking assistance and community engagement.

Community Need and Veteran Population

Clay County has one of the largest veteran populations in Northeast Florida, with approximately 30,000 veterans residing in the county. Many veterans face challenges such as navigating complex benefit systems, accessing digital resources, and overcoming social isolation.

Common needs among veterans include:

- Access to information about VA and community benefits
- Assistance navigating online systems such as VA.gov
- Opportunities for social connection and peer support
- Support for caregivers and family members
- Technology assistance and digital literacy

Clay County Veteran Service Gap Analysis

Although many organizations provide services to veterans, these resources are often dispersed across multiple locations.

Identified gaps include:

- lack of centralized resource access
- limited digital navigation assistance
- reduced social engagement opportunities
- limited coordination between service providers

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- insufficient community engagement opportunities

The Veterans Center addresses these gaps by serving as a coordinated hub for veteran services and programs.

Existing Programs Demonstrating Demand

Coffee Break Program

Monthly community engagement gatherings bringing veterans and families together.

VetTech Program

Volunteer-led digital assistance helping veterans access online services.

Open Door Program

Peer engagement program designed to support veterans experiencing isolation.

Current Participation Indicators:

- 205 Coffee Break participants since January 2025
- 140+ documented veteran interactions
- growing volunteer participation

[Insert Chart: Program Participation Growth]

Current Programs and Demonstrated Demand

The Clay Veterans Center has already demonstrated measurable community demand since opening in April 2025.

- 205 veterans and family members participated in the Coffee Break community engagement program since January 2025.
- More than 140 documented veteran interactions have occurred through the Veterans Center.
- The Veterans Council Clay County has contributed approximately \$13,500 toward rent and utilities to sustain the center.

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- Volunteers assist veterans with technology access, benefits navigation, and community connections.

Veterans Center Vision

The Clay County Veterans Center will function as a community hub connecting veterans with resources, programs, and peer support.

Primary Focus Areas:

- Resource navigation and benefits assistance
- Technology access and digital literacy support
- Peer engagement and camaraderie
- Caregiver support resources
- Community education and workshops
- Collaboration between veteran service organizations

Vision for a Clay County Veterans Center

The Clay County Veterans Center will serve as a welcoming, accessible hub where veterans and their families can connect with resources, services, and community support.

Key functions of the center may include:

- Veteran benefits navigation and assistance
- Digital access and technology support
- Peer support and camaraderie programs
- Caregiver support resources
- Workforce and educational workshops
- Community meeting space for veteran organizations
- Volunteer coordination and outreach

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The center will strengthen the well-being and independence of veterans and their families across Clay County.

Facility Concept

The following concept illustrates how a Veterans Center facility might be organized to support programs, services, and community gatherings.

Estimated Facility Size: 4,000 – 8,000 square feet

Proposed Facility Components:

- Reception and welcome area
- Veteran resource navigation offices
- VetTech digital access lab
- Meeting rooms for veteran organizations
- Community training and event space
- Volunteer coordination office
- Coffee and social gathering area
- Administrative space and storage
- Nonprofit partner service offices
- secure storage for donated furniture and medical equipment

[Insert Floor Plan Diagram]

Six Key Functional Areas of the Veterans Center

1. Resource Navigation and Benefits Assistance

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Veterans receive help navigating VA benefits, healthcare systems, and community programs.

2. VetTech Digital Access Program

Volunteers assist veterans with VA.gov access, ID.me verification, Login.gov authentication,

and general technology support.

3. Nonprofit Partner Service Offices

Office space allows nonprofit organizations to provide services such as counseling, housing assistance, legal workshops, and financial counseling.

4. Veterans Resource Warehouse and Donation Hub

Secure storage supports distribution of donated furniture, beds, chairs, medical equipment, and other household items to veterans in need.

5. Workforce and Entrepreneurship Center

Programs support job search assistance, workforce development, career transition, and veteran entrepreneurship.

6. Community Events and Cultural Programs

The center hosts community gatherings, workshops, educational programs, and veteran appreciation events.

Partner Service Offices and Program Integration

The center will include office and meeting space for nonprofit partners serving veterans and families.

Services may include:

- counseling and mental health support
- food insecurity assistance
- employment and job search programs

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- entrepreneurship mentoring
- transition assistance
- financial counseling
- housing assistance
- legal education workshops
- VA claims assistance
- peer support groups

Community Service Partner Model

The center will operate through a collaborative model where nonprofit partners provide services through scheduled office hours, workshops, and group programs.

This structure allows multiple organizations to deliver services efficiently while maintaining their missions.

Regional Veteran Service Hub Model

The center will function as a countywide hub connecting veterans with organizations and programs throughout Clay County.

It will coordinate partnerships and provide a central access point for information and assistance.

Campus Vision

The Clay County Veterans Campus represents a long-term development concept centered around the Veterans Center.

The campus would provide coordinated housing and support services for veterans through partnerships with nonprofit organizations.

Integrated Veterans Campus Concept

The Veterans Center may serve as the central hub within a broader Veterans Campus concept.

Potential complementary facilities include:

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- transitional housing
- independent living communities
- assisted living facilities
- memory care / dementia support
- rehabilitation facilities including physical rehabilitation and addiction recovery programs

This integrated model supports veterans across different stages of life and recovery.

Ownership and Development Structure

The County would retain ownership of the land and the Veterans Center facility.

Additional facilities located on the campus would be built, financed, and managed by nonprofit organizations serving veterans.

These organizations may operate through long-term ground leases or similar development agreements with the county.

Benefits of the Campus Model

The campus approach allows veterans to access housing, services, and community programs in a coordinated environment.

Benefits include:

- improved access to services
- stronger support networks
- efficient collaboration between organizations
- the ability for veterans to age in place

Site Concept and Location Strategy

Preferred Location Characteristics:

- Central access for Clay County residents
- Close to major transportation routes

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- ADA accessibility
- Parking capacity for 30–50 vehicles

Potential Location Areas:

- Middleburg
- Orange Park
- Fleming Island

Preferred Site Size: 0.5 – 2 acres

[Insert Site Layout Concept]

Project Development Approaches

Potential implementation methods include:

1. Renovation of an existing building
2. Construction of a new facility
3. Public-private partnership development
4. Renovation of county-owned property

NOTE: Projects must meet one of three national objectives set by HUD:

- 1** Benefit Low- and Moderate-Income (LMI) persons
- 2** Prevent or eliminate slums/blight
- 3** Meet an urgent community need

For a Veterans Center, the strongest justification is:

Benefit to Low- and Moderate-Income Persons

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Examples HUD accepts:

- Community service centers
- Senior centers
- Workforce training centers
- Counseling / support hubs

A Veterans Resource Center fits well if framed as:

- Benefits counseling
- Workforce assistance
- digital access
- peer support
- navigation of benefits
- caregiver support

Projected Program Growth

Estimated Veteran Participation Growth

2026 – 300 veterans served

2027 – 500 veterans served

2028 – 800 veterans served

2029 – 1,100 veterans served

2030 – 1,500+ veterans served annually

Estimated Annual Programming:

150+ events including workshops, meetings, and community activities

[Insert Program Growth Chart]

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Community Impact

A permanent Veterans Center would generate significant benefits for Clay County:

- Increased access to benefits and services
- Reduced social isolation among veterans
- Expanded digital access assistance
- Stronger nonprofit collaboration
- Increased volunteer engagement and community engagement

Economic and Community Return on Investment

Improved access to federal benefits will bring additional resources into the local economy.

Employment and entrepreneurship programs will strengthen workforce participation.

Volunteer engagement will generate thousands of hours of community service annually.

Clay County Veterans Campus Economic Development Impact

Development of the campus may attract nonprofit investment, philanthropic funding, and new employment opportunities.

Construction, healthcare services, counseling programs, and housing support services could create jobs while expanding resources available to veterans and their families.

OR

The Veterans Campus concept will generate economic benefits including job creation, construction activity, and long-term employment in service programs.

The campus can also attract nonprofit investment and philanthropic funding into Clay County.

Community Support and Stakeholder Engagement

Successful implementation will require a coalition of community partners including:

- veteran service organizations

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- civic groups
- chambers of commerce
- nonprofit agencies
- local businesses
- volunteers

Goal: 25–30 organizations publicly supporting the initiative.

Projected Community Impact

1,500+ veterans served annually

150+ community programs per year

20–25 partner organizations collaborating

60+ active volunteers supporting programs

Projected Annual Impact

Veterans Served: 1,500+ annually

Programs: 150+ events annually

Partner Organizations: 20–25 collaborating groups

CDBG Eligibility Justification

The Community Development Block Grant program prioritizes projects that benefit low- and moderate-income residents and improve access to community services.

The Veterans Center aligns with CDBG objectives by:

- serving veterans on fixed or limited incomes
- providing access to community-based services
- supporting vulnerable populations including disabled veterans and seniors
- strengthening community infrastructure

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Example Phased Funding Model (CDBG)

CDBG allocations are typically distributed annually. Clay County could support the development of a Veterans Center through phased investment over multiple program years.

Year	Potential CDBG Allocation	Project Phase
Year 1	\$400,000	Site acquisition / planning / architectural design
Year 2	\$600,000	Site development and infrastructure
Year 3	\$700,000	Facility construction phase 1
Year 4	\$600,000	Facility completion and interior build-out
Year 5	\$200,000	Equipment, technology, furnishings

This phased approach allows Clay County to leverage federal funding without requiring a single-year capital allocation.

Estimated Capital Project Cost

Facility construction or renovation: \$2M – \$3M

Site development: \$250K – \$500K

Furniture and equipment: \$100K – \$200K

Estimated Total Cost: \$2.3M – \$3.7M

Estimated Annual Operating Budget

Facility maintenance or lease: \$15,000 – \$40,000

Utilities and internet: \$3,000 – \$5,000

Insurance: \$2,000 – \$5,000

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Programming and supplies: \$10,000 – \$20,000

Estimated Annual Operating Range: \$30,000 – \$70,000

Development Timeline

Year	Phase and Key Activities
2026	Planning & CDBG Inclusion – finalize concept, build coalition support, identify potential sites
2027	Site Selection & Design – feasibility study, architectural concept, budget planning
2028	Funding & Pre-Construction – phased CDBG allocations, permitting, site preparation
2029	Construction / Renovation – facility buildout and infrastructure installation
2030	Program Expansion – launch expanded programs and partnerships
2031	Full Operations – operate at full capacity and evaluate impact

Five-Year Development Roadmap

2026 – Planning and CDBG plan inclusion

2027 – Site selection and architectural design

2028 – Funding and permitting

2029 – Construction or renovation

2030 – Program expansion

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2031 – Full operations

Long-Term Vision

By 2035 the Clay County Veterans Center could serve more than 2,000 veterans annually,

host hundreds of programs, and collaborate with dozens of community partners.

The center will strengthen the veteran community and benefit the broader Clay County population.

Long-Term Vision Veteran Campus

Over time the Clay County Veterans Campus could evolve into a comprehensive veteran support community that includes housing, rehabilitation services, workforce programs, and community engagement activities centered around the Veterans Center.

Conclusion

Clay County veterans have served our nation and community with honor and dedication.

Establishing a permanent Veterans Center will strengthen support networks, expand access to services, and provide a welcoming place where veterans and families can connect with their community.