

[IAVA Will Develop New Digital Tools To Help America's Veterans Get The Services and Benefits They Have Earned with \\$500,000 from Knight Foundation](#)

New York, NY (July 15, 2014) – Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the largest nonprofit organization for post-9/11 veterans and their families, today announced a plan to use new data and mobile tools to improve services to veterans and shed light on the issues they face, such as long wait times for health care and other benefits. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is providing \$500,000 to support the plan, including production of an IAVA Community of Veterans social networking platform and other tech-based initiatives aimed at community building and use of mobile technology. Lessons will be shared with the wider public.

“This will be a critical year for many of our returning service members. Our community faces numerous challenges such as veteran unemployment, suicide, mental health stigma and both the disability and claims backlog,” said Paul Rieckhoff, IAVA’s CEO and founder. “Our vets, like the ones that came before us, are worthy of this investment. This new plan is integral to revealing these issues to the American public and helping vets find solutions. It will make things better for our community. We hope more organizations and people will join in to support this work.”

In June 2013 Knight Foundation supported IAVA’s launch of “The Wait We Carry,” a digital visualization tool that helped highlight the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs disability claims backlog. The tool was designed to allow vets to tell their story about disability claims and share data. The Wait We Carry was essential in helping expose the extensive wait times many veterans faced – some over 365 days for a disability rating. After a year of public pressure and work, the backlog now stands at 267,000 claims, down almost 50 percent from last year.

With the new funding, IAVA will create digital tools designed to showcase more veteran issues and concerns such as the current Department of Veteran’s Affairs scandal related to long wait times for medical care. To this end, IAVA will produce “Community of Veterans,” a private social media platform that will bring members together to exchange ideas and experiences; IAVA will also build a mobile version of the tool. Through the platform, vets will be able to access resources such as counseling services and interactive benefit guides. It will further help IAVA collect data from and about its members, which will support the organization’s plans to build more tools and data projects about veterans’ issues.

IAVA will also work with Perisopic, a socially conscious data visualization firm, to expand [The Wait We Carry](#) into an open-source tool that anyone can

easily use to create similar data projects. Additionally, IAVA will collaborate with at least one news outlet to support coverage on topics related to veterans.

“IAVA is leveraging public information and data to solve real-world problems,” said Michael Maness, Knight Foundation vice president for journalism and media innovation. “The tools and insights developed through this project can be shared with people using data and technology to inform their communities. In this way we can increase public awareness and understanding of a range of issues and encourage more civic engagement.”

For more information on IAVA visit www.IAVA.org; follow IAVA on Twitter at twitter.com/iava.

About IAVA

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (www.iava.org) is the nation’s first and largest nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan and has more than 270,000 member veterans and civilian supporters nationwide. Celebrating its 10th year anniversary, IAVA recently received the highest rating – four stars – from Charity Navigator, America’s largest charity evaluator.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation supports transformational ideas that promote quality journalism, advance media innovation, engage communities and foster the arts. The foundation believes that democracy thrives when people and communities are informed and engaged. For more, visit www.KnightFoundation.org.