

PROGRAMS



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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help educate all elected and appointed officers of the organization about programs in the organization, from youth programs & scholarships, community service, volunteer recognition, “Buddy” ® Poppy, to all programs under the Veterans & Military Support umbrella. Additionally, it will have information concerning U.S. Flag issues and a variety of special projects. Our sole priority is helping your Post, District and Department serve your community and veterans in a meaningful way. For that reason, the VFW National Organization is committed to doing everything possible to serve you and make every opportunity count for you and for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

The purpose of this section is twofold. First, we want to familiarize you as leaders of your Post, District or Department, with the fundamentals of our VFW programs and activities. As we do that, it is our goal then to encourage you and your existing leaders to participate in building that much-needed relationship with your local community. We are convinced that good programs, properly executed, will do more for your Post than anything else you do.

Your programs are often the first impression that the public has of the VFW. Therefore, it’s extremely important to be prepared and more importantly appoint the right persons as the program chair. Your VFW programs are defined under two categories: ***Community Service, Youth Scholarships and Activities and Veterans & Military Support. Within the Community Service, Youth Scholarships and Activities*** category, we often refer to several program elements as our core programs. These are programs that are executed by the largest number of Posts and have the greatest impact on our organization, our communities, and our veterans.

Typically, these core programs are mandated for every Post as part of your Department All State Program and are heavily encouraged and supported by the VFW National organization. These core programs within the ***Community Service, Youth Scholarships and Activities*** include our scholarship programs, Voice of Democracy ® and Patriot’s Pen, the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year program, Scouting and “Buddy” ® Poppy.

The second group of programs under the ***Community Service, Youth Scholarships and Activities*** umbrella, is called Special Projects and Activities, which cover Americanism, volunteering recognition, community service, awards and recognition and other miscellaneous youth activities. These programs are highly encouraged for all Posts and Departments and will be supported by the VFW National organization upon request.

Before you can effectively execute our VFW programs, you first must know the programs. I recommend to all Post, District, or Department officers and chairs, to carefully read the program chair’s guides to familiarize yourself with the programs that best fit your Post and your available resources. As a VFW leader, you should be able to speak intelligently and authoritatively about all aspects of our great organization.

The best available resource that we have available is our VFW website at vfw.org. I would strongly encourage you as officers and program chairs to establish a login. Doing so will provide

you with access to all the information and materials concerning VFW Programs but will also allow you to access additional information needed to help you execute your duties and responsibilities as an officer of the organization. Here you will gain access to important items such as National Bylaws, Manual of Procedure & Ritual amendments and National Resolutions to be presented at the National Convention, our monthly National Headquarters Bulletin and General Orders, and several online fillable forms.

However, the most important benefit of having a login is being able to access **MY VFW**, where you'll have access to all materials and information within our **VFW Training & Support** section. This section contains videos, promotional materials, chair manuals and resources, and much more in all available areas of the organization.

VFW Programs Overview

Community Service, Youth Scholarships and Activities

Patriot's Pen

Originally created as the Youth Essay Contest, Patriot's Pen asks junior high and middle school students to write a 300 to 400-word essay on a new patriotic theme each year. Winners receive scholarships and begin by competing at the Post level. Winners proceed to the District, to the Department, and finally to the National level where they compete for the \$5,000 first place scholarship. The themes and additional information concerning program execution can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the **VFW Training & Support** hub, under **Community Service and Youth Programs**.

Voice of Democracy ®

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy Audition Essay Contest, like Patriot's Pen, asks high school students to write and record a 3 to 5-minute essay, again on a patriotic theme selected by the VFW each year. Students may record an electronic audio recording of their essay (submitted via email, CD, or flash/USB drive), 3–5 minutes in length (± 5 seconds) in MP3 format. Like Patriot's Pen, Voice of Democracy winners receive scholarships and other incentives at the Post, District, and Department and finally to the National level where they will compete for the \$35,000 first place scholarship. The Voice of Democracy theme and additional information concerning the execution of the program can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the **VFW Training & Support** hub, under **Community Service and Youth Programs**.

These two great youth scholarship programs provide almost \$3 million in scholarships and incentives every year.

Scholar's App

As technology continues to evolve and move forward, the VFW is moving forward with it. The VFW now offers students the opportunity to apply for both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen using an online system called Scholar's App. This system simplifies and coordinates much

of the work for the Chairperson at all levels. Before a post can use Scholar's App, they must first be entered into the system by the Department Chair or the Programs Dept.

Once this is set up, a post can generate and print out flyers specifically for their post. Students can use the link or the QR code on the flyer to apply online. Applications go into a folder reserved specifically for that post. Judges can then be assigned and the judging process completed remotely. Once judged, the chair can advance the student to the next level. Hard copy applications and recordings can be uploaded by the chair on the student's behalf.

Today's students and teachers expect an online submission process. Providing one shows that your Post is responsive, professional, and aligned with how schools operate today. Most importantly, adopting the online system allows your Post to focus on what truly matters—supporting young voices and encouraging patriotism in the next generation.

Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award

While you're visiting a school, don't miss the opportunity to mention the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award. The VFW wants to identify and recognize America's best educators in three (3) categories, (K-5, 6-8, 9-12), who instill a sense of national pride in students. Teachers who promote civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism are prime candidates. It offers commemorative citations for those worthy teachers and their schools. Posts are encouraged to submit a candidate, in each category, and forward these awards to their District by November 15. If your Department does not have District judging, then forward it on to your Department Headquarters and/or Department Chair by January 1. The Department may then select a single candidate, in each category, for the award and submit their entries to National Headquarters by February 1. That honor can establish a great relationship that opens the door for all VFW and Auxiliary programs. Additional information concerning the execution of the program can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the ***VFW Training & Support*** hub, under ***Community Service***.

VFW Scouting

The VFW has a long relationship with Scouting. VFW Posts need to consider providing leaders, sponsoring units, offering their facility for meetings and encouraging their involvement in service projects. Posts can benefit from Scouting by having a unit do a flag retirement ceremony, help distribute Buddy Poppies or help with clean up after events.

Department Scout of the Year winner citations can be found on the Dashboard under entries, citations, Scout of the Year. Complete the form, save and submit, and download for print. There is only one entry permitted for each Department.

These are just a few that would provide a benefit and generally can serve your Post. Additional information concerning the execution of the program can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the ***VFW Training and Support*** hub, under ***Community Service***.

VFW “Buddy” ® Poppy Program

Our oldest and perhaps most historically significant program is the VFW “Buddy” ® Poppy program. It is important that you realize that although Memorial and Veterans Days are particularly important Buddy Poppy events, you should have poppies at every event that involves your Post and the public. Poppies can and should be distributed year-round.

I’m sure you know that we never “sell” poppies. We give them away and receive donations. If someone cannot donate, don’t deny them a poppy. Seeing the red poppy on a lapel or dress brings honor to those we have lost and recognition to the VFW.

Additionally, Section 219 of the National Bylaws and Manual of Procedure mandates that the net proceeds from the distribution of Buddy Poppies must be credited to the Post Relief Fund. Also listed in Section 219 are the purposes for which funds can be disbursed from the Post Relief Fund. I would encourage officers at all levels of the organization to familiarize themselves with this section. Additional information concerning the execution of the program can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the ***VFW Training and Support*** hub, under ***Community Service***.

VFW Recognition Programs

The purpose of the VFW Recognition Program is twofold. First and foremost, as an organization of wartime veterans and their spouses, the VFW and its Auxiliary understand the need to recognize and honor those individuals who have performed above and beyond their peers. Of particular significance are those who, like our members and veterans, have placed the safety and welfare of others above and beyond their own. Secondly, the VFW and its Auxiliary realize the value of these awards to the Post, District, Department and National organization.

It’s important that VFW and its Auxiliary leaders, at every level, take advantage of every opportunity to honor worthy individuals and sometimes organizations.

With that in mind, the VFW has established several awards. The following are suggested awards:

Chairperson Thank You

These citations are available to recognize Posts or individual Post chairpersons who have demonstrated an exceptionally high level of service to their community. The Department Chairperson is given sole responsibility for identifying those Posts and individuals.

Public Servant National Awards (Law Enforcement, Firefighter, Emergency Medical Technicians/Service, 911 Dispatchers, and Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technicians)

Each year, the Veterans of Foreign Wars selects law enforcement, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, 911 dispatchers, and explosive ordnance disposal technicians to receive the

VFW's Public Servant Awards. Posts are encouraged to submit a candidate for these awards to their Department Headquarters by January 1. The Department may then select a single candidate for each of the four awards and submit those to the VFW National Headquarters by February 1.

Life Saving Awards

The Safety Chairperson at Posts, Districts and Departments are encouraged to regularly identify and honor individuals throughout the year in their geographic area who have saved a life. The VFW Programs department provides the three different Life Saving citations (Regular, Line of Duty and Valor) and appropriate medal (if available), free of charge, for local presentations.

Refer to the Judging Manual for guidance on criteria for all awards and programs.

VFW Special Projects & Youth Activities

Our next level of programs is our special projects. These include Americanism, volunteer recognition, community service, awards and recognition and other youth activities.

Equally important among our special projects is community service. Any activity done by a Post or Auxiliary that benefits the community falls under this broad banner and is supported by the VFW National Organization and encouraged for all Posts, Districts and Departments.

Recognizing these exceptional efforts is provided in two ways – our Volunteer Recognition Programs, and the National Community Service Post Award.

VFW National Community Service Post Award

Every department will have an NCSP Winner based on total impact. Each year on July 1, the National Programs office will determine the top community service Posts in each Department, based off their community service reporting and total impact, from July 1 to June 30 the previous year. Your community service total impact is figured by the money spent to host and organize the community service event plus total hours all volunteers participated, plus the mileage for all volunteers (Dollars Donated + Hours + Mileage = Total Impact). Winners will also be published in the Convention program booklet and receive a street sign identifying this national award for the Post to put up in their community.

VFW's Veterans in the Classroom

Another special project is the VFW's Veterans in the Classroom. In recent years, many teachers have contacted VFW Posts seeking veterans to come into the classroom and share their military experiences. VFW members may also choose to contact local youth groups and schools and express their willingness to share their experiences. VFW National Headquarters has materials available to support this activity. Many veterans have found this to be enjoyable and therapeutic.

Few youth programs provide a greater benefit to a Post than involvement with Scouting, Civil Air Patrol, Naval Sea Cadet or JROTC units. These programs annually produce individuals with an appreciation of patriotism, civic responsibility and the likelihood of future military service.

VFW Posts need to consider providing leaders, sponsoring units, offering their facility for meetings and encouraging their involvement in service projects. Posts can benefit from Scouting by having a unit do a flag retirement ceremony, helping distribute Buddy Poppies or helping with clean up after events. In the case of JROTC, the same applies. Your place may serve as a location for the JROTC Drill team to practice and, just like Scouting, they are an excellent resource for volunteers for Post-sponsored activities.

Posts are encouraged to seek out ways in which they can benefit their community. The VFW encourages any activity that benefits the community, brings recognition to the Post and honors America's veterans and those in uniform. Every program, done by your Post, results in relationships that produce goodwill. This goodwill increases public interest in your events, often enhances your fundraising efforts and can produce new members. A Post that has been identified as a community asset through its programs will seldom have a shortage of members or lack of community support. Use your VFW Programs to establish your Post as a respected community asset. The VFW will then become the organization of choice for all veterans and will reap the rewards of public favor that cannot be purchased.

Helpful Hints for Program Execution

Each time you visit a school, conduct a patriotic event, honor a local hero, serve your community's youth or perform any kind of community service, you are creating an impression of the VFW. Hopefully, that impression is the beginning of a relationship that benefits the community and your Post. The goal of any Post should be to become known as a valuable community resource and not the local "watering hole" in the community.

Posts that achieve this status rarely have problems with recruiting or fundraising.

Getting young people involved is one way to achieve that goal. To start, our scholarship programs, just like the "Buddy" ® Poppy program, should be integrated into everything you do in the community. Make sure Buddy Poppies and scholarship entry forms are available at every public event, so there are consistent opportunities for youth and their families to engage and participate.

We will discuss schools first, but later we will explore a variety of other opportunities to present our scholarship programs. Contact schools, home school associations and other youth organizations early, preferably in April. This is the time of year when they begin planning for the coming fall. When you visit a school, don't go unannounced, call first to find out with whom you should meet and make an appointment.

Schools are busy places and often have a secure environment. Showing up without an appointment almost ensures failure. Call, make an appointment and be on time. Conduct yourself professionally and you will be treated professionally.

Make sure you have the necessary materials to leave with the teacher, counselor, principal or administrator on everything you will discuss. Show them copies of the various brochures and

identify the entry form included. If the opportunity is available, go into the classroom and present the students with the programs that directly impact them. One of the primary purposes of your visit is to leave the impression that your Post is a resource, not only for scholarships, but for veteran's history, patriotic information, and U.S. Flag etiquette.

Your chances for success are increased when you work closely with your Auxiliary counterpart. Make sure that they understand and have materials for all the VFW programs.

The most successful Posts are always the ones that work together with their Auxiliary. Like our scholarship programs, the Teacher Awards begin at the Post level. Information and entry forms are on the VFW website at vfw.org.

A key factor in the success of your scholarship and teacher programs is your judging process. The judging sheets are included on the training website. When selecting your judges, make every attempt to find judges from outside the VFW and its Auxiliary. Local military recruiters, educators, media personalities, police officers, firefighters, church pastors and local civic leaders are excellent choices. If possible, make your life easier by using the same judges for all your scholarships and teacher's awards. Cultivate a good relationship with your judges by expressing your gratitude and inviting them when you honor your winners.

As mentioned earlier, when seeking students to participate, don't hesitate to look beyond your schools. These same programs should be presented to the leaders and sponsors of any group that deals with young people. Look around your neighborhood for community centers, athletic teams and leagues, Scout units, churches with large youth groups, home school associations, YMCA's and YWCA's - anywhere there are large groups of young people who may wish to participate.

In recent years, home school programs have produced several winning participants. Home school parents and their associations are generally patriotic, have broader latitude for selecting curricula and are always looking for projects that have value beyond the immediate lesson.

Veterans & Military Support (VMS) Programs

To continue to detail the core programs, as mentioned earlier, Veterans & Military Support is part of the VFW's never-ending obligation to assist members of the active-duty military, National Guard and Reserves and veterans, as well as their families. These programs were established to keep the Veterans of Foreign Wars in the forefront of patriotism as the organization and its members find innovative ways to show support for America and her armed forces.

The programs under the Veterans & Military Support umbrella consists of the VFW Combat Tested Gaming (CTG), Military Appreciation Program (MAP)/Adopt-A-Unit Program (AAU), VFW #StillServing Grant, Post Assistance Grant, Uniting for Veterans Grant, the VFW Financial Assistance for Service Members, and the VFW's "Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship" program. Through these programs, the Veterans of Foreign Wars provides guidance and assistance to our subordinate units in their efforts to support our military and their families.

From hosting morale boosting events, providing financial assistance, to providing scholarships to veterans returning to school.

VFW Combat Tested Gaming (CTG)

The VFW's Inaugural Gaming League Exclusively for Veterans was established in 2023. CTG has quickly succeeded in reaching its early objectives. Now, as we look to the future, we set our sights on becoming THE leader in the veteran gaming space by continuing to promote the program and through partnering with a veteran-owned company which specializes in building the gaming infrastructure needed to support our growth and long-term success.

In just half a year, CTG has become the fastest growing veterans gaming community in America. We are over 3,000 veteran gamers on our Discord server and streaming gameplay on our Combat Tested Gaming Twitch channel. Join our Discord community to connect with other veterans and active-duty service members who play your game of choice. Subscribe to our Twitch and YouTube channels to watch our gameplay and experience the thrill and camaraderie of our gamers.

There is a dedicated VFW Service Officer available to answer VA benefits questions daily. Four VFW Posts have leveraged CTG to start gaming nights and one VFW Post has already built a gaming room to support student veterans. Five Veterans' lives have been saved during these crises by using connections made through CTG.

VFW Military Appreciation Program (MAP)/Adopt-A-Unit (AAU) Program

The Military Appreciation Program is designed to encourage the link between the VFW and their local military community.

This program promotes VFW member interaction with the local military and opens avenues for National Sponsorships and local level involvement with all branches of service. Within this program there are two unique services to help foster the relationship between the Post and the local military community, the Military Appreciation Program Grant process and the Adopt-A-Unit program.

The Military Appreciation Grant process is intended as financial assistance for Posts, Districts, and Departments to sponsor events for active-duty military units, National Guard, and Reserves. These events are most successful when local Posts interact directly with the military unit, involving the National Certified Recruiters, Veterans Service Officers, and your local and Department chain of command.

A Military Appreciation Grant is on a first come first serve basis and is open to VFW Posts who have adopted the unit and are in Good Standing. The application, which is located on the VFW National Dashboard, must be filled out completely, including a breakdown of the event budget and the VFW involvement with the event. Additional information concerning the execution of the program and the grant application can be found at [vfw.org](https://www.vfw.org), behind the login within the ***VFW Training and Support*** hub, under ***Veterans & Military Support***.

Another opportunity for Posts to interact with their local military community available within the Military Appreciation program is the Adopt-A-Unit program. This program was developed to pledge support of the Post to the service members and families of a unit from the local military community. When a Post “adopts” a unit, you make a commitment to the service members and their families to provide moral and emotional support before, during and after deployment.

Sponsoring a military unit is a great opportunity to get other community activity projects started, such as coordinating with teachers or schools to co-sponsor the unit. Additional information concerning the execution of the Adopt-A-Unit program and the application can be found at vfw.org, behind the login within the *VFW Training and Support* hub, under *Veterans & Military Support*.

Please remember that the objective of all Military Appreciation Program initiatives is to increase the awareness of the VFW, and it does not end when the troops re-deploy home. They and their families continue to need our support and assistance.

VFW #StillServing Grant

The #StillServing Grant is offered exclusively to VFW Posts, Districts and their Auxiliaries to offset expenses incurred while doing community service projects. Projects require direct involvement by the applying organization’s members with members of their community to qualify.

Both a VFW Post and its Auxiliary, and a District and its Auxiliary, can receive funding of up to \$1,500, but each applicant organization must have its own unique project. Applicants are limited to receiving a total of \$1,500 during the cycle.

Applications for the VFW #StillServing Grant will be accepted from October through June 1st of the following year, or until all grant funding is exhausted.

VFW Post Assistance Grant

The Post Assistance Grant is offered exclusively to VFW Posts to offset expenses incurred for building repairs and equipment that enhances or restores the applicant organization’s ability to serve veterans and their community. Auxiliaries, Districts, Departments and other VFW subordinate organizations, etc., may not apply. VFW Posts may receive up to \$2,500 in reimbursement for qualifying projects. Applicants are limited to receiving this grant once every three years.

Applications for the VFW Foundation Post Assistance Grant will be accepted from October through June 1st of the following year, or until all grant funding is exhausted.

Uniting for Veterans (UFV)

The UFV Grant is open for VFW Posts and Auxiliaries to apply for a matching donation of up to \$1,500 for monetary and food donations to local food bank and homelessness relief organizations in their communities. The VFW will provide a \$1 match for every pound of food or dollar donated to food insecurity or homelessness relief organizations. A Post or its Auxiliary may apply for this grant. Funds are sent directly to the Organization the Post or Auxiliary donated to. No funds are provided to the Post or Auxiliary.

The UFV Grant opens in October through June 1st of the following year, or until all grant funding is exhausted.

VFW Financial Assistance for Service Members

This program administers financial grants to active-duty service members (to include activated Guard and Reservists) and their families to help cover daily necessities like mortgage/rent, auto payments, home repairs/vehicle repairs, and utilities. An important note about this program is the financial grant application is only available on-line at vfw.org and must also be submitted online using the form on our website. Applications submitted by U.S. mail, email, and fax will not be accepted. For the application and more information, visit: vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants.

VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" Program

The last program under the Veterans & Military Support umbrella is the VFW's "Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship" program. The VFW's "Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship" helps service members get the education and training needed to begin the next chapter of their life. Each scholarship will provide recipients with up to \$5,000 for tuition and fees to apply toward their education at an accredited post-secondary institution, including universities, colleges, trade schools and apprenticeships, and certification programs. An important note about this program is the scholarship application is only available on-line at vfw.org and must also be submitted online using the form on our website. Applications submitted by U.S. mail, email, and fax will not be accepted. For the application and more information, visit: vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support.

VFW Student Veteran Initiatives



- ☐ Scholarships of up to \$5000
- ☐ Separated with or currently hold a military rank of E-5 or below
- ☐ Demonstrate a need for financial assistance
- ☐ Must be accepted or enrolled in a VA-approved program or school at an accredited postsecondary institution
- ☐ Limited to one per family per semester
- ☐ Applications for the fall semester will be accepted Jan.1 through Apr. 30
- ☐ Applications for the spring semester will be accepted Aug. 1 through Nov. 15
- ☐ Fall semester scholarships will be awarded in August, and spring semester scholarships will be awarded in January
- ☐ Scholarships must be used by the end of the school semester for which the veteran is applying, or they will become null and void
- ☐ Be a citizen of the United States

The VFW and one of its major supporters, Sport Clips Haircuts, have again partnered to help our veterans and their families. The VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" will provide service members and veterans with the financial assistance they need to complete their educational goals without incurring excessive student loan debt. It's just another way to say "Thank you" to those who deserve it the most. vfw.org/Scholarship/