



February 2017

**A Guide to Our National and
Local Efforts to Support
America's Veterans, Service
Members and Their Families**

About the VFW

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is a nonprofit veterans service organization comprised of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. Founded in 1899 and chartered by Congress in 1936, the VFW is the nation's largest organization of war veterans and its oldest major veterans organization. With nearly 1.7 million VFW and Auxiliary members located in more than 6,500 Posts worldwide, “*NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.*” The VFW and its Auxiliaries are dedicated to veterans service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs. For more information or to join, visit our website at www.vfw.org.

***Our Mission:** To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.*

***Our Vision:** Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.*

Our Programs

For military veterans, service members and their families:

National Veterans Service (NVS) – Service members and veterans may be entitled to benefits and compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In order to claim these, a veteran must file a VA claim through a cumbersome process. Through our NVS program, our nationwide network of VFW Service Officers assist veterans in this process at no charge to the veteran. Each year, we help recover approximately \$7.2 billion in earned benefits and compensation. www.vfw.org/NVS.

Unmet Needs – This program provides financial aid to those experiencing financial difficulties as a result of a military-related event. Funded in large part by Burger King franchise owners, the program provides financial aid of up to \$5,000 to assist with basic life needs in the form of a grant — not a loan — so no repayment is required. To further ease the burden, we pay the creditor directly.

The applicant must be a service member, veteran, or eligible dependent listed under the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) and:

- Currently on active duty, whose financial hardship is a result of a current deployment, military pay error, or being discharged for medical reasons; or
- Discharged after 2001, whose financial hardship is a direct result of his/her military service due to service connected injuries and/or illnesses causing an employment hardship; or
- Was discharged prior to 2001, is on a fixed income (VA compensation, SSI, SSDI) and/or his/her financial hardship is an emergency situation.

Unmet Needs can be reached at 1-866-789-6333 or by email at unmetneeds@vfw.org. More information is available at: www.vfw.org/unmetneeds. The points of contact for this program are Mark Herron (ext. 6262) and Jessica Hood (ext. 6146).

Help a Hero Scholarship – The VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" provides eligible service members and veterans with the financial assistance they need to complete their educational goals without incurring excessive student loan debt. Scholarships of up to \$5,000 are awarded to qualified applicants. The point of contact for this program is Quentin Carroll. He can be reached at 816-968-1155 (ext 6155) or by email at HelpAHero@vfw.org. More information is available at www.vfw.org/scholarship.

SVA Fellowship – This program provides ten students with the opportunity to work alongside VFW representatives from their home state as they meet with lawmakers to advocate on behalf of veterans during the VFW's annual VFW Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., in March. The program covers travel and accommodations for each fellow. The point of contact for this program is Ken Wiseman. He can be reached at 202-608-8363 or by email at kwiseman@vfw.org. More information can be found at www.vfw.org/StudentFellowship.

For Youth:

Voice of Democracy – Each year, nearly 40,000 high school students from across the country enter to win a share of \$2.1 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the VFW's Voice of Democracy audio-essay competition.

The VFW established the Voice of Democracy program (VOD) in 1947 to provide students grades 9-12 the opportunity to express themselves in regards to democratic ideas and principles.

The national first-place winner receives a \$30,000 scholarship paid directly to the recipient's American university, college or vocational/technical school. Other national scholarships range from \$1,000-\$16,000, and the first-place winner from each VFW Department (state) wins a minimum scholarship of \$1,000 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., during the VFW Legislative Conference. The experience culminates with a summer trip to the Valley Forge Freedoms Foundation to participate in a leadership seminar. The contact for this program is Kris Harmer. She can be reached at 816-968-1117 (ext 6117) or kharmer@vfw.org. More information on this program is available at www.vfw.org/vod.

Patriot's Pen – Each year more than 132,000 students in grades 6-8 enter the VFW's Patriot's Pen youth essay contest. The first-place winner from each state competes for national awards totaling \$54,500, with each first-place state winner receiving a minimum of \$500 at the national level. The national first-place winner wins \$5,000 and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C.

The essay contest encourages young minds to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300-400 word essay expressing their views based on a patriotic theme chosen by the VFW Commander-in-Chief. The contact for this program is Kris Harmer. She can be reached at 816-968-1117 (ext 6117) or kharmer@vfw.org. More information on this program is available at <http://www.vfw.org/Youth>.

Scouting – Some of the VFW's earliest ties to the community involve youth groups and perhaps none are stronger or more lasting than the relationship between the VFW and America's scouting organizations. In fact, VFW's

partnership with the Boy Scouts of America dates back to 1915 when VFW Post 2100 helped to establish Troop 1 in Everett, Washington.

Through the VFW's Scout of the Year program, members of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts who display standout citizenship, patriotism and love of country have the opportunity to be rewarded with college scholarships of up to \$5,000. The contact for this program is Kris Harmer. She can be reached at 816-968-1117 (ext 6117) or kharter@vfw.org. More information on this program is available at www.vfw.org/scout.

Teacher of the Year – The VFW Teacher of the Year award contest recognizes three exceptional teachers for their outstanding commitment to teaching Americanism and patriotism to their students. Each year, a classroom elementary, junior high and high school teacher whose curriculum focuses on citizenship education topics—for at least half of the school day in a classroom environment—can be nominated for the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award. The contact for this program is Tammy Beauchamp. She can be reached at 816-756-3390 (ext 6287) or tbeauchamp@vfw.org. More information on this program is available at www.vfw.org/TeacheroftheYear.

For VFW Posts:

Military Assistance Program (MAP) Grants – The VFW Military Assistance Program (MAP) is the outstretched hand between the VFW and the local military, offering financial assistance for VFW troop support activities with local military units.

Since 2005, MAP has sponsored events supporting over 2 million service members and their families. The program provides financial assistance to a VFW Post or Auxiliary for troop support activities to build relationships and provide information to their local military about VFW programs and services.

Who can apply for a MAP Grant? VFW Departments, Posts and Auxiliaries that desire to support their local military. The actual MAP application can only be submitted by a VFW or Auxiliary member and must be signed by the appropriate individuals which are specified in the MAP Grant Guidelines. Inquiries should be directed to map@vfw.org or by calling 816-756-3390 (ext 6211) and asking for John Linstra. More information on the program is available at www.vfw.org/TroopSupport.

Post Special Project Award – This program recognizes exceptional community service efforts among VFW establishments. If your Post, County Council, District or Department conducted a special project that you think should be nationally recognized by VFW National Organization, we would like to hear from you.

All entries receive a Community Service Citation. Noteworthy entries receive a Merit Award Plaque. Exceptional entries receive an Award of Excellence. All recipients of the Award of Excellence are automatically entered in the Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award competition. The point of contact is John Linstra at 816-756-3390 (ext 6211) or JLinstra@vfw.org. The submission form is available in the VFW Program Chairman manual online.

Award Details:

- A maximum of eight (8) Posts per conference who receive the Award of Excellence could receive a \$5,000 Community Service Grant.

- A maximum of \$40,000 per conference will be awarded. (Could be less, if not sufficient Award of Excellence recipients.)
- Those qualified Posts that have earned the Award of Excellence will then compete for the Fred C. Hall Award and could earn an additional \$5,000 and attendance at the VFW National Convention.

Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project Award – Every Post Special Project receiving the Award of Excellence in the May judging will be entered in the Fred C. Hall Memorial Outstanding Post Special Project competition.

The winning Post receives a plaque at the VFW National Convention and a \$5,000 service scholarship for community projects. The Post commander (or designated representative) and a guest will receive round-trip airfare, a cash stipend and accommodations to receive the award at the VFW National Convention.

The late Fred C. Hall was an active Life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars as well as many other civic and fraternal organizations. Throughout his adult life, he was a great proponent of VFW Posts taking an active role in the community. He is credited with starting the VFW Post Insurance program. If you have questions please contact John Linstra at 816-756-3390 (ext 6211) or JLinstra@vfw.org.

VFW Foundation Post/VFW Auxiliary Community Support Grant – VFW Foundation will provide up to \$1,000 to a Post and/or VFW Auxiliary performing an important and needed outreach in their community. Requests are not required solely in support of military or veteran causes or projects. Typical grant awards will be for activities that include a direct Post/Auxiliary involvement such as purchasing school supplies for underprivileged local youth or the grant can be a lateral donation to a local nonprofit such as a homeless shelter, youth sports team, senior citizens home, etc. Grant now also covers enhancements (remodeling/repairs) to Post buildings. The total amount available increased from \$100,000 to \$400,000 per fiscal year. For info/application please visit: www.vfwfoundation.org/grants or contact Jason Couch, VFW Foundation grants coordinator at jcouch@vfw.org or (816) 968-1174.

VFW Foundation Regular Grant – This grant is geared specifically toward activities that directly benefit veterans, active duty military personnel and their families. It is open to both VFW Posts and/or VFW Auxiliaries and 501(c)(3) nonprofits that have no connection to the VFW. Grant awards vary from \$1,000-\$15,000 with most grants in the \$3,000-\$10,000 range. Applicants must demonstrate a substantial large-scale project such as the operation of a homeless veterans' shelter, military family food bank, city-wide stand down event, regular van service to take veterans to local VA for appointments, etc. Amount available is \$100,000 per fiscal year. For info/application please visit: www.vfwfoundation.org/grants or contact Jason Couch, VFW Foundation grants coordinator at jcouch@vfw.org or (816) 968-1174.

Website Solution Project – The VFW Website Solution program offers grants to assist Posts and Departments in establishing a viable, easy-to-manage website. Working in conjunction with its developers, Pixelbit/DrivePath, this template-based platform offers Posts and Departments an affordable opportunity to stake their claim of the web, making pertinent information easily accessible to members as well as the public. Further, the website templates being offered adopt a consistent look and feel, working to reinforce the official VFW brand and messaging. Grants are available to all 53 Departments and the first 4,000 Posts to apply. Inquiries should be directed to uplink@vfw.org. More information on the program can be found behind the log in, by selecting VFW Website Solution Program on the 'My VFW' page under Member Resources.

Advocacy

National Legislative Service (NLS) – The VFW is one of the most respected voices in Washington D.C. and within local governments across America. We advocate for justice for our nation's veterans, service members and military families on an array of issues and continue to be the voice for veterans everywhere. We regularly testify before Congress, meet with elected officials and rally our national network of more than 300,000 VFW members and patriotic supporters of veterans to ensure our lawmakers put veterans first.

Our voice was instrumental in establishing the Veterans Administration, development of the national cemetery system, in the fight for compensation for Vietnam vets exposed to Agent Orange and for veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Syndrome. In 2008, we won a long-fought victory with the passing of a GI Bill for the 21st Century, giving expanded educational benefits to America's active duty service members, and members of the guard and reserves, fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. We were the driving force behind the Veterans Access and Accountability Act of 2014, and continually fight for improved VA medical centers services for women veterans. More information on our efforts can be found at www.vfw.org/NLS. Our congressional testimony can be accessed at www.vfw.org/VFW-in-DC/Congressional-Testimony.

National Security & Foreign Affairs (NSFA) – The NSFA program articulates a national security and foreign affairs policy that calls for a strong national defense and quality of life improvements for military personnel, retirees, and their families; guarantees our integrity as a nation; promotes our democratic ideals and interests abroad; and seeks the fullest possible accounting of all military service members from all wars. This includes foreign travel and fact-finding trips by national officers and staff to gain firsthand knowledge of military and diplomatic operations around the world and across the country. These missions further serve to validate the requirement to pursue key issues of concern to our military forces and national interests abroad. More information can be found at www.vfw.org/VFW-in-DC/National-Security---Foreign-Affairs.

Action Corps – This is our national grassroots advocacy network comprised of more than 300,000 VFW members and patriotic supporters of veterans. This group stays up-to-date on the issues facing our veterans, our military and their families, standing ready to email, write, call and visit our nation's lawmakers to make their voices heard. The VFW Action Corps is free and open to all patriotic Americans who care about the military and veterans' communities. More information can be accessed at www.vfw.org/ActionCorps.

Other Important Initiatives

Mental Health Awareness – On August 8, 2016, Brian Duffy and Colette Bishop told us all about the Mental Wellness Campaign and "A Day to Change Direction," the day of action with Give an Hour and the Campaign to Change Direction. October 8th was the target date for posts, districts, and departments to host an event, but the campaign runs all year. Here are more details: www.changedirection.org/VFW-service-project. This is the primary website for VFW & Auxiliaries to gather more resources and tools associated with the Campaign. Suggested activities include:

- Conduct a community service project.

- Discuss mental wellness in the context of "Know the Five Signs" of emotional stress. This can be done by a Post Surgeon, a local mental health care provider, a Give an Hour volunteer, or a VA care provider.
- Members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Campaign to Change Direction and their training on "Know the Five Signs." This can be done via the website: www.knowthefivesigns.org/tools/oc/Bo/KnowTheFiveSigns.
- Posts, auxiliaries, and departments can sign a pledge to support the Campaign to Change Direction, which can be done via this link, and signing up as a "Military" supporter: www.changedirection.org/make-a-pledge/partner-pledge.

If you have any questions about the Mental Wellness Campaign or this specific event contact Programs Director Lynn Rolf III at 816-968-1116 (ext 6116) or lrolf@vfw.org.

Employment & Military Transition - VFW Hospitality Career Connection – VFW partnered with National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation to host a virtual career fair on Wednesday, October 5, 2016.

World War I Centennial Commemoration – The VFW is calling on our members and supporters to help as we join with the United States World War I Centennial Commission in honoring, commemorating and educating the public about our country’s involvement in the “Great War.” As a commemorative partner, the VFW will help spotlight events and programs that help teach about the history and impact of World War I, all while commemorating and honoring the participation of the U.S. and its citizens in the war effort. Additional information about the centennial commemoration can be accessed at www.worldwarIcentennial.org.

100 CITIES/100 MEMORIALS Program – Sponsored by the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission and the Pritzker Military Museum, the 100 CITIES/100 MEMORIALS program is a \$200,000 matching-grant for groups who undertake the restoration, preservation or conservation of local World War I memorials. More information about the program can be found at www.worldwarIcentennial.org/100Memorials.

Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Commemorative Program – Designed for organizations to thank and honor our Vietnam veterans and their families, the VFW is encouraging Posts and our supporters to participate in the Commemoration of the Vietnam War by planning and conducting events and activities that will recognize the Vietnam veterans and their families' service, valor and sacrifice. For more information on the program, or to apply to be an official Commemorative Partner visit www.vietnamwar50th.com/commemorative_partners/commemorative_partner_program/.

Our Impact

As the nation's oldest major veterans' organization, the VFW has an impeccable and longstanding record of service and stewardship. More than 4 million patriotic Americans, both members and non-members, entrust the VFW with financial contributions and dedicate millions of volunteer hours.



YOUR DONATION OF
\$20
ENSURES THE VFW CAN

- ★ Educate a separating service member about his or her well-earned VA benefits through a private benefits counseling session with a VFW Service Officer
- ★ Provide training to 4 VFW Service Officers on signs of emotional suffering so they can better direct veterans to programs and services
- ★ Help cover rent, utilities or groceries for a military family struggling with the hardships of war
- ★ Serve 5 morale-boosting "welcome home" meals for service members recently back from combat

1,850

Number of VFW-accredited representatives across America and abroad, helping veterans fight for the VA benefits they have earned.

7.6 million+

Number of connections between deployed service members and loved ones made possible by the VFW's "Free Call Days."

\$4.5 billion

The amount in VA benefits the VFW network helped more than 255,000 veterans recover in the last three years.

2,094,880

Number of service members and their family members hosted at VFW Military Assistance Program (MAP) events since 2005.

27

Number of times the VFW has testified before Congress in the last 12 months alone. The VFW has been instrumental in virtually every major legislative victory for veterans in the 20th and 21st centuries.

\$3.3 million

Amount of scholarships, monetary awards and other incentives the VFW distributes annually to middle and high school students through two major patriotic essay competitions.

\$6.1 million

Value of financial assistance awarded to military families since 2004 to help cover basic needs in times of crisis. 47% of the funds covered basic housing needs.

\$3 million+

Amount of scholarships awarded to more than 714 veterans and service members through VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" since January 2014.

Learn more about the VFW's programs and services at www.vfw.org.

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 **IMPROVING LIFE IN AMERICA**

8.6 million

Number of volunteer hours contributed by VFW members annually.

\$49.8 million

Amount donated annually to local community service projects by VFW members.

 **HONORING THE FALLEN**

9.5 million+

Number of VFW "Buddy"® Poppies distributed by the VFW last year.

\$12.3 million+

Amount raised through the VFW "Buddy"® Poppy program for needy veterans.

 **INSPIRING PATRIOTISM IN YOUNG PEOPLE**

36,435

Number of high school students who competed in the 2015-16 Voice of Democracy competition.

132,162

Number of students who competed in the 2015-16 Patriot's Pen competition.

 The VFW has fought for veterans, service members and their families since 1899.

 **THE VFW BY THE NUMBERS**

Nearly 1.7 million

Number of VFW and VFW Auxiliary members.

6,561

Number of VFW Posts worldwide.

 **HELPING VETERANS GET JUSTICE**

66,913

Number of favorable VA claims filed by the VFW's nationwide force of VA-accredited service officers in 2015.

13,279

Number of VA claims filed by VFW Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) offices in 2015.

20

Number of Benefits Delivery at Discharge offices across the nation, including the military district of Washington, D.C., area.

 **HELPING STRUGGLING MILITARY FAMILIES**

4,050

Number of grants provided to military families facing financial hardship through *VFW Unmet Needs* since 2004.

\$2,905,298

Amount of grants provided through *VFW Unmet Needs* covering housing for struggling military families since 2004.

2,136

Number of military families who received assistance with housing needs since 2004.