

# PUBLIC RELATIONS



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## **Public Relations Introduction**

**Public Relations** may be the most important task you and your Post will undertake. It occurs every minute of every day. It goes beyond preparing and distributing news releases. It is the underlying element that brings success or failure to your Post. All contact between your Post and the community has a public relations aspect. **Ensuring the community views your Post positively is paramount.**

The community service your Post performs will enhance the Post's reputation as a responsible, caring and energetic community service organization — one that leads by example.

## **Your PR Strategy**

What do you want to accomplish with your PR strategy? Define your objectives. This is the critical first step.

- **Determine your audience.** This includes members, potential members and non-members. Different Post activities appeal to different segments of the community.
- **Define your message.** Sticking to one message is essential. However, your message may be presented in several ways through various outlets. Determine the best outlet for the best results.
- **Develop a strategy.** How can you best accomplish your goals? Look at the dynamics of your community. Build a relationship with the media in your area. Keep an up-to-date list of contacts for each outlet. Become the subject matter experts in your community on patriotic and veterans' issues. Make your Post visible and active on social media. Develop relationships with other local community service organizations.

When evaluating your strategy, you should listen carefully to the feedback from Post members and officers, members of the community and the media. Take this information and fine tune your strategy, if necessary. A good communicator talks and listens.

Suggestions from all sources should be considered. After all, those people see your messages from a different angle, and what might be very clear to you may not be to them. A new point of view may help get the word out more efficiently and effectively.

Development of good public relations takes time and commitment.

## **Building Media Contacts**

As a Post officer, you will have to speak to the media and general public. Therefore, you need to be able to speak clearly and concisely on veterans' issues and VFW programs. Your ability to communicate in both the written and spoken word will benefit the Post and the community.

You should build a good working relationship with members of the media, as well as the leaders of the various VFW programs. The assistance of officers and members is invaluable when gathering information to present to the media. When your information is accurate and of interest to the community, the media will welcome your submissions.

Some basic equipment needed to accomplish this task are a computer, email address, letterhead and a style guide, such as the Associated Press Stylebook.

A camera or smart phone is a great tool when used properly. After all, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” but only when that picture is of good quality and supports your newsworthy story. Avoid taking “grip-and-grin” photos. Additionally, always look for the action shots. Remember, get close, get faces, and get a signed photo release.

**Your goals are to develop a public relations strategy and make it work, establish media contacts, and increase the community’s awareness and respect for the VFW.**

### **Building VFW Awareness by Rewarding Your Community**

Know the VFW programs and how they serve the community. Our programs are the heart of our organization, beginning with community service. Tell the community about the Post service officer and the free assistance available to any veteran and his or her dependents to gain entitlements.

Our programs can reach people in the community who might not otherwise know veterans or the continuing service they offer to their communities. Through our youth and citizenship education programs we offer valuable and needed information to various groups in the community.

Establish an awards program that relates to VFW programs. Everyone loves praise. Recognition focuses the community spotlight on the individual or group being acknowledged as well as on the VFW. Award your local police, firefighters and EMTs with a certificate of appreciation during a public ceremony. Coordinate this event with a community anniversary or a national observance.

Other organizations or groups that have assisted the VFW in a community service project deserve thanks as well. Host a special event to recognize individuals or groups who further the VFW’s priorities and ideals. Include teachers, public officials, youths and members who have demonstrated support of the VFW’s values.

### **Deal With Bad Publicity, Don’t Avoid It**

Unfavorable publicity needs to be handled promptly and with as accurate information as possible. Here are some tips for dealing with negative publicity:

- **Don’t avoid the media.** Help them get all the facts so the story will be fair and balanced.

- **Do not provide conjecture or speak before you have all the facts.** Stating "We're aware of the situation, and are investigating," can help.
- **Do not place blame.**
- **Do not discuss fault or liability.**
- **Deal with the situation and move on.** Even a bad situation can have positive aspects.

Think of this as a welcome opportunity to present the VFW's programs and projects that help the community. If you have been helpful, the media contacts you make can prove valuable in the future.

### **Targeting the Media with a Specific Message**

Get to know the media in your area. This includes newspapers, both daily and weekly; radio, television and cable television stations; local or regional trade publications; and local and regional magazines.

Your contact list should include: name, title, address, affiliation, phone number, email address, social media handles and publication deadline dates.

Remember: your membership is diverse. Contacting various outlets ensures that your message reaches a wide audience.

Not every message will need to be sent to every contact. A news release announcing teachers and students receiving awards from the VFW would be best sent to the local media outlets as well as the school and any professional publication for teachers. A blood drive held at the Post would have a different list of media contacts. Choose carefully. A constant barrage of unrelated news releases can numb the media to your message.

### **A 'Thank You' Reaps Rewards**

Nothing is more important than saying "thank you." A well-written thank you note to a guest speaker is imperative.

Presentation of a certificate of appreciation to an individual or a group that has assisted with a program goes a long way toward building community relationships. A brief note of thanks to a member of the media for event coverage can help keep the lines of communication open. You also may want to consider writing congratulatory letters to individual Post members when they have accomplished something noteworthy outside of the organization.

Many members belong to various community service organizations. Sending congratulatory letters to elected leaders of other service organizations is a good way to establish a spirit of camaraderie between organizations. After all, we are all trying to better our communities through voluntary public service.

In addition, you can host an annual appreciation event for local law enforcement agencies, community-safety representatives, educators and youths who deserve recognition.

### **Make Your Community Proud of Your Post**

Make your community proud it has a VFW Post. Be the focal point in your community for all patriotic programs. Whether it's parades, school programs or voter registration, make sure the VFW has a visible presence.

Keep the Post home in good shape. Make it attractive and welcoming. Let it be an example of an organization that is proud of its history and working to make the community a better place in which to live. When the Post has a good image, it is easier to get the media involved and excited about VFW-sponsored events.

**Finally, remember that you represent the VFW to every person you meet.** The impression you make is one the public will associate with the VFW. Make sure it is a positive one.

### **Keep a Calendar**

A calendar of upcoming VFW events can help simplify your job. On your calendar include important national events, anniversaries and observances. To commemorate these dates, you may want to have a letter to the editor ready for possible publication.

Also you might consider hosting an event in observance of these special days. When planning an event, it is important to consult with the local community calendar. Scheduling conflicts can be avoided with some simple checking.

### **Important Dates to Remember**

3rd Monday in Jan. - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day  
Jan. 27 - Signing of Vietnam Peace Accord (1973)  
Jan. 31 - Panama Campaign Ended (1990)  
3rd Monday of Feb. - Presidents' Day  
March 29 - National Vietnam War Veterans Day  
March 31 - Somalia Campaign Ended (1995)  
April 9 - National Former POW/MIA Recognition Day  
April 11 - Persian Gulf War Official Cease-Fire  
May 1 - Loyalty Day  
May 8 - WWII Ends in Europe (V-E Day) (1945)  
May 15 - Peace Officers Memorial Day; Women's Army Corps Founded (1942)  
3rd Saturday in May - Armed Forces Day  
Last Monday of May - Memorial Day  
June 14 - Flag Day; U.S. Army Founded (1775)  
June 27 - National Post-Traumatic Stress Awareness Day  
July 2 - U.S. Army Air Corps Established (1926)  
July 4 - Independence Day  
July 27 - Korean War Armistice Day  
Aug. 4 - U.S. Coast Guard Established (1790)  
Aug. 14 - Japan Surrendered, Ending WWII (1945); National Navajo Code Talkers Day  
Sept. 2 - V-J Day: Japan Signed Formal Surrender (1945)  
First Monday of Sept. - Labor Day  
Sept. 11 - Patriots Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance

Sept. 14 - VFW Auxiliary Founded (1914)  
Sept. 17 - Constitution and Citizenship Day  
Sept. 18 - U.S. Air Force Established (1947)  
3rd Friday in Sept. - POW/MIA Recognition Day  
Sept. 29 - VFW Founded in 1899  
Oct. 13 - U.S. Navy Established (1775)  
1st Tuesday of Nov. – Election Day  
Nov. 10 - U.S. Marine Corps Established (1775)  
Nov. 11 - Veterans Day; Signing of WWI Armistice (1918)  
Nov. 21 - Grenada Campaign Ended (1983)  
Dec. 7 - National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day  
Dec. 13 - National Guard Established (1636)  
Dec. 15 - Iraq War Ended (2011)  
Dec. 31 - Official End of WWII (1946); Kosovo Campaign Ended (2013)

## **News Releases and Promotion**

### **A News Release Must Be Newsworthy**

The most fundamental way, although not the only way, to get your message out to the media is through a news release.

An effective news release relates information that is newsworthy. **It should be clear, concise, error-free and answer the "Five Ws" in the first paragraph: who, what, where, when and why.**

Try to keep the news release to one page, two at the most. If more information is needed to better explain your news release (fact sheets, biographies or program information), it can be attached. Be sure the contact person's name, phone number and the date of the release are clearly indicated.

Include quotes from the head of the organization, the Post Commander or the officer responsible for the program. It is best to use quotes that sound natural and express an opinion or position.

Press releases can be written on events, programs, awards, election of VFW officers or national issues. Be sure to highlight the local aspect no matter what the subject. Localization makes for easier placement.

Avoid buzzwords and organizational acronyms. Assume that readers know nothing about the organization — chances are they don't.

As you are writing, think about simplicity. Be brief. Forget flowery adjectives — they will most likely be cut anyway. And don't be insulted if your release is changed or cut, as long as it gets the main points across. The editor's job is to do just that — edit.

Know the media deadlines. Allow enough time for editors to call with questions, but not too much time for the interest to lag.

Make the reporter's job easier by emailing the news release to them. Follow-up with a phone call.

When you have completed your news release, go back over it again. Check that you have answered the "Five Ws" in the first paragraph. Did you give the release a point of local interest? Are the sentences short and clear? Is the release written in a consistent manner? Is it typed and error-free? Nothing is more irritating to an editor than having to rewrite a release.

If a photo is included with the release, be sure to provide the names of everyone in the photo and a brief explanation of the event. Make sure the photo is of good quality and suitable for publication.

### **Control Interviews with Facts and Research**

If reporters call, determine why they are calling and the subject to be discussed. Ask if the reporter is on deadline, and assure the reporter you will call back before the deadline. Remember, you have little control over the interview, but if the reporter asks an off-topic question, bring them back to the agreed topic. Here are tips designed to help as you prepare for the actual interview:

- Jot down likely questions and appropriate answers.
- Know what you want to communicate. Plan to make your points accordingly.
- Do your research. Provide background or expanded information.
- Never lie or mislead a reporter.
- Offer your conclusion first, briefly and directly. Back it with facts.
- Avoid organizational jargon and acronyms.
- Short answers are better than long. Use complete sentences.
- Don't accept a reporter's facts or figures as true; don't respond to a hypothetical situation; and do respond to negative-leading questions with positive statements.
- Keep cool. Don't allow yourself to be provoked.
- Remember when talking to a reporter there is no such thing as "off the record."
- If there are any skeletons in the closet, be prepared for them to come up in the interview.
- Be prepared to state all your positive points completely in response to the first questions asked.
- State clearly when you can release information and why.
- If you don't know the answers, say so, and offer to find out.

The interview will be brief. A reporter has only a few minutes to get your full story. Don't ask to approve the story before it is published or broadcast.

## Notifying the Media When the Chief Visits

The VFW National Commander's visit to your area is an important event for several reasons. First, they are the chief spokesman for our organization. They are widely traveled, aware of the concerns of veterans and their families across the nation, and have the responsibility to meet with the president and key congressional members to express the interests and needs of the nation's veterans.

For these reasons, the local media will be interested in their views on veterans' issues, national security and foreign affairs. It benefits the VFW and veterans in general if the Chief's visit is well-covered by the media.

Ahead of the Chief's visit to your Post, VFW National Headquarters will supply a media alert template, bio and suggested interview questions to the Department Commander and Adjutant. If the Department hasn't announced the visit, take the opportunity to publicize the event yourself. Your media plans for the Chief's visit should include:

- **Media Alert.** If your Department has already announced the Chief's visit, ask for a copy. Then, forward it to the news editors in your community. If the Department has not distributed a media alert, write one yourself.
- **Interviews.** Contact your local TV and radio stations in your community and ask if they would like to have the VFW's National Commander as a guest. Of course, be sure the Chief will be in your area long enough to take part in this type of interview. Most Post visits are scheduled for 30 minutes. Such interviews work best at the beginning of a visit or at the end. In any case, coordinate with your Department headquarters to determine what time works best for the Chief's already-established schedule.
- **Interviewees.** The media is there to interview the Chief. Conduct the interview in such a manner so others cannot interrupt. The Chief, the Post/District Commander and the Department Commander are the only VFW members who should attend the interview. Post, District and Department Commanders are there only to provide information on veterans' issues on a local or state level. Do not put the Chief into an interview by themselves where the media are going to concentrate on local veterans' issues. The Chief talks only on relevant national and international issues.
- **News Conference.** Since the amount of time the Chief can spend at a Post is limited, it is usually a good idea to invite the media for a specific time. Then, turn the Chief over to them for a news conference-type interview.
- **Place.** Where you conduct the interview is very important. Do not conduct interviews in the Post canteen. Use your meeting room or an area that is clean and quiet.
- **Time.** The best time to conduct an interview at the Post is as soon as the Chief arrives. Reporters have deadlines to meet and they do not have time to stand around while the Chief visits with members. Get the interview started when they arrive. The Chief can visit with members later. The only exception to this rule is when the Chief will be at the Post for a luncheon or dinner. For these visits, ask the media if they would like to eat with members, listen to the Chief's remarks afterward, and then conduct the interview. Quite often, the Chief's remarks to the group after the meal give the media ideas for questions.

- **Follow-up.** If there are questions that can't be answered during the interview, be sure to get the name and phone number of the reporter, and provide an answer as soon as possible.

### **Good PR Helps Retain Members**

Post officers have an additional responsibility to members of the VFW to ensure that Post activities are enjoyable, interesting and diverse. This promotes membership retention. Members who show pride in the organization and the community service they perform attract potential members.

Remind members to wear VFW-branded apparel. Make sure new members feel welcome and offer them the opportunity to get involved in a VFW program or project that captures their interest. Getting a new member off to a good start, or involving an existing member in a new program, is in everyone's best interest. A happy member is the best PR the VFW can have.

Supporting VFW activities through meaningful PR is the key to supporting members in their efforts to help the community. Members will recognize your contribution to the success of the VFW and its many projects and programs. There is no substitute for teamwork.

## **Advertising**

There are significant differences between public relations and advertising.

With advertising you control the timing and content but not the cost. **In public relations you have no control on the timing or content but pay nothing.** Resources will determine which method you use most frequently.

Talk to local radio and TV stations about advertising or donated public service announcement (PSA) time. The cost of placing a 30-second spot can be minimal depending on your location. Explore these mediums for effectiveness of messaging (how many of your target audience you reach) and cost comparison.

VFW National Headquarters has produced 30 and 60-second videos and radio spots. They publicize the VFW's mission and promote our free assistance programs. Some solicit membership so they cannot be used as PSAs, which are free.

Additionally, if you advertise to solicit members, be mindful of the environment at the Post. Make sure the prospective member feels welcome and respected.

### **Be Creative with Publicity Options**

We have talked about the printed word in the form of a news release and the possibilities available through radio and video, but there are other options to investigate as well.

- **Social media** offers a broad spectrum of free and paid services that are incredibly useful. Social media platforms allow you to connect with people anywhere in the world, almost instantly.
- **Outdoor advertising** ranges from bumper stickers to welcome signs as people drive through your community. Take every opportunity to keep the community aware of the VFW's presence. In this age of mobility it is important to remember that the population in your community can change daily.
- **Exhibits** in shopping areas, community social events and other public forums are excellent ways to bring the VFW story to the community. Information on VFW activities and programs can entice eligible veterans to join the organization and favorably influence others in the community.

## **Social Media**

### **The Age of Social Media**

Simply put, social media allows people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks.

Establishing a social media presence allows your Post to engage a vast and diverse audience to include members, prospects, donors, potential donors, supporters, etc., while building the VFW's brand and credibility.

Social media is useful to share information about meetings and events, opportunities for support and to strengthen your Post's relationship with your online community. It is a place to share success stories and to ask for support if needed.

There are numerous social media sites available for use. The key is finding the sites that are a good fit for your audience.

When looking into building a profile on a new social media site, be aware of the sites' strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and the risks.

Using social media can have an extremely positive impact on your Post. Engaging with your audience by posting regularly and being responsive to questions and comments is the key to success!

### **Dos and Don'ts of Social Media**

#### **DO:**

- Post regularly.
- Use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Reply in a timely manner.
- Be customer-service oriented.
- Answer questions.
- Use pictures and videos for eye-catching content.

## **DON'T:**

- Be argumentative when someone disagrees with the VFW's position.
- Share articles from untrusted news sources.
- Keep the password to yourself. Instead, make sure that more than one person has access to the Post's social media accounts
- Post polarizing content. Instead, stay nonpartisan and in line with VFW positions.

## **Using the Internet for Publicity and Outreach**

The internet is a world of endless possibilities. It contains more information than most people will ever need. When researching for the most up-to-date information on a particular topic, it can't be beaten. **It provides you with the opportunity to communicate instantly with VFW members and others who visit your Post's website.**

Your Post's website is a window into the Post's character. A calendar of current activities, showing what, when, where and how to get involved, is an incredibly useful tool. A listing of diverse activities carried out by the Post allows numerous people to find the "perfect fit" for their interests and abilities.

### **Tell your Post's story.**

- Is the VOD program in full swing? If so, what schools are participating? How many students are participating? What are the awards for the top students?
- Did you adopt a local military unit?
- Have you recently recognized local citizens for their efforts to better the community? Seize this opportunity to tell your story on your website.

The prompt placement of news releases on current actions of veterans' legislation, or breaking news on issues of interest to veterans on your Post's website is vital because members need to be aware of current events so they can contact their local, or national elected officials, and voice their opinions.

Numerous issues concerning veterans can be researched on the internet. Find out how your congressional representative or senator voted on a particular bill. Biographical and contact information on that individual is available in an instant. Use this tool to keep yourself and your members informed. The VFW provides a list of current, veteran-related bills before Congress and their current action at <https://voterveice.net/VFW/bills>.

If your community has a website, ask if they will allow a link to the Post's site. This would be an excellent opportunity for nonmembers in the community to become further acquainted with the VFW and the many programs and projects it performs that benefit the community. Be sure to include information on how to join and a local contact at the Post.

If you keep your members informed they will feel connected to the organization and take pride in its accomplishments. Feeling proud and connected may encourage them to become more involved in Post activities. Increased involvement leads to more program participation. It is a win/win situation for the member, the Post and the community.

In addition, it's important for the Post website to continually be updated. A website that isn't being updated or maintained will deter visitors from your site. In this day of "instant access," people demand that information on websites be current. Otherwise you could lose credibility in your community.

## **VFW Website Solution Program**

The VFW Website Solution program is geared to assist Posts and Departments in establishing a viable, easy-to-manage website. The 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.

These websites boast many manager-friendly functions, and feature an "integration" component which allows the national website, and Department and Post websites to share information, both manually and automatically. This includes a system which allows the Post to efficiently submit reports directly to the Department. In addition, website developer DrivePath offers each Post and Department ongoing support with each website.

This is a great opportunity for Posts and Departments. Additional details are provided on the following flyer. Apply today at <https://vfwprograms.formstack.com/forms/websolutionapp>!

 **Additional Resources:** From Public Service Announcements (PSAs) and social media guides to sample media alerts and press releases, additional public relations resources are available behind the member login at vfw.org in the Communications & Public Affairs section of Training & Support. Log in at vfw.org, and select the VFW Training & Support link under Member Resources.

**The following pages comprise the  
Website Solution Program  
flyer and VFW Press Kit.**



# WEBSITE SOLUTION PROGRAM

V2.0

by PIXELBIT | DrivePath



The easy-to-use online solution to helping you grow VFW membership.

CONTACT US FOR MORE DETAILS:

248.232.1293

WEBMASTER@VFWNATIONAL.ORG

## VALUE

- Our control panel allows you to easily manage the content of your site 24/7. This helps you keep News, Events and resource information current.
- Makes it easier for potential new members to get the info they are looking for regarding membership.

## FEATURES

- Sync your Calendar & News with VFW District, Department & National websites.
- Edit all of the content on the site including managing officers / staff via our dedicated control panel.
- Social media integration.
- Editable Photo Gallery, Newsletter Email Engine and more...

## NEW FEATURES

- Mobile Friendly Responsive Design.
- Create Pages on the Fly and Control where those pages appear in the dropdown navigation.
- Turn On/Off Modules on every page & rearrange Modules to appear in a specific order.
- Full Screen Calendar - Recurring Events.
- Sliders - You Control!
- Search Engine Optimization built in.
- New Pages - TAPS, HONOR GUARD, M.O.C & More...

**1st Year FREE**  
with VFW National Grant. Ask for Details.

## COST

ONLY **\$360<sup>00</sup>** per year\*

\* Cost Includes one domain and hosting. Additional domains are \$35 each.

\* Cost is FREE w/ Site Sponsor Program - Ask for details.





## VFW at a Glance

*The VFW is a nonprofit veterans service organization comprised of eligible veterans and military service members from the active, Guard and Reserve forces. The VFW and its Auxiliary are dedicated to veterans service, legislative advocacy, and military and community service programs.*

### Origins

In 1899, the American Veterans of Foreign Service (Columbus, Ohio) and the National Society of the Army of the Philippines (Denver, Colorado) were organized to secure rights and benefits for veterans of the Spanish-American War (1898) and the Philippines War (1899-1902). These two organizations merged in 1914, creating the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. The VFW was chartered by Congress in 1936.

### Membership Eligibility

Citizens or nationals of the United States serving honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces in a foreign war or overseas operation recognized by a campaign medal, in Korea after June 30, 1949, and recipients of hostile-fire or imminent danger pay. Veterans of World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Persian Gulf, Somalia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and other smaller expeditionary campaigns, as well as occupation duty, qualify.

### Partner Organization

A national volunteer service organization, the Auxiliary of the VFW was founded in 1914 and is the backbone of many local VFW volunteer efforts.

### Membership Size

More than 1.5 million VFW and Auxiliary members in all 50 states, and many foreign territories.

### Organizational Structure

Thousands convene each year at the VFW's national convention to elect officers, adopt resolutions and discuss business affairs. Leading the organization are the elected commander-in-chief, senior vice commander-in-chief and junior vice commander-in-chief. The National Council of Administration serves as the VFW's board of directors.

Nearly 6,000 Posts worldwide comprise 52 Departments in the 50 states, the Asia/Pacific Areas and Europe. Posts form the basic local chapter.

### Priority Issues

- **Budget:** Fully fund programs for veterans, service members and their families.
- **Health Care:** Provide service members and veterans timely access to high-quality health care without increasing cost shares.

#### NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64111  
Office 816.756.3390  
Fax 816.968.1157

#### WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002  
Office 202.543.2239  
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org  
www.vfw.org

- ***Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs:*** Ensure veterans and their dependents have timely access to earned benefits.
- ***Education, Employment and Transition Assistance:*** Provide veterans the opportunity to succeed after leaving military service.
- ***Military Quality of Life:*** Maintain a quality, comprehensive benefits and retirement package that is the backbone for an all-volunteer force.
- ***National Security, Foreign Affairs and POW/MIA:*** Fully support service members and their mission to fight the war on terrorism, and protect our nation's citizens and interests around the world.



## VFW Community Achievements

*The VFW takes great pride in its history of service to its communities both stateside and abroad. Annually, VFW and Auxiliary members donate nearly nine million hours to community service projects, relief efforts and local VA facilities each year.*

- 1915 VFW Post 2100 helped sponsor a Boy Scout troop in Everett, Washington
- 1916 First national VFW essay contest held
- 1922 "Buddy"<sup>®</sup> Poppy program began
- 1923 Entered the war on drugs by printing a resolution calling for an international conference
- 1927 Provided \$10,000 to Mississippi Valley flood victims
- 1930 First VFW scholarship award (\$300) goes to a Boy Scout
- 1936 Boy Scout-VFW plan of cooperation was signed
- 1938 Supported the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis
- 1940 VFW Junior Rifle Clubs are formed with National Rifle Association
- 1942 VFW Aviator Cadet Program began
- 1950 Cooperative disaster-relief plan developed with the Red Cross
- 1952 The Dunn family (Kansas flood victims) won a \$75,000 farm in Washington courtesy of the VFW
- 1953 VFW National Teen-er Baseball: First tournament was held in Hershey Park, Pennsylvania
- 1956 150,000 kids took part in the national VFW marble competition
- 1958 Became full partner with Voice of Democracy (VOD)
- 1959 Minnesota VFW/Auxiliary raised \$325,000 for dedication of the VFW Cancer Research Center at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis)
- 1961 Assumed primary sponsorship of VOD — within four years 262,000 students participated
- 1962 Lite-a-Bike program: A \$300,000 project with 3-M Co. of St. Paul, Minnesota, provided "Scotchlite" reflector tape — 50,000 VFW members from 4,500 Posts participated
- 1964 VFW/Auxiliary provided nearly \$100,000 to earthquake victims in Anchorage, Alaska
- 1970 Drive-to-Survive program began
- 1973 Drug Awareness program began
- 1979 VFW Political Action Committee formed
- 1980 Minnesota VFW Posts sponsored the U.S. hockey team in the Winter Olympics
- 1983 Agreed to permit the Red Cross to use VFW facilities as shelters and relief centers during national disasters and emergencies
- 1986 Donated \$122,000 to the Statue of Liberty Restoration Fund
- 1990 Provided \$49,000 to California earthquake victims
- 1992 Provided \$197,000 to relieve victims of Hurricane Andrew and other disasters
- 1993 Relief funds totaled \$500,000
- 1995 Youth Essay Contest (7th-8th grades) began

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Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390  
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### WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239  
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org  
www.vfw.org

- 1997 "Buddy"® Poppy celebrated 75th anniversary
- 1998 VFW Posts raised \$100,000 for the March of Dimes
- 1999 VOD gave \$2.5 million in scholarship monies to high school students  
VFW donated \$50,000 and 25,000 reprints of its war chronology to Vietnam Veterans Memorial's Young American Vietnam War Era Studies Project
- 2000 Distributed 60,000 audio books to armed forces worldwide through *Operation Yarnspinner*
- 2002 Donated \$110,000 to diabetes research  
Equally distributed \$120,000 among families of active-duty personnel killed in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the Pentagon
- 2003 Partnered with USA Freedom Corps homefront initiative
- 2004 Established relationships with the National Council for Social Studies (NCCS) and National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
- 2005 Provided \$560,000 to Gulf Coast veterans after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita  
Distributed 5,000 copies of CD entitled, "Vietnam: A Nation Remembers"  
Established VFW Military Scholarship program  
Expanded Patriot's Pen Essay Competition
- 2007 Radiothon raised nearly \$100,000 for Unmet Needs
- 2010 Donated over \$648,000 toward construction of the Vietnam Veterans Education Center  
Increased Voice of Democracy National Scholarships to \$150,000  
Provided over \$20,000 to assist service members with family in Haiti following the January earthquake
- 2011 Pledged \$500,000 toward the construction of the Veterans Hall in the National Museum of the United States Army  
Provided over \$145,000 in emergency financial relief to military families living in tornado-stricken areas
- 2012 Provided over \$120,000 for Hurricane Sandy victims on the East Coast
- 2013 Provided \$30,000 for the Moore, Oklahoma, tornado victims and over \$30,000 for the flood victims in Colorado
- 2015 Provided \$10,000 to the Pacific Areas for typhoon relief
- 2016 Provided \$25,000 for flood relief in Louisiana
- 2017 Provided \$621,300 in aid for victims of Hurricanes Matthew, Irma, Harvey and Maria, and \$19,000 for victims of the California wildfires
- 2018 Provided \$139,000 in aid for victims of Hurricanes Michael, Irma and Florence, and \$35,000 for wildfires in California and Colorado. Provided \$55,000 for Pacific area victims of Tropical Cyclone Gita, and victims of the Mount Kilauea volcanic eruptions, and \$20,000 for disaster relief efforts in Saipan
- 2019 Provided \$32,182 in aid for victims of Hurricane Florence in North Carolina, and \$15,000 for flood victims in Nebraska  
Provided \$20,000 for Pacific area victims of Typhoon Yuta
- 2020 Provided \$30,000 in aid for victims of floods from hurricanes in Louisiana  
The VFW and VFW Foundation provided \$400,000 to Posts and Auxiliaries for Community Service Grants
- 2021 The VFW and VFW Foundation provided \$1 million in grants to boost Post and Auxiliary operations through the COVID pandemic. The VFW provided \$50,000 in aid to support relief efforts from a severe winter storm in Texas

## VFW Diverse Endeavors

*The VFW honors veterans through memorial fundraising efforts, sponsorship of special events for disabled vets, and by recognizing volunteer service. Donations also help victims of natural disasters and less-fortunate children.*

### Special Events

- ***“Run for the Wall”***

Supports the annual “Run for the Wall,” a cross country motorcycle ride to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. The VFW sponsors refueling for all participating riders during a scheduled stop near the VFW National Headquarters.

- ***“Uniting to Combat Hunger”***

A collaborative campaign established in 2018 with Humana. Created to combat food insecurity, while also working to raise awareness of the issue that may affect 1 in 8 people in America, and as many as 1 in 4 Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans. To date, the campaign has provided more than 2.5 million meals to those facing hunger and food insecurity.

### Memorials

In fulfilling its pledge to remember the nation’s war dead, the VFW promotes national memorials for veterans of all wars. Additionally, thousands of memorials have been constructed across the nation through local VFW Posts.

- ***National WWI Memorial***

Gave the memorial a \$350,000 grant to help expand the Liberty Memorial Museum, which houses the nation's most comprehensive collection of World War I historical materials. In 2017, the VFW was proud to sponsor the World War I Centennial Commemorative Ceremony at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. The VFW donated \$100,000 to preserving the history of the Great War.

- ***WWI Memorial***

Donated \$300,000 to the U.S. World War I Centennial Commission for the creation of the World War I Memorial, in Washington, D.C.

- ***National WWII Memorial***

Reached its five-year fundraising goal of \$6 million for the memorial’s construction in only two years. The donation ranks as the largest from any veterans group, and second overall.

- ***Korean War Memorial***

Members donated \$600,000 toward the construction of the Korean War Memorial. The donation ranked among the highest.

- ***Vietnam Veterans Memorial***

Donated over \$300,000 toward building “The Wall” — all 58,000 Americans who died as a result of the Vietnam War are listed. The VFW was the first major organization to contribute.

- ***Women in Military Service to America Memorial***

Donated \$70,000 toward construction costs.

- ***Disabled Veterans for Life Memorial***

Donated \$100,000 toward construction costs.

### NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street  
Kansas City, MO 64111

Office 816.756.3390  
Fax 816.968.1157

### WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20002

Office 202.543.2239  
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org  
www.vfw.org

- ***Vietnam Veterans Education Center***

Donated over \$648,000 toward the construction of the Education Center.

- ***National Museum of the United States Army***

Donated \$500,000 toward the construction of the Veterans Hall in the museum.

- ***National Desert Storm Memorial***

Donated \$500,000 toward the construction of the National Desert Storm Memorial.

### **Awards**

- Outstanding police officers, firefighters, EMTs and other first responders are recognized annually by the VFW for their work in the community.
- Donated \$70,000 in support of Park University's Valor Medals Review project, a research initiative to appropriately recognize those who may have been denied military service medals based on racial bias.

### **National Home for Children**

Children, youth and family of VFW and Auxiliary members who have nowhere to turn find a safe haven on this 629-acre VFW campus in Eaton Rapids, Michigan. The privately funded facility is a living memorial to VFW and to all veterans.



## Legislative Victories

*The VFW played an instrumental role in virtually every significant piece of veterans' legislation passed in the 20th century, as well as bills enacted in the 21st century. Note: In each case, this is the year an act was passed or an institution established.*

For more information, contact the VFW National Legislative Service at [vfwac@vfw.org](mailto:vfwac@vfw.org).

- 1917 War Risk Insurance Act Amendments
- 1918 Vocational Rehabilitation Act (P.L. 178)
- 1919 Census Act Rider on Veterans Preference Discharge Allowance
- 1920 Widows and Orphans Pension Act (Spanish-America War)
- 1921 Veterans Bureau Act
- 1923 Veterans Preference Point System
- 1924 House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
World War Adjusted Compensation Act
- 1925 Senate Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs
- 1926 Spanish-American War benefits  
New Johnson Act (WWI benefits)
- 1930 Veterans Administration (VA) World War Service Disability Pension Act (P.L. 522)
- 1931 Bacharach Amendment (P.L. 743) allows borrowing on WWI bonus certificates
- 1933 Wagner-Peyser Act: Veterans Employment Service
- 1934 Pension for widows of WWI vets
- 1936 VFW congressional charter signed by President Roosevelt  
Bonus bonds (\$2.4 billion) to WWI vets redeemable
- 1938 Armistice Day (Nov. 11) legal holiday
- 1940 National Service Life Insurance  
Selective Service & Training Act
- 1943 Benefits to WWII veterans (P.L. 10)  
Disabled Veterans Rehabilitation Act
- 1944 GI Bill of Rights (P.L. 346)  
Veterans Preference Act
- 1946 Veteran Emergency Housing Act
- 1947 Bureau of Veterans Re-employment Rights (BVRR)
- 1950 Vocational Rehabilitation Act
- 1951 Servicemen's Indemnity & Insurance
- 1952 Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (Korean War GI Bill)
- 1954 Veterans Compensation Act  
Nov. 11 declared as Veterans Day (P.L. 380)
- 1962 Veterans Benefits Act (Cold War GI Bill)
- 1966 Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act (P.L. 89-358) (Vietnam War GI Bill)
- 1970 Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
- 1972 Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act

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- 1973 Federal court agrees veterans preference applies to state jobs
- 1974 Vietnam Era Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act (vocational rehabilitation)
- 1976 Veterans Education & Employment Assistance Act
- 1977 Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Act
- 1978 Veterans preference preserved
  - Veterans & Survivors Pension Improvement Act
  - Veterans Day returned to Nov. 11
- 1979 Vietnam Veterans Outreach Program (creates Vet Centers)
- 1980 VFW calls for Agent Orange study
  - Veterans Rehabilitation & Education Amendments
- 1981 Former POW Benefits Act
  - Veterans Health Care, Training & Small Business Loan Act
- 1982 Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS)
  - Vietnam Veterans Memorial dedicated
- 1983 Emergency Veterans Job-Training Act
- 1984 Montgomery GI Bill Veterans Dioxin & Radiation Exposure Compensation Standards Act (P.L. 98-542): Agent Orange & Atomic Exposure
- 1987 New GI Bill Continuation Act
- 1988 Radiation-Exposed Veterans Compensation Act
  - Department of Veterans Affairs Act
  - Veterans Judicial Review Act
- 1989 VA becomes a Cabinet department Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims
- 1990 Agent Orange service-connection
- 1991 Agent Orange Act (P.L. 102-4)
  - Persian Gulf War Veterans Assistance Act (P.L. 102-25)
- 1992 Veterans Health Care Act
- 1996 Veterans Health Care Eligibility Reform Act
- 1999 Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act
- 2003 Concurrent receipt for military retirees rated 50% disabled or more
- 2004 Full concurrent receipt for military retirees rated 100% disabled
  - Traumatic Injury Insurance supplemental created
- 2005 Protestors banned from military funerals
  - Stolen Valor Act signed into law
- 2006 VFW calls for VA/military health care system review after Walter Reed outpatient debacle
- 2008 Record VA discretionary budget approved
  - GI Bill for the 21st Century signed into law
- 2009 Advance Appropriations for VA becomes law
- 2010 Family Caregiver Legislation signed into law
  - Ensured all VA and DOD health care programs met minimum health care coverage standards
- 2011 VOW to Hire Heroes Act
  - VFW stopped TRICARE premiums from increasing annually
- 2012 Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act
  - Extended USERRA protections to veterans working for TSA
- 2013 Reinstated military Tuition Assistance programs
  - New Stolen Valor Act signed into law
  - Stopped Creation of Distinguished Warfare Medal (Drone Medal)
- 2014 Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014
  - In-State Tuition for Post-9/11 GI Bill eligible veterans
  - Advance Appropriations for VA Benefits
- 2015 Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans (SAV) Act
  - Eliminated 1 percent COLA reduction penalty on future military retirees
  - Created government match to military Thrift Savings Plan accounts

- 2016 Toxic Exposure Research Act to evaluate impact on descendants  
Enhanced fertility treatment and adoption services
- 2017 Forever GI Bill gives veterans a lifetime to use GI Bill benefits  
Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017  
VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act  
Global War on Terrorism Memorial  
Improved VA hiring and retention authorities  
Veterans Choice Program improvements and expansion  
Declassifying toxic exposure documents  
Prevented significant copayment increases for TRICARE
- 2018 Expanded caregiver benefits to veterans of all eras  
Consolidated community care into one improved program  
Established a process to evaluate and improve VA facilities to better serve veterans  
Defeated proposed cuts to Individual Unemployability
- 2019 Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act  
Elimination of the Widow's Tax
- 2020 Added bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism to VA's list of presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange  
Changed the statutory definition of Vietnam veterans to include individuals who served in the Republic of Vietnam from Nov. 1, 1955, to Feb. 27, 1961  
Deborah Sampson Act  
Elimination of the 12-year limit on using Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits
- 2021 Expanded maternity care options from community providers  
PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act



## VFW Programs & Projects

*Since its founding, the VFW has been a staple in the community. Troop support, youth activities, volunteering and scholarship programs are a few of the ways the VFW shines in the many communities and cities where Posts are located.*

### Youth Scholarship Programs

- ***Voice of Democracy***

This audio-essay competition annually awards nearly \$2 million in scholarships to students in grades 9-12. The first place winner receives a \$30,000 scholarship.

- ***Patriot's Pen***

More than \$1.2 million is awarded annually to students in grades 6-8 in this essay contest. The first place winner receives \$5,000.

- ***Teacher of the Year***

The VFW annually recognizes three exceptional (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) teachers for their outstanding commitment to teaching Americanism and patriotism to their students. Awards include three national \$1,000 awards for each teacher for their professional development expenses; \$1,000 award for his/her school; plaques for both the teacher and school and an all-expense-paid trip to attend the VFW National Convention.

### Educational Outreach

- ***Echoes From the Wall***

The VFW partnered with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to distribute a curriculum, Echoes From the Wall, to 25,000 public and private high schools and donated \$50,000 to the project.

- ***Educational Brochures***

The VFW produces and distributes a flag brochure and poster.

- ***Veterans in the Classroom***

November is officially known as VFW Veterans in the Classroom Month. Members demonstrate flag etiquette and share their wartime experiences with America's youth.

### Youth Activities

Locally, VFW Posts sponsor various youth sporting programs such as baseball and ice hockey. In addition, many VFW Posts sponsor Boy and Girl Scout troops, Junior Olympics, bike safety, JROTC units, drill teams, color guards and a variety of other programs to build good citizenship and exemplary character in America's youth.

### Community Volunteerism

Each year, VFW members volunteer more than 1 million hours of service to various community endeavors.

- ***Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service***

The VFW was a charter member in 1946. VFW volunteers donate millions of hours of service annually at VA medical facilities.

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## **Troop Support**

- ***Military Assistance Program (MAP)***

More than 2.4 million service members and their families have been hosted at morale-boosting events sponsored by the VFW since 2005.

- ***Adopt-a-Unit***

More than 3,400 units and ships have been adopted through VFW Posts since 2007. VFW National Headquarters adopted the USS Cole in 2002.

- ***Care Packages***

Posts across the country show their support of America's military by collecting and distributing much-needed personal items for adopted units.

- ***VFW Unmet Needs***

This program administers emergency financial grants to military families to help cover basic expenses like mortgage payments, childcare, food and more. Since 2004, 11,111 grants have been issued totaling more than \$12.5 million.

- ***VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship"***

Introduced in 2013, this program awards scholarships of up to \$5,000 to qualifying veterans and service members. The program has provided more than 2,200 scholarships totaling more than \$9.85 million.

- ***Student Veteran Support Grants***

Provides financial grants to VFW Posts, Districts, and Departments to assist with outreach and services to veterans on college campuses around the country.



## VFW Service to Veterans

*From lobbying Congress and monitoring the Department of Veterans Affairs to assisting veterans filing claims, the VFW remains a dedicated advocate for America's veterans, service members and their families.*

### **National Veterans Service (NVS)**

NVS is responsible for accrediting and training VFW's global network of professional service officers. NVS provides annual training to VFW Service Officers. NVS staff represents veterans at the Board of Veterans Appeals in Washington, D.C. Each year NVS provides more than \$2 million to VFW Departments in support of their veteran service programs.

- ***Department Service Officers (DSOs)***

A global network of highly trained and accredited service officers helps veterans navigate the complicated VA claims process. Department of Veterans Affairs statistics show that for 2021, the VFW helped recoup \$10.2 billion in earned benefits on behalf of more than 550,000 veterans. VFW's Pre-Discharge claims representatives also filed nearly 12,000 VA claims resulting in more than \$156 million in disability compensation for transitioning service members.

- ***Tactical Assessment Center (TAC)***

The VFW's TAC operates a toll-free hotline for veterans with questions or concerns about VA health care and benefits. The number is 1.800.VFW.1899. Veterans can also email [vfw@vfw.org](mailto:vfw@vfw.org).

- ***Health Screenings***

The VFW hosts a health fair at its national convention. Attendees can receive health screenings, eye exams, cholesterol checks, respiratory function testing, blood pressure screening and blood glucose testing. Many lives have been saved thanks to these free screenings.

- ***Pre-Discharge Program***

Introduced in 2001, the VFW's pre-discharge program (formerly known as Benefits Delivery at Discharge) provides claims assistance to separating military personnel on more than 20 military installations and military populated regions throughout the country.

### **National Legislative Service**

The NLS educates Congress and advocates for policies that improve the lives of veterans, active-duty military, and their families.

- ***Action Corps***

This grassroots lobbying effort has more than 300,000 volunteer advocates who write, call and visit lawmakers to discuss issues related to veterans. Also, Action Corps members receive the VFW *Action Corps Weekly*, an e-newsletter relating to current legislation and events.

- ***Your Voice on Capitol Hill***

VFW members live in every congressional district. The VFW's membership size and effective advocacy ensures that members of Congress do not ignore the needs and preferences of those who have worn our nation's uniform. The VFW testifies up to 30 times every year before Congress, including before an annual Joint Senate and House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Hearing to consider the VFW's Priority Goals.

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### **National Security and Foreign Affairs**

The welfare of active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel and their families is of a prime concern to the VFW.

- ***POW/MIA***

The VFW national officers visit Asian and European countries to meet with host-country officials to stress the importance of conducting MIA investigation and recovery operations, as well as gaining access to documents and archival research facilities.

### **Employment Services**

The VFW is a strong supporter of veterans' preference in government positions. The Washington Office actively works to advance veteran-specific employment legislation and works with the U.S. Department of Labor to ensure veterans have resources in their communities to find quality post-military careers.



**NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.**

**Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States**  
**[www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org)**