



Student Veteran Liaison Guide

Role of the Student Veteran Liaison

The Student Veteran Liaison in each Department is the VFW's primary person for interacting with Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapters, and other student veterans groups and programs in that territory. Your job is to facilitate connections between VFW Posts and student veterans groups, helping to establish mutually beneficial relationships. Additionally, you are expected to be an expert in VFW resources, and to be knowledgeable about VA benefits.

Student Veteran Liaisons should be prepared to:

- Increase the level of cooperation between SVA and the VFW to support student veterans on college campuses and in online educational programs worldwide.
- Reduce confusion felt by student veterans and their families by setting up clear pathways to local resources and solutions.
- Coordinate the efforts of SVA and the VFW to help student veterans succeed in their academic goals and continue to contribute as leaders within the community.

- Assist in organizational development for both SVA and the VFW in communities currently underrepresented through cross-training and cooperation.
- Report activity to VFW National Headquarters detailing which student veterans groups and VFW Posts are working together, and what projects they're working on.

Current Situation

"Today's veterans face tremendous obstacles in their path of attaining a college degree. These challenges range from a missing sense of camaraderie to a lack of understanding by university faculty and peers. When coupled with the visible and invisible wounds of war, a college degree seems to be an elusive goal for men and women returning from military service." (About SVA, 2011)

Demonstrating the value of our organization to younger veterans is the key to success for the VFW. This can be accomplished through engaging and informing younger veterans about the VFW and its programs and services, in addition to the benefits of membership.

Demographics

Student veterans' organizations consist of predominantly younger, current conflict, energetic, forward-thinking and diverse veterans with unique needs. The average student veteran is 27 years old and 73 percent are eligible for VFW membership having completed deployments overseas in support of the Global War on Terrorism or other qualifying operations.

SVA Chapters and other student veterans clubs generally exist in urban areas and near universities. Student veterans offer unique skill sets and can be an asset to growing the VFW at the grassroots level through various forms of technological innovation, networking and peer interaction.

Integration

Many veterans seeking higher education may look to be a part of a group with similar interests or seek out peer support. The VFW can provide this while reducing the aura of unintentional alienation felt by some younger veterans.

The VFW must work to bring student veterans together with VFW Posts in order to link them to their educational benefits, disseminate information, collaborate on ideas, and increase the VFW's appeal to younger generations of veterans. These partnerships are mutually beneficial for the Post and the SVA Chapter.

Collaboration

Most VFW Posts offer a variety of activities, services and have event/meeting spaces available. Coordination between VFW Post leadership, student veterans groups and similar clubs allows the VFW to improve their image within the local veterans' community, build relationships and allow for networking, mentorship and recruiting opportunities. Meetings should discuss pertinent issues to student veterans such as VA benefits, employment and training assistance, community and veterans' service, volunteering opportunities and generally making a difference in the lives of other veterans.

Additionally, **1 Student Veteran** www.vfw.org/1StudentVeteran/ is a great resource to connect student veterans with when initially making contact to ensure they're receiving their education benefits.



Engagement Strategies

- Advertising via campus newsletters or radio broadcasts (if applicable)
- Conducting outreach efforts at university functions
- Distributing materials or holding meetings at the campus veterans center (if applicable)

- Social networking sites— Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, etc.



Engagement Resources

- Availability of VFW facilities to conduct meetings/briefings/social events (holiday or stop day parties, watch parties for sporting events, service holiday events)
- National Veterans Services resources to help student veterans attain their rightfully earned disability benefits
- 1 Student Veteran, a new initiative with Student Veterans of America to assist veterans who are having difficulty receiving their education benefits through the VA
- National Military Service programs to encourage interaction with National Guard/Reserve components and student veteran groups through Unmet Needs and the VFW “Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship”
- Women veterans materials (roughly 20 percent of SVA members are women veterans)
- Current conflict campaign materials (the average student veteran is a 27-year-old Iraq or Afghanistan veteran)

- VFW members who are recent college graduates or university faculty

How to Locate a Student Veterans Chapter

There are nearly 1,000 SVA chapters nationwide and hundreds more unassociated chapters. Finding student veterans on a large college campus with thousands of students and hundreds of student activity groups can be a challenge. How can you begin contacting the student veterans in an area? Simple!

- Your first resource is the roster of SVA chapters in your area that is shared biannually with VFW Headquarters by SVA and sent to each VFW Department
- If that doesn’t work, try the Chapter Map & Directory on SVA’s website
<http://studentveterans.org/on-campus-veteran-support-group/directory.html>

If that does not yield results, there may not be a chapter associated with SVA in your area. Unassociated chapters are relatively easy to find but it will require more effort on your part. The easiest way to locate unassociated groups is to check the website for student life and activities, or the directory for registered student groups at your local college or university. This can be accomplished by navigating the educational institution’s website and searching sites for terms commonly found in student veteran’s group titles such as “military” or “veterans.”

Establishing a Student Veterans Group or Enrolling an Existing Group in SVA

If there isn't a student veterans group at your local college or university, but you have several students who are interested in starting one, it's a relatively simple process.

The regulations vary from school to school, but generally you will need two or three student veterans and a faculty or staff member. Additionally, a draft of a governing document or constitution will be necessary. Usually whoever is the governing entity of student groups at that particular institution can provide a draft, or if all else fails a sample can be attained through SVA. Membership standards and particular rules governing student group conduct and composition can vary from one school to another, so flexibility in planning is a necessity.

For example, many schools prohibit student groups from discriminating in their membership, so the group would have to be open to students who are not veterans. These members are usually what the VFW would consider Auxiliary members, such as spouses and other dependents.

For existing student veteran groups, the road to becoming an SVA chapter is much shorter. Simply guide them to the SVA application online, and they will find specific instructions on how to become an SVA chapter.

Particulars on both processes can be found online at:

<http://studentveterans.org/on-campus-veteran-support-group/become-a-chapter.html>

Chapter Success

Once a chapter is established, the work is really just beginning. The VFW can play a critical role in any student veteran group's success through providing access to veterans' service, community outreach, service and engagement opportunities, meeting space and mentorship. An excellent guide created by the Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University is a great source for ideas to guide a student veterans group to being a success and being an engaged asset to the community. The guide can be retrieved online at

<http://studentveterans.org/on-campus-veteran-support-group/chapter-success-manual.html>.

Any additional questions can be answered by the VFW National Headquarters. Please contact us at 816-756-3390.

NO ONE DOES MORE FOR VETERANS.