



YOUTH PROGRAMS

YOUTH PROGRAMS

☐ **Youth Activities**

- ☐ **Voice of Democracy**
- ☐ **Patriot's Pen**
- ☐ **Youth Programs**
 - *JROTC/SROTC*
 - *Civil Air Patrol*
 - *Navy Sea Cadets*
 - *Support of Community Youth Activities*
 - *Youth Recognition Programs*
 - *Post Scholarships*
 - *VFW in the Classroom*

☐ **Teacher of the Year**

☐ **Scouting**

- ☐ **Scout of the Year**
- ☐ **Scouting Awards**
 - *Eagle Scout*
 - *Girl Scout Gold Award*
- ☐ **Support of Scout Troop or activities**

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

The 2025-2026 Theme is
“How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?”

Program Overview

The Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition is especially designed for high school students from grades 9 through 12 including home-schooled students. It is a valuable educational experience for students and a wonderful opportunity for positive publicity for students, teachers, schools as well as the VFW in your community. The program dates back to 1946 and continues to be one of the VFW's most exciting programs. The VFW annually commits \$3 million in scholarships and incentives at the Post, District, State and National levels. Participants write and then record a three-to-five-minute audio essay on a patriotic theme selected annually. The Voice of Democracy Program is endorsed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and is designed to foster patriotism in the participants and enhance their written and oral communication skills. In addition, this program demonstrates the VFW's willingness to partner with local schools and the community.

Key Information for Posts

You may make this a joint effort with your Post Auxiliary. Prior planning ensures a high-level performance. Start early! In August, send press releases to local newspapers announcing the 2025-2026 topic. Shortly after school starts, bring or send Voice of Democracy materials to local principals or a previously developed contact within the school. Remember there are many home-schooled students that can't be reached through the local schools. This makes media presence even more critical to the success of this program. Your R.O.E (Regional Office of Education) or in some areas D.O.E. (District Office of Education) has a list of all home-schooled students who register with the R.O.E. or D.O.E. (Home schooled students are not required to register but most do to insure accreditation.) They are generally grateful for the opportunity to advertise student scholarship information, and home-schooled students and their parents are often grateful as well.

It will be the Post PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address to the District PP and VOD Chairperson's respectively. In turn, the respective District Chairperson will add your credentials to Scholars App as described in the simplified training developed by the Department of II. Scholars App will generate a free poster advertising the PP/VOD Contests. You can make copies of these posters and distribute them in libraries, churches, community bulletin boards etc. The posters are complete with a QR Code outlining the rules and eligibility for students. Students can enroll in the contests directly through Scholars App.



David Darte
Chairman

173 Yaeger Lake Trail
Litchfield, IL 62056
Cell: (217) 273-2218
Email: ddarte@yahoo.com

Post 3912-12

As soon as possible after the Oct. 31st deadline for student entries, assign your judges through Scholars App as directed in the department training. Post deadline for judging is Nov. 15, 2025 unless otherwise specified by your District VOD Chairman. Note: The judging criteria supplied by national is vague. The Judging Rubric that is used at the II department level gives judges more quantifiable guidelines and is available at vfwil.org under Resources/ PP and VOD. Department recommends you send this rubric to your post judges in addition to what Scholars App. provides.

Once the post judging is completed, Post Chairpersons should advance (promote) post winners to the district for judging as prescribed by Scholars App. Posts may advance their "winner(s)" based on the following schedule;

- 1-15 essays – One (1) entry to District
- 16-30 essays – Two (2) entries to District
- 31-45 essays – Three (3) entries to District

(NOTE: Each additional 15 essays, entitles another entry. The number of schools participating does not affect the number of entries allowed.)

Do not forget to heap loads of recognition and praise on your post winner(s). Completing a press release for the local paper with a picture, as well as some prize for the winner(s), would be most appropriate.

Key Information for Districts

District Chairpersons are urged to aggressively promote the Voice of Democracy Program. After coordination with your auxiliary counterpart, please reach out to every post and auxiliary in your district. Establish a quick, easy and effective line of communication between you and the Post Voice of Democracy Chairman/Commander. Consider using email or social media for this purpose. It will be the District PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to submit their name and email address to the Department PP and VOD Chairpersons respectively with cc to the Department Quartermaster at vfwil@vfwil.org. It will also be the District PP and VOD Chairperson's responsibility to enroll all posts in their district and their respective Post PP and VOD Chairpersons into Scholars App as described in the simplified instructions developed by Department of II. ASAP so those individuals will be included in the Scholars App Suborganization line-up. As the District meeting is to be a School of Instruction, it would not be out of line for the District Voice of Democracy Chairman to ask for time to present training materials to Post Voice of Democracy Chairmen and Commanders on the program requirements.

Posts have been advised to have their post judging completed by November 15, 2025. Please advise posts in your district of your deadline to receive post entries via Scholars App This will allow adequate time to assign judges, complete district judging and advance

District Winner to department in Scholars app by December 15, 2025.

Headshots of District winners can be uploaded to Scholars App. Picture must be a good quality color, head and shoulders photo (cell phone pictures are acceptable). As an alternative, pictures can be sent to Department Headquarters to arrive no later than December 15, 2025. The Student Introductory Questionnaire with both parent's names must also be in the hands of the department by December 15, 2025. This will allow time for the printing of the program book distributed at the State Awards Banquet.

Key Dates (Please Note New Deadlines)

- October 31, 2025 - Student entries to post
 - November 15, 2025 - Post judging complete unless otherwise specified your District
 - December 10, 2025 - District judging complete
 - December 15, 2025 - District winners due to the State Headquarters
 - January 10, 2026 - State Judging will be completed
 - January 10, 2026 - District Participation Report due to the State Headquarters
 - January 15, 2026 - Department winners due to National
- January 31, 2026 - Department reports due to National
February 14, 2026 - State Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet, Springfield

Prize Structure at the National and State Level

The winner from each state competition earns a trip to Valley Forge Pennsylvania and competes for national awards which range from a minimum \$1,000 up to \$35,000 for first place.

The State Awards are:

1st Place - John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund First Place Award in Memory of George G. Gorin, Jr	\$2,500 Cash
2nd Place – George Cramer/Ray Soden Scholarship Award	\$1,500 Cash
3rd Place – Terry L. McKinney Memorial Award	\$1,250 Cash
4th Place – Dale & Catherine Clifton Award	\$1,000 Cash
5th Place – Johnson Phelps Post 5220 Auxiliary.....	\$750 Cash
6th Place – Jarnell/Ross Award.....	\$600 Cash
7th Place – William Glenn Britt Memorial Award.....	\$550 Cash
8th Place - Dick Cosner Memorial Award.....	\$500 Cash
9th Place – Vern & Lorraine Umphery, Post 6863 & L.A. Award.....	\$450 Cash
10th Place – Robert C. Holysz Post 2200 Award.....	\$400 Cash
11th Place – Grant-Parkholme Post 9115 Award.....	\$375 Cash
12th Place – West End VFW Post 2004 Memorial Award.....	\$350 Cash
13th Place - Chester Spears Memorial Award.....	\$325 Cash
All other District Winners will receive an award of	\$300 Cash

Districts and posts wishing to become an award sponsor should forward their donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters by December 1, 2025; it should be earmarked V.O.D. Award Sponsorship. Thank you for this valuable support of the state program. Sponsorships will be awarded in the order received. Districts wishing to sponsor the Annual VOD Pizza Party or the Annual VOD Ice Cream Social for 2024-2025 Champions can donate \$300, but their donation must be earmarked “VOD Pizza Party Sponsor” or VOD Ice Cream Social Sponsor.” The first district to respond will receive the sponsorship. Districts wanting to sponsor other Voice of Democracy weekend events, such as Saturday’s student luncheon, the Springfield tour or the tour of The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum should forward a donation of \$300 to Department Headquarters. The Donation should be earmarked Springfield Tour.

Each District Winner and family will be provided two nights free lodging in Springfield and one ticket to the Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet.

The post sponsoring the state winner will receive a beautifully engraved plaque at the State Convention.

The school that the state winner attends will receive a \$500 award. In the event the student is home-schooled, the Department of Illinois VFW will donate \$500 to the charity of the parents’ choosing.

The district sponsoring the largest number of students participating in the VOD contest will receive \$100. Because districts are comprised of varying numbers of posts, the award will be calculated by dividing the total number of students participating by the total number of posts in the district (regardless if those posts participate or not). This is intended to level the playing field among larger and smaller districts. The award will be known as the Voice of Democracy Participation Quotient.

Additional Resources

All the information needed to conduct the PP/VOD programs is online at <https://www.vfw.org>. After you log in, (or create an account and log in), click on My VFW and then on the VFW Training and Support heading. There you will find a wealth of information about VFW programs! Scroll down and click on Community Service & Youth Activities for more information specific to Voice of Democracy.

You can download and print the student entry forms for Voice of Democracy at the National website also by visiting the following link: <https://www.vfw.org/community/youth-and-education/youth-scholarships>

National's supply catalog has printed entry forms, posters and a wide variety of awards and gifts designed for use in the Voice of Democracy program. Telephone: (800) 821-2606 or <https://www.vfwstore.org/>

The State Voice of Democracy Director and Assistant Director are excited to help your post and district have a very successful Voice of Democracy program. If you have any questions about the Voice of Democracy, let us know. Our contact information is at the top of this section of the CLM.

State Dashboard Reporting

The participation entry for the Voice of Democracy Contest will be posted to the dashboard in February based upon the report submitted by each District Voice of Democracy Chairman to the State Chairman.

NOTE: Posts can receive credit for Voice of Democracy participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois. Send a check earmarked, Voice of Democracy, by April 30, 2025:

Posts with 100 members or more must donate \$200.00. Posts with less than 100 members must donate \$100.00

Promote patriotism in our youth through the Voice of Democracy program as we embrace the motto of 2025-2026 IL VFW State Commander Eugene Blackwell "Serving our Community with Resilience"

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY



2025-2026 Theme

“How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

Patriotic Audio Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$35,000 Award

What is the Voice of Democracy Program?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 26,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is, “How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, state and national level. National winners will be notified of their scholarship & placement.

The Rules

Who can enter?

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12 by the Oct. 31 deadline who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions; or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application for which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over, GED or Adult Education Students are ineligible.

What do I need to enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or – 5 second max.) audio essay on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging. In addition you can submit your emailed entry form, essay, and audio file to the VFW Post upon approval. You must be the sole author of your essay. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The recording must be in your own voice and in English. Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

You may enter only one competition at one Post (if otherwise eligible) per year. At any time during the contest, additional participant personal information could be requested by the VFW, including but not limited to a photograph, SSN, or biographical information.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: First, visit this website [vfw.org/FindaPost](https://www.vfw.org/FindaPost) to “Find A VFW Post.” If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit this link <https://www.vfw.org/ContactUs/> and look for “Find a State Contact” to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at youthscholarships@vfw.org

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, **Oct. 31, 2025**. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Originality is worth 35 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Content is worth 30 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Voice of Democracy Competition Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Age _____ Jacket Size _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian (Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

() _____

Parent/Guardian Daytime Phone _____

Parent/Guardian Email _____

Participant Agreement for Students Advancing to National Level

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania as a guest of the VFW National Organization. In consideration for permission to participate in the National Voice of Democracy Competition ("Competition") I do hereby, for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators and assignees, waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and/or the Departments (state organizations) of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the Competition and/or arising out of any travel related to the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my audio file, essay, name and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

I Have Read and Understand the Rules and Participant Agreement

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry and that I have not inappropriately used any AI tools or Chat GPT. I have only entered the competition once yearly if otherwise eligible. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post Level Voice of Democracy Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of students participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (banquet, pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Departments.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Voice of Democracy Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____

() _____

Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

For assistance contact:
816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____





Voice of Democracy Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,
a _____ at _____
GRADE (FRESHMAN, SOPHOMORE, JUNIOR, SENIOR) SCHOOL NAME
in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDENT'S NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

SUMMARY

DISTRICT VOICE OF DEMOCRACY PARTICIPATION REPORT

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Voice of Democracy Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Scholarships & Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Scholarships & Awards \$ _____

District Additional Expenses \$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

***PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
VOICE OF DEMOCRACY CHAIRMAN***

DISTRICT VOICE OF DEMOCRACY REPORT FORM

[illegible]

YOUTH ACTIVITIES PROGRAM

Youth Activities programs can be a big asset for your post and district when they are promoted in your communities. Issue press releases and introduce these programs in the community. People like to hear of organizations doing things for veterans as well as local youth.

All the information that is needed to conduct the Youth Activities Program is online at <https://vfw.org>. After you log in (or create an account and login), click on My VFW and then on the VFW Training and Support heading. There you will find a wealth of information about VFW programs! Scroll down and click on Community Service & Youth Activities for more information specific information, including the Youth Activities Manual.

When approaching the various types of youth activities, develop a plan of implementation. Allow plenty of time for press releases and advertising as well as contact with community leaders. Local papers like to hear of different youth programs, so, it is usually easy to get coverage. Our youth is our future and can strengthen the posts within their communities. We are promoting good citizenship and showing young people the joys of service.

Informed post, district and auxiliary chairpersons are vital within our organizations. They provide a vital link between the community and today's youth. Contact your local schools and scouting organizations, as well as the many church groups of your areas. Check out the various kind of activities which they already have and try to build on them. Be excited about our programs. Be creative and work in new programs with local teachers and scout leaders. Be sure to honor these young people with certificates, trophies, plaques, and cash awards to help keep them excited and motivated.

Encourage your posts and districts to report their programs on the Department Dashboard. Reporting on a monthly basis makes it easier and more accurate.

Post Awards

There will be a \$50.00 cash award and certificate for first place presented to the Posts who have the most hours, dollars, and member participation reported in the following membership categories:

Membership Category 1 - Up to 150 Members
Membership Category 2 - 151-300 Members
Membership Category 3 - 300 Members and up

District Awards

There will be one district plaque award presented to the district who has the most hours, dollars, and member participation reported.



John Davin
Chairman

516 Lee Lane
Bolingbrook, IL 60440
Phone: 630-632-9878
Email:
bigjohndavin@hotmail.com

Post 5917-18

PATRIOT'S PEN

2025-2026 Theme: "How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?"

Program overview

The Patriot's Pen Program is a 300-400- word essay contest sponsored by the VFW and Auxiliary nationwide for students in grades 6 through 8, including those home-schooled. The VFW appreciates the difficult task that teachers and administrators have to develop curriculum to prepare students for their future. We realize that it is particularly challenging because of the myriad of career choices that lie ahead for students. Regardless of the path they choose, however, one thing that students have in common is that they will, hopefully, all become active U.S. citizens and the next generation of decision-makers and leaders of our great country. For that reason, the VFW believes that students are never too young to ponder the rich heritage of freedoms that they are inheriting from those patriots who have gone before and to begin to formulate their role in preserving and advancing those freedoms. The Patriot's Pen Contest incorporates both academic and good citizenship instruction. In addition, we believe that most would agree that learning to effectively organize and communicate their beliefs and ideas is a skill that will serve students well in all walks of life.

Key information for Posts

Get started in your schools as soon as possible. Be sure to have all the information (entry forms, theme, rules, eligibility requirements, post award information as well as district and state information) when you approach your teachers to help you - maybe even a copy of last year's winning essay. The VFW Store has many supplies to aid you, including posters that can be displayed in libraries and on community bulletin boards. Posts and auxiliaries are encouraged to work together in promoting and conducting the program.

Rules:

The contest is open to all 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students enrolled in a public, private, or parochial school as well as a home-schooled study program within the United States, its' territories and possessions; or enrolled in an overseas school as a dependent of the US Military or US Civilian personnel. (Foreign exchange students are excluded.)

The essay must be the contestant's original work; and the participants cannot refer to their race, disabilities, national origin, or identify themselves, their school, city or state, in any way within the essay. All essays must be typewritten and have to be no less than 300 words or more than 400 words. A one letter word such as (a), will be counted as one word. Essays either under or above requirements will be disqualified. Complete rules and judging criteria are available at <https://vfw.org>

After post judging is complete, the Post Chairman may advance their "winner(s)" based on the following schedule:

- 1-15 essays - One (1) entry to District
- 16-30 essays - Two (2) entries to District
- 31-45 essays - Three (3) entries to District

(NOTE: Each additional 15 essays entitles one additional entry. The number of schools participating does not affect the number of entries allowed.)

Once the post judging is completed, Chairpersons and Commanders should ensure that the winner's materials are properly submitted to the District Patriot's Pen Chairperson. Please follow the District Chairperson's instructions regarding where, when, and how entries are to be submitted. Unless otherwise directed, you will need to submit items 1-4, that are listed below under Key information for Districts. Note that there is a link provided there to access those documents. Do not forget to heap loads of recognition and praise on your post winner(s). Completing a press release for the local paper with a picture, as well as some prize for the winner(s), would be most appropriate.

Deadlines:

- October 31 - Student entries to post
- November 15 - Post judging complete Check on your District's due date
- December 10 - District judging complete
- December 15 - District winners due to the State Headquarters
- January 10 - State Judging will be completed
- January 10 - District Participation Report due to the State Headquarters
- January 15 - Department winners due to National
- January 31 - Department reports due to National
- February 7, 2026 State Voice of Democracy Awards Banquet, Springfield

Key Information for Districts

District Chairpersons are urged to aggressively promote the Patriot's Pen Program. After coordination with your auxiliary counterpart, please reach out to every post and auxiliary in your district. Establish a quick, easy, and effective line of communication between you and the Post Patriot's Pen Chairman/Commander. Consider using email or social media for this purpose. As the District meeting is to be a School of Instruction, it would not be at all out of line for the Patriot's Pen Chairman to ask for time to train Post Patriot's Pen Chairmen and Commanders on the program requirements.

Districts may advance one winner to the State Competition. Be sure to forward your District Winner's entry material to the State Youth Activities Chainnan with a copy to Department Headquarters to arrive no later than December 22, 2024. The winner's package must include the following:

- Typed copy of the speech

- Entry form with all necessary signatures

A glossy 3x5 head-and-shoulder, color photograph of your winner is acceptable but a digital photo is much preferred. Photos taken by a smart phone are acceptable and can easily be emailed.

- Patriot's Pen Introductory questionnaire

(Email is the preferred method of submitting entries! A flash drive with all the information is also perfectly acceptable. If that is foreign to you, please recruit someone to help you - entries submitted the old fashioned way will be accepted as well)

Please understand that all this information is critical both to comply with National requirements and to allow the printing of the program book distributed at the State Awards Banquet. If critical information is not received timely, I may need to contact your student directly even if you have not yet announced your district winner. Please send in a complete entry - including quality photographs - so this action is not required.

The District Report Form and District Participation report form are due by December 30. Those documents are available on following pages.

The following link will allow you to access the documents required for submission of your entry. Email entries are fast and eliminate expensive postage and the risk of lost mail. Documents can also be copied as needed. Documents are available on the slate website at <http://www.vfw11.org> and are located under Programs. Click on Patriot's Pen.

Top 4 entries will receive two nights lodging at the Department of Illinois Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards Banquet and meeting weekend in Springfield. Students will also tour Springfield sites.

The State Awards are:

1st Place - John H. Emery Youth, Pageantry and Patriotism Fund First Place Award in memory of Ronald Hubert \$1,000 Cash
2nd Place - Gaye Hines Memorial Second Place Award.....\$500 Cash
3rd Place Award - William Glenn Britt Memorial Third Place Award.....\$400 Cash
4th Place Award - Raymond L. Moreland Memorial Fourth Place Award.....\$300 Cash

****The winner will be announced at the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen Awards Banquet and the winner will read his or her winning essay****

District Award

The district sponsoring the largest number of students participating in the PP contest will receive \$100. Because the district is comprised of varying numbers of posts, the award will be calculated by the total number of students participating divided by the total number of posts in the district (regardless of if those post participate or not). This is intended to level the playing field among larger and smaller districts. The award will be known as the "Patriot's Pen Participation Quotient".

State Dashboard Reporting

The Participation entry for the Patriot's Pen Contest will be posted in February based upon the report submitted by each District Youth Activities Chairman to the State Director.

NOTE: Posts can receive credit for Patriots Pen participation by making a cash donation to the Department of Illinois, VFW earmarked 'Patriots Pen' by April 30, 2025. Posts with 100 members or more must donate \$100.00 Posts with less than 100 members must donate \$50.00

The Post sponsoring the State Winner will receive a beautifully engraved plaque at the State Convention.

Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award

(Please note Deadlines)

This Program recognizes teachers who care about America. VFW annually recognizes the Nation's top classroom Elementary, Junior High (Middle Schools) and High School teachers who teach Citizenship Education topics regularly and who promote American History, traditions and institutions. Nominations are submitted by fellow teachers, supervisors, and other interested individuals (not relatives). Self-nominees are not eligible.

National Headquarters mails the brochures out directly to Schools...but posts still need to contact the schools regarding this program.

Posts will need to follow up, and the deadlines are as follows:

- Teacher Nominations to Post October 31, 2025
- Completion of Post Judging November 15, 2025
- Completion of District Judging December 15, 2025
- Completion of Department Judging January 10, 2026
- Department winners to National January 15, 2026
- District participation reports due to Department Chairman - January 1, 2026
- Department Reports to National February 1, 2026

District Chairmen must send the following to Department Headquarters for Judging:

- ▶ Winner's original entry form and essay of 350 words or less
- ▶ Winner's official Post Teacher Entry form with signatures at Post & District Level.
- ▶ One page resume (no more than two sides)
- ▶ Up to 5 (five) pages (both sides) of additional documentation (i.e. news articles, supervisor's recommendations.)
- ▶ Good quality head and shoulders photograph (Digital photos are preferred! Color copies or low-grade computer printouts will not be accepted.)

(Note: No entries will be considered for department Judging if all of the above criteria is not included with the nomination.)

State Awards

The first-place winner in each of the three categories will receive \$100.00 Cash and a special engraved plaque.

A special engraved plaque will also be presented to the winning Teacher's School.

The Categories are:

- Kindergarten through 5th Grade
- 6th through 8th Grade
- 9th through 12th Grade

National Awards: (as shown on our National Headquarters web page, <https://vfw.org>)

Included in this Program is the end-of-the-year Post Report Form that the District Chairman is required to fill out and submit to the State Youth Activities Program Director by no later than January 1, 2025.

PATRIOT'S PEN



2025-2026 Theme

“How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?”

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

Patriotic Written Essay Competition Grand Prize: \$5,000 Award

What is the Patriot's Pen Program?

Conducted nationwide, this VFW-sponsored youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on an annual patriotic theme. We invite you to join the more than 60,000 students who participated last year in this contest.

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, State and national level. Department (State) winners receive a portion of \$55,000 in national awards. National Winners will receive at least \$500. **The first-place national award is currently \$5,000.**

The Internal Revenue Service requires a recipient awarded more than \$599 be given Form 1099 identifying the proceeds as taxable income. This may require the winner to provide their social security number.

How Does the Contest Work?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post.

The contest consists of four levels. The first level (entry) is sponsored by VFW Posts. Post winners advance, one for every 15 entries, to the VFW District (regional) level where one first-place winner is advanced to the VFW Department (state) level. The first-place winner at the Department level is then advanced into the VFW national competition.

Who Can Enter?

Patriot's Pen is open to 6th, 7th and 8th-grade students enrolled by the Oct. 31 deadline in public, private or parochial schools in the U.S., its territories or its possessions; or dependents of U.S. military or civilian personnel in overseas schools. Home-schooled students also are eligible. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application which has not been denied) and intend to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. (Foreign exchange students are ineligible.)

How Do I Get Started?

- Ask a teacher or youth group/club adult leader to supervise the Patriot's Pen writing contest.
- Contact a participating VFW Post and indicate your interest in participating.

- Establish a contact person who is a member of that VFW Post or its VFW Auxiliary.
- Make sure that your essay is submitted to the VFW Post before the contest deadline of Oct. 31. You can submit your essay and entry form electronically by email upon the Post's approval. Entries sent to the VFW National Headquarters directly will be returned.

How Am I Judged?

Knowledge of the theme is worth 30 points:

You must show a thorough knowledge of the theme in your work. Demonstrate you have researched the issue extensively.

Theme development is worth 35 points:

Answer all relevant facts about the theme such as the who, what, where, when and why. Relate the theme to your own experiences.

Clarity of ideas is worth 35 points:

Write your essay in an easy-to-understand format. Leave your reader with a clear understanding of your explanation of the theme.

What Is the Theme?

VFW's Commander-in-Chief annually chooses the year's theme. The 2025-2026 theme is:

How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?"

Deadline Information.

To qualify, all entries must be submitted to a sponsoring VFW Post by midnight Oct. 31.

Note:

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions:

First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find a VFW Post."

If you don't have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble contacting them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) headquarters office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/contactus to look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email.

**For assistance contact
the VFW National Headquarters
at 816.968.2787
Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org**

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Patriot's Pen Competition

Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

(____) _____
Phone Email

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Essay Word Count _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian (Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

(____) _____
Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone

Parent/Guardian's Email _____

What Are the Rules?

- You must write your own essay.
- All essays should be typed in English with no color or graphics. 300 - 400 words in length (+ or - 5 word max). Every word is counted regardless of length. The essay title (theme) or added footnotes do not contribute to the word count.
- To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.
- Do not put your name on the essay. The entry form is your essays cover sheet. Secure the Official Student Entry Form with a staple or other fastener on top of your essay. Contestants are allowed to enter only once each year if otherwise eligible (one Post competition).
- The essay must be contestant's original work and a product of the contestant's own thinking. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The approach to the Patriot's Pen theme should be positive and clearly focused. Poetry is not acceptable. Quotations may be used sparingly if plainly identified wherever used. A contestant's teacher, counselor or parent may check the essay for punctuation, grammar and/or spelling, but the content must remain the contestant's. Contestants will be judged on the basis of their essay alone and are not required to present the essay orally. All essays become the property of the Veteran's of Foreign Wars. The VFW retains non-exclusive rights to the use of your essay and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.
- At any time during the contest additional participant personal information (i.e. SSN, photo, etc.) could be requested by the VFW.

I Have Read and Understand the Contest Rules

Signature of Student Participant _____ Date _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Patriot's Pen Competition.

Post Commander/Chairperson Signature _____ Post# _____

VFW Auxiliary President/Chairperson Signature (If applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of participants _____ No. of winners _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarships awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (Banquet, Pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Patriot's Pen Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department.

District Chairperson Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

(____) _____
Phone Email

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the student named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Patriot's Pen Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson Signature _____

(____) _____
Daytime Phone Email

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Local VFW Post Information:

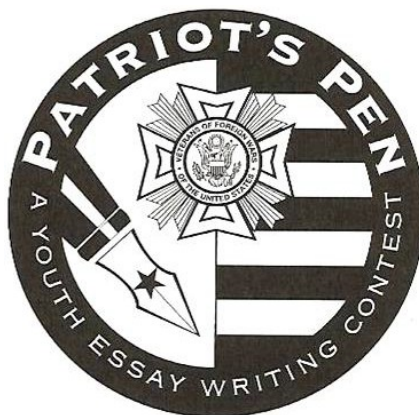
Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____

Alternate Contact: _____

Phone: _____ Best Time To Call: _____





Patriot's Pen Introduction Questionnaire

Representing VFW Post _____ and its Auxiliary,

a _____ at _____
GRADE (6th, 7th or 8th) SCHOOL NAME

in _____
CITY

STUDENT'S NAME

PRONUNCIATION OF STUDEN'TS NAME

The student is the Son/Daughter of

Mother: _____

and

Father: _____

2025-2026 Illinois VFW Commander's Leadership Manual
SUMMARY

**DISTRICT PATRIOT'S PEN
PARTICIPATION REPORT**

DISTRICT NO. _____

DEPARTMENT OF _____, VFW

The VFW Posts and Auxiliaries identified in this report in this District participated in the VFW annual Patriot's Pen Program.

GRAND TOTALS FOR POST COMPETITION: list totals taken from District report form(s)

_____	_____	_____	_____
Posts	Auxs	Students	Post Winners Advanced
\$ _____		\$ _____	
Monetary Awards		Addl. Money Expended	

MONETARY VALUE OF DISTRICT COMPETITION (add County Councils if applicable):

District Monetary Awards \$ _____

District Additional Expenses \$ _____

Signed by: _____ Date _____
District Chairman

***PLEASE ATTACH COMPLETED REPORT FORM(S) AND GIVE
THIS COMPLETED SUMMARY TO YOUR DEPARTMENT
PATRIOT'S PEN CHAIRMAN***

DISTRICT PATRIOT'S PEN REPORT FORM

[illegible]



SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD CITATIONS FOR ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS AND THEIR SCHOOLS

Each year, the Veterans of Foreign Wars selects elementary, middle and high school teachers to participate in the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher program. VFW Post Teacher Award Chairpersons may submit one candidate in each grade level to their District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your **Department Headquarters and/or Department Chairperson by Jan.1.** The Department may select a single candidate in each grade level and submit them to **VFW National Headquarters, on the Dashboard by Feb.1, for National judging.** Department Teacher winners that are received at National Headquarters By Feb.1 will receive a VFW National citation for both the winning teacher and their school.

Simply visit vfw.org/#login, log in to My VFW, then look under Member Resources, click on VFW Training & Support, then click on Community Service & Youth Programs, then look under Additional Resources. The Teacher Entry form, Instruction sheet, and Chairperson's Guide are up on the VFW website.

Who Is Eligible?

1. Teachers who promote civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism are prime candidates for this award. For example, do you know a teacher who plans field trips to city hall or organizes community volunteer projects? Maybe you know an instructor who invites veterans into the classroom to discuss their military experiences. Perhaps you are familiar with a teacher who fosters the development of democratic values and beliefs through special projects. If you know of such a teacher, honor them today.
2. All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

Documentation Required for all Candidates:

1. All Post-level nominees should provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo of themselves, if available. These items will be forwarded on to the District, if applicable, and/or the Department with the winning teacher entry form.

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

2025-2026 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

What is the Teacher Award Program?

Founded in 1899, the VFW highly supports the education of America's youth. VFW and its Auxiliary have developed a slate of programs dedicated to helping America's educators. VFW Citizenship Education programs stimulate interest in America's history, traditions, Americanism, civic responsibility, flag etiquette and patriotism.

Teachers care deeply about America and its children. They're concerned about the perpetuation of America's noblest traditions and highest ideals. Wouldn't you like to see them get the honor they deserve? Now you can.

Why Should I Enter?

VFW wants to identify and recognize America's best educators who instill a sense of national pride in students. The national awards include \$1,000 Smart/Maher award for each of the top K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 teachers for professional development expenses, \$1,000 award for each winning teacher's school, commemorative plaques and all-expense-paid trip to the VFW National Convention.

Who is Eligible?

All current certified/licensed teachers in grades K-12 are eligible. Previous national VFW winners are ineligible. Nominations can be submitted by themselves, fellow teachers, supervisors, family members or other interested individuals.

How are teachers nominated?

Fill out the official entry form contained on the next page, and provide a one-page resume as a minimum or up to five pages, including the resume, as a maximum of documentation of their teaching experience (for example: resume, references, news articles, etc.) and a head-and-shoulder photo if available.

Please submit your completed entry form signed, along with the required documentation to your local VFW Post. Visit vfw.org/FindaPost for Post locations or call VFW Programs Department at 816.756.3390 ext. 6287 to find the Post nearest you.

What Is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31, 2025. It is the responsibility of the nominator to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Citizenship (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what extent does the teacher encourage and/or model good citizenship and community involvement?

Innovation (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, how much innovation (new ideas, new tools, new resources, and new approaches) does this teacher utilize in the classroom? Does this teacher's effort reflect an ongoing desire to stimulate the students with new things?

Resources (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree has this teacher demonstrated an ability to identify and utilize new and exceptional resources to fund, facilitate and provide materials for his or her classroom? Does this teacher tap into outside agencies, organizations and individuals to acquire materials and expertise in the classroom? As an example – bringing speakers, finding in-kind and monetary donations, or utilizing local opportunities like museums, field trips and local events.

Passion (1-25 points): On a scale of 1-25, to what degree does this teacher appear to be passionate about the profession of teaching? Are they regularly seeking to upgrade their skills? Do they try and find ways to encourage their students? Do they take a personal interest in their student's individual success?

*If you have any questions, please call
Mary Spencer, 816.756.3390, ext 6287 or
mspencer@vfw.org.*

Local VFW Post Information:

Contact: Name, Title

Phone

Best time to call

Alternative Contact: Name, Title

Phone

Best time to call

2025-2026 Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award



Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025

2025-2026 Official Entry Form Teacher Award Competition

Please tell us who you are nominating—below in box.

Name: First, M.I., Last	
Address	
City, State, Zip	
()	
Phone	Email
Grade Level (K-5, 6-8, or 9-12)	
School Name	
School Address	
()	
School Phone	School Email

Person Nominating Teacher

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this teacher has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Teacher Award Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairperson's Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President's/Chairperson's Signature
(If Applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of teachers participating _____

No. of winners advanced to District _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. scholarship awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post /Aux. additional expenses \$ _____
(banquet, pins, etc.)

To Be Completed by the VFW District (If Applicable)

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Teacher Award District Competition and is our entry into the Department judging.

District Chairperson's Signature _____ Dist # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____
Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that the teacher named in the previous section is the duly selected first-place winner of the Teacher Award Department Competition, is our entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson's Signature _____

() _____
Daytime Phone _____ Email _____

The winner ☒ has been ☐ will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries will begin at the local VFW Post level. Individual nominees may submit their entry directly to the Post. This VFW Post should be within your local area and within your U.S. state of residence. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One Post winner can be submitted for each level, and to District by Nov. 15. If your Department does not have a District judging, then submit to your Department Headquarters by Jan. 1. Otherwise, one District winner, at each level, may advance to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post in your area, follow these instructions: First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to find your local VFW Post. Be sure this Post is within the state you reside in. If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/ContactUs and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email. If you still need assistance, please email us at VFW National Headquarters at mspencer@vfw.org.

VFW DISTRICT CHAIRMEN ONLY

**DISTRICT REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR THE
SMART/MAHER VFW NATIONAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION TEACHER AWARD**

USE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION TO COMPLETE THE ATTACHED:

The guidelines listed below are intended to help clarify the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher Award reporting process and to ensure that all participation and expenses incurred by Posts/Auxiliaries are completely and accurately reported for proper credit:

TOTAL POST PARTICIPATION

List Posts in your District that had a declared winner. Please list the participating Posts in numerical order on the report form.

TOTAL AUXILIARY PARTICIPATION

If Post has an Auxiliary, credit their participation by indicating *YES* or *NO*.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Number of schools that had teachers nominated.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPATING TEACHERS

Number of teachers that actually were nominated.

AWARDS AND MONEY EXPENDED

Total dollar values of awards presented to teacher participants at Post & District level. All additional moneys allocated and expended in conducting their program. (Banquet, gifts, medals, citations, etc.)

**Forwarding Smart/Maher VFW Natl Citizenship Education Teacher Award
District Winners to Department**

District Chairman: The District winner's materials that should be forwarded to the Department Chairman (immediately after the District judging is completed) are:

1. District winner's original nomination form and essay of 350 words or less signed by person nominating the teacher.
2. District winner's official Post Teacher Entry form w/signatures at Post & District level.
3. One page resume (**no more than two sides**).
4. Up to 5 pages (both sides) of additional documentation (i.e. news articles, supervisor's

YOUTH CADETS AWARDS

VFW awards for special recognition of outstanding achievement and exceptional leadership are available for Junior and Senior ROTC programs, Naval Sea Cadets and Civil Air Patrol Cadets. If any of these programs exist in your community, these awards provide your Post an outstanding opportunity to honor these patriotic young people.

JROTC

(Junior Reserve Officer Training Course)

Why should a Post become involved?

Few youth programs provide a greater benefit to a Post than involvement with a Scouting or JROTC unit. Both programs annually produce individuals with an appreciation for patriotism, civic responsibility, and the likelihood of future military service. As Boy and Girl Scouts, Sea Scouts, Venture Scouts and JROTC cadets, these individuals are often a tremendous asset to a Post by helping with Post projects such as placing flags on graves on Veterans Day and Memorial Day, helping with Post maintenance and fix-up efforts, helping distribute "Buddy"® Poppies, providing color guards and assisting with VFW public events.

As young adults, participants in these programs are much more likely than others of their age group to enter the military and, ultimately, become eligible for membership in the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Awards Administration

Cadet awards may be initiated by the local VFW Post or directly by the cadet's unit. In either case, documentation should come from the unit as follows:

- Naval Sea Cadets: from the unit commanding officer in a letter with copy to NSCCHQ.
- Civil Air Patrol Cadets: from the candidate's squadron by submitting a CAPF-120.
- JROTC/SROTC Cadets: from the unit by submitting a letter documenting the criteria.

Criteria for Civil Air Patrol and Naval Sea Cadets

- Good academic standing
- Satisfactory progress in the cadet program
- Outstanding achievement in community service and/or the cadet program
- Outstanding leadership in the cadet program
- High moral character
- Exceptional professionalism in appearance and actions (Officer Award)
- Outstanding military bearing and conduct in and out of uniform (NCO Award)
- Involvement in patriotic programs, drill team, color guard, etc.
- Demonstrated potential and willingness to assume higher levels of responsibility

Additional criteria for JROTC & SROTC awards:

- Positive attitude toward the ROTC program
- For JROTC, must be enrolled as a 10th - 12th grade JROTC student
- For SROTC, must be an undergraduate student enrolled in Military Science I through IV
- Must maintain a "B" average in ROTC curriculum and a "C" average in all remaining subjects with no failing grades in the previous semester
- Active in at least one other student extracurricular activity (music, athletics, government, etc.)

Upon receipt of the letter and documentation, VFW Programs Department personnel will review the submitted materials, approve and contact the VFW Department. The Department or Post may then purchase the award(s) through the VFW Store for presentation.

The VFW has many other opportunities that you can be involved with Youth Activities in your community. Remember, this is a win-win situation for the Post. The Post can support youth in the community.

Here are some other examples of how you can support Youth Activities. This list is not all inclusive. Talk to your community leaders, youth leaders, churches, and other community groups on how you Post or District can become involved and support the Youth of America

Support of Community Youth Activities

- o Coach or sponsor a Youth Team (baseball, soccer, football, basketball, soccer, etc)
- o Host a youth activity or event at your post
- o Work with a youth group on community event (food or clothing collection)
- o Meet with Key Club or National Honor Society at HS on community project
- o Sponsor a pizza party or ice cream for youth group

Youth Recognition Programs

- o Recognize an outstanding young person in your community
- o The VFW Store has numerous certificates that you can purchase to recognize youth
- o Leaders of Youth Program
- o Individual Patriotic Services
- o Individual Appreciation for Community Service
- o Honor Certificates for Youth

Post Scholarships

- o If your Post is one of the lucky Posts that have sufficient funding, you may consider awarding a scholarship to a local High School Student
- o Talk to Key Club or National Honor Society and see if they have any students needing financial assistance to attend leadership conference

VFW in the Classroom

Every day, we strive to thank America's educators by providing them with helpful resources and encouraging our members to visit local classrooms. Let us help you educate America's future leaders and bring history to life!

Veterans play an important role in educating our nation's youth about the founding principles upon which America was founded. As combat veterans, VFW members can provide students with a unique perspective about the sacrifices America's service members make to maintain freedom for all of us.

When visiting a classroom, a VFW member will prepare a brief introduction, a main presentation and a Q&A session. Depending on the topic, a member may bring appropriate memorabilia, uniforms, photographs and other relevant material.

American history is something we all share, and there's no one better to help tell that story than someone who's had a great part in shaping it.

If you are a VFW member or Post interested in becoming active with your local schools, see the tips and suggestions on the following pages.

SCOUTING PROGRAM

Scout of the Year Program



Ron Milton
Chairman

209 Taurus Dr
Shiloh, IL 62269
Phone: 618-604-0423
Email: usafret1@att.net

Post 1739-14

Annually, the VFW honors Scouts who have been the recipient of one of the following awards: Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Silver Award, or Sea Scout Quartermasters Award. Also, in order to be eligible for the honor, the Scout must be a Registered, active member of a Scout BSA Troop, Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew, or Sea Scout Ship who has risen above their peers in exemplifying the exceptional qualities of their rank.

The Department of Illinois will be making an Award to the First Place nominee from the Scouting America programs and the First Place Girl Scout of America nominee in the following amount however, only one Scout will be advanced to the National Competition:

\$300.00 Cash Award - Scouting America Scout of the Year
\$300.00 Cash Award - Girl Scouts of America Scout of the Year

This is a natural fit for the VFW, and will afford your Posts and Districts an opportunity to create activities that promote good Citizenship and Americanism. Each Post and District is urged to assign a liaison person to work closely with scout groups in your area.

On the Post level you can establish a Post Award of maybe a plaque or cash. Then advance your Scout of the Year entry or entries to your District or directly to the Department if no District program is offered. Districts are encouraged to honor entrants as well, but are not required.

Deadline dates for the Scout of the Year Award:

Student Entry to Post – March 1, 2026
Post Entry to State Headquarters – April 1, 2026
State Winner to National – May 1, 2026

The necessary forms can be found on the state website at www.vfwil.org. Click on resources tab and scroll down to Scout of the Year. Make an extra effort to involve scouts in your Post and District programs and activities. The rewards are great for you as well as the Scouts. By working with your local scouting groups, you may also be able to assist and promote the scouts to work toward achieving all of their scouting goals, not just those that qualify them to enter the Scout of the Year contest.

Let's plan to make Youth Activities a priority in our Posts and Districts. These programs will give your post more visibility in your community, will allow you more opportunity for new member recruitment, as well as encouraging current members to get involved because they have children and grandchildren. Remember too, the Patriot's Pen and Scouting programs can be a precursor for the Voice of Democracy Contest.

I sincerely hope that your involvement with youth activities this year will be a pleasant and rewarding experience for all involved. Always remember that you are invited to call if you have any questions or need any help.

Other Scout Programs

If your Post doesn't have anyone in your area that qualifies for Scout of the Year, there are still plenty of ways you can still meet the requirements to get the green on the dashboard. Here are some examples. The list is not all inclusive but is an example of how other Posts are supporting the Scouting Program. Contact Scout packs or troops in your area and see how you can help.

- Allow a boy scout or girl scout troop to use your facility for meetings
- Volunteer to be a scout leader
- Work with a local scout on their Eagle Scout or Gold Award project
- Teach a class or help the scouts to receive a merit badge
- Work with the scouts on a flag retirement ceremony
- Work with the scouts on a food drive or clothing drive

Don't think that you can't get credit on your dashboard just because you don't have an Eagle Scout in your area. There are lots of ways to be involved with scouting. Remember, you have to fill out the Program Reporting Form and tell what you did to support scouting. I recommend you submit a report after each activity just so you don't forget about it.

VFW SCOUT OF THE YEAR

Judges Score Sheet

DEPARTMENT/STATE _____ DATE OF JUDGING _____

JUDGE'S NAME & SIGNATURE _____

Instructions to Judges: Read and review all letters and data submitted by each applicant with the criteria listed below in mind. Use the input data to develop an overall presentation of the scout's personality that is consistent through all the data and letters submitted and grade each scout in each character areas. Grade each candidate using the following scoring system:

EXCEPTIONAL = 6-10 pts. AVERAGE = 4-5pts. LOW = 1-3 pts.
Ten (10) points are the maximum for each of the sub-elements.

SECTION A: HIGH SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

_____ Academic achievement
_____ Extra-curricular activities
_____ Demonstrated leadership
_____ Significance of participation
_____ **Sub-Total** (40 pts. Max.)

SECTION C: COMMUNITY SERVICE RECORD

_____ Evidence of regular participation
_____ Impact on the community
_____ Demonstrated leadership
_____ Demonstrated achievement (awards, etc.)
_____ **Sub-Total** (40 pts. Max.)

SECTION B: SCOUTING RECORD

_____ Timeliness of achieving rank
_____ Demonstrated leadership
_____ Participation in events
_____ Quality of Eagle, Gold, Summit, or Quartermaster Project
_____ Demonstrated adherence to Scout Code
_____ Exemplary moral/spiritual character
_____ **Sub-Total** (60 pts. Max.)

SECTION D: CONTENT OF THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

_____ Evidence of exceptional character
_____ Evidence of leadership qualities
_____ Willingness to accept responsibility
_____ Evidence of self-confidence
_____ Evidence of serving others
_____ Evidence of respect for authority
_____ Evidence of patriotism and respect for this nation and its symbols.
_____ **Sub-Total** (70 pts. Max.)

_____ **TOTAL SCORE (210 PTS. Max.)**

**JUDGES HAVE THE OPTION OF INTERVIEWING TOP FINALISTS
PRIOR TO FINAL SELECTION.**

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program



WHAT IS THE SCOUT OF THE YEAR PROGRAM?

Annually, the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States recognizes individuals who are: Eagle Scouts, Girl Scout Gold Award recipients, Venture Summit Award recipients and/or Sea Scout Quartermasters who have risen above their peers in exemplifying the qualities of that rank.

AM I ELIGIBLE?

To be eligible for the award, the candidate must:

- Be the recipient of the Eagle Scout Award, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit Award or Sea Scout Quartermaster Award.
- Be a registered, active member of a Boy or Girl Scout Troop, Venturing Crew or Sea Scout Ship at the time the above reward was received.
- Have demonstrated exemplary citizenship in school, Scouting and community.

Prior National Scout of the Year winners are ineligible. There is no minimum age requirement for applicants as long as all other eligibility criteria has been met. The maximum age requirement for applicants is 18 years old. If an applicant reaches their 18th birthday during the nomination year, they remain eligible as long as they are still in high school at the time of the submission deadline. A Scout may enter through only one VFW Post. A local Post can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHAT ARE THE DEADLINES?

- Deadline for entry to VFW Post is **March 1**.
- One candidate with full entry criteria must be submitted by a VFW Post to the next level of judging by **April 1**. The VFW Department Scouting Chairman can provide this information.
- The Department winner must be selected and submitted by their Department Scouting chairman to the VFW National Headquarters by **May 1**.

Questions should be directed to 816.756.3390, ext. 6787 during normal business hours Monday through Friday or emailed to scouting@vfw.org.

Official Entry Form

SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

MUST BE COMPLETED BY EACH CONTESTANT
and submitted directly to a VFW post in your community.

Name: First, M.I., Last

Address

City, State, Zip

()

Home Phone

Email

Date of Birth (dd/mm/yyyy)

Scout Troop Number

SCOUT/VENTURE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the foregoing information is accurate and if I am the winner, I will make myself available to receive the award at a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Scout/Venture Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

UNIT LEADER'S CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that the above-named Scout/Venture is an active member of our unit or was when the award was received and the information supplied by the candidate is accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Unit Leader's Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

PARENT'S CONSENT

I hereby certify that all information on this application is correct. I willingly submit this name for consideration as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States' Scout of the Year. If this individual is selected as the winner, I will ensure that he/she is allowed to attend a presentation ceremony as designated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Father, Mother or Guardian Signature

Date (mm/dd/yyyy)



SCOUT OF THE YEAR Program

VFW DEPARTMENT SCOUTING CHAIRMAN

PHONE: _____

SPONSORING VFW POST

POST NUMBER: _____

ADDRESS: _____

POST COMMANDER'S SIGNATURE: _____

DISTRICT CERTIFICATION IF APPLICABLE, CHECK WITH THE VFW DEPARTMENT SCOUTING CHAIRMAN

DISTRICT #: _____

DISTRICT CDR.: _____

DEPARTMENT CERTIFICATION MUST BE COMPLETED BY DEPARTMENT VFW SCOUTING CHAIRMAN OR DEPT. COMMANDER

DEPARTMENT: _____

SUBMITTED BY: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

WHAT DOCUMENTATION IS REQUIRED?

The following documentation should be submitted:

- **Photograph of the Scout** — must be attached to this form. The Scout must appear in correct, complete uniform for their current rank. Recommended size 3" x 5".
- **School Participation Record** — a single page, one-sided resume of the candidate's school activities indicating academic achievements, offices held, honors received and significant participation in other activities.
- **Scouting Record** — maximum of three pages, one side only, listing of all Scouting participation beginning with Cub Scouts or Brownies - years of participation, unit numbers and sponsors. Also include when Eagle, Gold, Summit or Quartermaster Award was received and Palms. Identify leadership positions held at all levels, participation in Scouting activities (jamborees, Order of the Arrow conferences, etc.) and the candidate's Eagle Scout, Girl Scout Gold Award, Venture Summit or Sea Scout Quartermaster Project.
- **Community Service Record** — a single page, one-sided resume listing participation in community and religious service organizations (excluding Scouting and school), noting leadership positions held and any recognition received.
- **Letters of Recommendation** — Submit three letters, no more than two pages in length from:
 - A scout leader.
 - A community member.
 - A teacher/faculty member (if homeschooled, a parent letter is allowed).
 - In addition, you may include one or two additional letters, no more than two pages in length from local community members who have special knowledge of the candidate's abilities/accomplishments.
- **Completed Entry Form** — submitted to a local VFW Post. Local Posts can be identified by zip code at vfw.org/FindaPost.

WHO MAKES UP THE VFW SCOUTING TEAM?

The backbone of Scouting in the VFW is the VFW Scouting Team. These VFW members are deeply involved in Scouting, most with decades of experience.

Appointed by their Department Commander, they are responsible for promoting scouting in their state. They are available to encourage Posts to sponsor units, support units and individual Scout projects. They should be the Department's "expert" on all phases of scouting. Many Departments have multiple members of the VFW Scouting Team, but every Department should have at least one individual to promote the values of scouting to youth and to the VFW itself. For more information on the VFW Scouting Team call 816.756.3390, ext 6787, or email scouting@vfw.org



Scouting Tracking Form

The attached scouting tracking form will assist posts and districts in tracking scouting activities and entries into the State dashboard.

Record your scouting contacts as they happen and while they are fresh on your mind. Some of your contacts can also be used for community service and Americanism.

Your contacts will also help in promoting the Scout of the Year Program. If you have any questions or assistance, please contact me at usa-fret1@att.net.

Ron Milton
State Scouting Chair.



Veterans of Foreign Wars State of Illinois

Scouting Activity Report Form

Due Quarterly: July 31, October 31, January 31, April 30

Post #	Post Name	Dist.	Quarter Ending			
Scouting America Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage	
List only things that you do in support of Scouting America						
Girl Scout Programs		Members	Hrs	Money	Milage	
List only things that you do in support of Girl Scout, USA						
Donations to Scouting Programs		Members		Money		
List only donations made by your VFW or Auxiliary Unit members						
Scouting America						
Girl Scouts						
USE OF BUILDING		Members		Money		
Total Members this Report			Total Monies Donated			
Total Hours this Report			Total Miles			
VFW State Headquarters 217-529-6688						
3300 Constitution Drive						
Springfield IL 62711						

Also report VFW Scout Activity on your Community Service Report