**Welcome to**

**Elks Veterans Services 101**

![A close up of a map

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Webpage: www.mnelks.org/veterans.html

Share Veterans events on Facebook: @MnEVS

**Finding Local Veterans in Need:**

**Where to Start**

“Our Lodge wants to help, but we can’t find any Veterans in need.” Sound familiar? Our office fields this question from time to time, particularly in areas without a VA facility nearby. Here’s how to get started.

First, the VA operates thousands of facilities, and not all are hospitals. They run housing facilities for formerly homeless Veterans, offsite clinics, benefits offices, and Vets Centers. Many of these facilities, especially Vets Centers, are located away from traditional VA campuses. Contact the staff at these facilities and ask how the Elks can help.

Additionally, the VA has dozens of outreach programs in each facility, from adaptive sports programs to skills-based classes to financial counseling and more. Keep an open mind, and research where the needs are, even if it means leaving your comfort zone and changing what your Lodge has done in the past.

Then, search online for Veterans organizations in your area. There are more than 45,000 Veterans nonprofits registered in the United States. There may be some just around the corner that you don’t know about.

You can also search for city, county, regional or state Veterans offices and let them know the Elks are there to serve veterans in need. Check for Veterans meetings and gatherings on community calendars and ask if you can stop by to say a few words about the Elks support for veterans.

Many large nonprofits, like the Salvation Army, Volunteers of America and even the YMCA have programs specifically for veterans, military members and their families. Reach out to these groups and see how your Lodge can work together with them.

Don’t forget about more traditional outreach organizations, like the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and AMVETS, to name just a few.

Be aware that younger veterans are less likely to be a part of traditional Veterans groups and may be harder to connect with. Groups like the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, The Mission Continues and Team Rubicon rally younger veterans to meet in their communities for service activities and social gatherings. Check their websites to find the local contact in your area.  You may also want to reach out to student veterans near you. If there is a community college or university near you, they may have a student Veterans group or staff member responsible for Veterans outreach.

Finally, work with what you have. Because of privacy laws, many organizations may not be able to share names. They can, however, share needs or ideas. And once your Lodge has built up some trust, they may be more willing to connect you with veterans directly.

Minnesota Elks Troops Week at Youth Camp:

<https://www.mnelksyouthcamp.org/troops-week.html>

Minnesota Elks Sponsored Veterans Outdoors programs:

<http://www.mnvetsoutdoors.org/>

Minnesota Beyond the Yellow Ribbon:

<https://mnbtyr.ng.mil/>

VA Facilities

<https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp>

Veterans Service Organizations

<https://www.dav.org/>

<https://vva.org/>

<http://www.pva.org/>

<http://www.amvets.org/>

<http://www.legion.org>

Veterans groups

<https://iava.org/>

<https://www.missioncontinues.org/>

<https://teamrubiconusa.org/>

<http://studentveterans.org/>

Community based Non-Profits that serve Veterans

<http://www.salvationarmyusa.org/usn/veterans-affairs-services>

<https://www.voa.org/veterans>

<http://www.ymca.net/military-outreach/>

**Programs:**

These are the programs that the Elks have on the books. This does not mean that you are limited to these, but it offers a good start for community involvement.

***Adopt – A – Veterans:***

This program is designed to get Elks involved with the community members, often older Veterans, who find themselves alone, or in a nursing home. When your lodge adopts-a-Vet, your members take the time to remember them. Meet up for “Tuesday Coffee” or take a walk in the park. Befriend them, get to know them. Remember them on holidays and birthdays. Bring them to the lodge for a social event, or on a weekly basis. Treat them like a family member.

***Playing Cards for Veterans:***

If you are close to a casino, or go through the Elks.org site, you can acquire decks of discarded playing cards for free. Take these to the Veterans home, or local nursing home where veterans reside. If they do not know how to play card games, teach them. If you do not know how to play card games, buy a how-to book and learn games together.

***VAVS Representation:***

If you live next to a VA facility, or a facility that serves Veterans, your lodge can apply to get monthly ENF funding to support activities there. These funds can be used for anything that benefits the veterans at the facility.

***Welcome Home:***

Welcome home kits are available for reimbursement from the National Veterans Services, up to $300. These kits basically treat recently homeless veterans like College students on their own for the first time, giving them a chance to build up their home and prepare for the next positive step in their lives. The following page has the list of items you can purchase for a well-balanced kit:

**Suggested Contents of the Welcome Home Kit**

**Kitchen**

* + 1 – 20-piece Dinnerware set
  + 1 box – 9-piece cook set
  + 1 – 3-piece knife set
  + Toaster
  + Coffee Maker and filters
  + Measuring Cups
  + Can opener
  + Pizza Cutter
  + Slotted Spatula (black)
  + Silicone Spatula Betty Crocker (red)
  + Mixing Spoon Betty Crocker (black)
  + 2 sets Plastic Food Storage
  + 1 set Kitchen towels
  + 1 set kitchen wash cloths
  + Oven Mitt
  + 1 package paper napkins
  + 1 roll Tin Foil
  + 1 roll plastic wrap
  + 1 box each Large and Small Ziploc
  + 4 rolls paper towels
  + 1 baking/Brownie pan
  + 1 package paper plates
  + 1 cutting board
  + 1 scissors

**Bedroom**

* + Queen Sheet Set
  + Pillows (2)
  + Comforter
  + Blanket
  + Hangers (1 set of 8)
  + Alarm Clock

**Bathroom**

* + Shower Curtain with Rod and Rings
  + 1 – 5-piece set bath towels
  + 4 – 4 packs Toilet Paper

**Cleaning Supplies**

* + Kitchen Trash Can
  + 1 package trash bags
  + Broom
  + Mop
  + Mop Bucket
  + 1 package sponges
  + 1 bottle dish soap
  + 1 bottle all-purpose cleaner
  + 1 bottle glass cleaner
  + 1 laundry basket
  + 1 bottle laundry detergent
  + 1 Toilet Brush
  + 1 bottle Toilet bowl cleaner

**Miscellaneous**

* + Floor Lamp
  + 2 Light bulbs (3way and 60 watts
  + Microwave Oven (if needed)

**Grants**

**Basic Grant Guidelines**

**Charitable:***Grants should always be used for charitable purposes. Keep the following six broad categories (defined as charitable by the IRS) in mind when planning a grant project; relieve the poor, distressed or underprivileged; advance education or science, but not through scholarships; lessen the burdens of government; lessen neighborhood tensions; eliminate prejudice and discrimination; combat juvenile delinquency.*

**Restrictions:** Grant guidelines state that Lodges may not use grants to support State Major Projects, national Elks programs, fund scholarships, Hoop Shoot/Soccer Shoot events, youth awards nights, poster and/or essay contests, appreciations dinners, fundraisers or general community events. Grants may not be used for Lodge maintenance and/or repairs, or to only benefit Lodge members and their families. Grant funds must serve a population in need and cannot be donations of funds or supplies to individuals.

***If your Lodge is using a Community Investments Program grant to serve veterans and military members in need, the project must focus on one of these five areas of increased need.***

* ***Employment***
* ***Homelessness and Housing***
* ***Military Families***
* ***Health***
* ***Educational Support***
* **EMPLOYMENT**

Many military members struggle to find **employment** when they return home, and veterans’ unemployment level is higher than the national average. Help veterans find jobs in the local community.  
  
Red Lodge "Beartooth", Mont., Lodge No. 534 uses its Impact Grant to provide job training to veterans, including resume workshops and job fairs.

* **HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING**

**Homelessness and housing** are a struggle for many who have served, and as many as one in five homeless persons is a veteran. By reaching out to the homeless population in your community, you are supporting veterans.  
  
On any given night, an estimated 50,000 veterans are living on the streets. Watch this video below to meet seven vets who were there recently but have now exited homelessness with help from the Veterans Administration and community partners like the Elks.

Then, learn more about the Elks' commitment to eliminating the scourge of veteran homelessness: [**https://www.elks.org/vets/welcomehome.cfm**](https://www.elks.org/vets/welcomehome.cfm)

* **MILITARY FAMILIES**

**Military families** have unique struggles—spouses may have trouble finding employment, families may struggle with finances, and children may need help with school transitions and coping with the absence of a parent. Support local military families.  
  
Portland, Ore., Lodge No. 142 partners with the National Guard and uses its Gratitude Grant to hold a welcome home party and resource fair for military members and their families.

* **HEALTH**

Veterans with injuries have many needs, and **health** is a concern for many veterans. Hospitalized, homebound and elderly veterans may have little support. Care kits, clothes, bus passes, and supplies are always needed. Personal contact is also needed, and much appreciated.  
  
Mansfield, Mass., Lodge No. 2633 uses its Beacon Grant to plan parties, hold dinners and provide supplies for residents of a nearby VA home.

* **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT**

Many recently returned veterans are at risk of dropping out. Student veterans need extra help to get an education, stay in school and focus on their future. Reach out to student veterans in the community and provide them with **educational support**.  
  
Santa Barbara, Calif., Lodge No. 613 uses its Beacon Grant to hold a monthly bowling league and support group for student veterans.

* **BE A FRIEND**

At the end of the day, any veteran you hope to help needs to be connected to their local community, but not put under the microscope. Invite veterans to take part in your Lodge’s charitable activities. Be an inviting friend.

**Freedom Grant**

**Applying**

**2019-20 Dates:** Freedom Grant applications became available online April 1 and were open until all 325 grants were awarded. Freedom Grants are available for use between April 1, and March 31. Final Report Forms are due one month after Freedom Grant projects are completed.

**How to Apply:** The Lodge Secretary (or the Lodge Grants Coordinator) is able to process, complete and submit the online application.

**Process:** Upon approval of a Lodge's online application, an approval letter and grant check will be sent to the Lodge address. A Lodge can use its $2,000 Freedom Grant in conjunction with a Beacon Grant and/or a Gratitude Grant. Applications must be submitted separately.

**Online Final Report:** Final Reports are online and can be accessed on the Grants Dashboard. After the grant has been used, complete the Final Report and upload all grant-related receipts and photos. Final Reports will be due 30 days after the anticipated grant completion date. The Lodge will be locked out of applying for grants 60 days from that date.

**Spotlight Grant**

Starting with the 2019-20 grant year, we are debuting our newest grant offering, the Spotlight Grant! Every Lodge will have the opportunity to use this $2,000 grant to shine a light on two important issues facing nearly every American community—family literacy and homelessness among our nation’s veterans.

Lodges **do not** need to meet the GER's per-member-giving goal to apply. Spotlight Grant projects should include the following:

* **Project Plan:** The CIP will provide seven projects. **The Lodge must select one project,** demonstrate the need specific to the community and implement the project. The Lodge must follow the project plan.
* **Lodge-led:** Hands-on Lodge involvement is required. The Lodge should oversee project details and grant funds. Spotlight Grants cannot be a donation of supplies/funds and cannot be split between multiple projects.

**Beacon Grant**

Every Lodge is eligible to apply for a $2,500 Beacon Grant! Lodges **do not** need to meet the GER's per-member-giving goal to apply. Beacon Grant requirements are outlined below.

* **Active:**Actively serve the community. If people see the Lodge doing good things, they'll be inspired to join! Beacon Grants **cannot be used as donations** of funds and supplies.
* **Ongoing:** Make a commitment. The project should continue on a weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual basis–at the least.
* **Lodge-led:** Hands-on Elk involvement! The Lodge should be in charge of the grant funds and project details.
* **New:**Start a project that the Lodge has never previously funded! If your Lodge received a Beacon Grant in the past, it should continue that project each year. Beacon Grants cannot be split between two projects.

**Gratitude Grant**

Gratitude Grants are the ENF's way of saying thank you to every Lodge that meets the National President's per-member goal for giving to the ENF.

**New Rule:** Gratitude Grant eligibility is now based on whether the Lodge has reached the GER’s per-member-giving goal in the prior fiscal year. If the Lodge met the 2018-19 goal, the Lodge will be able to apply for a 2019-20 Gratitude Grant on April 1.

Gratitude Grants must be used to support local, charitable activities such as hosting a community clean-up day, purchasing supplies for a homeless shelter, or organizing a school literacy fair.

Though donations do qualify, we highly encourage your Lodge to consider using the Gratitude Grant in an active way. We want you to serve your communities in ways that will raise the Lodge's profile, energize membership, encourage former members to return to the fold, and gain the notice of people who want to be part of an organization doing big things.

To encourage active projects, applications for a donation will receive a follow-up email. Please read the entire email and contact the ENF with any questions.

**Impact Grants**

Impact Grants are designed to set a standard of excellence in community leadership through service. The ENF is looking to award Impact Grants to Lodges who intimately understand a problem in their community, have a unique idea about how to solve it, and who are ready with the volunteer power to get it done.

Impact Grants are competitive. Lodges do not need to meet the per-member-giving goal to complete the two-step award process, but funding is limited and only a select number will receive the grant.

***Please note that to be eligible for an Impact Grant, Lodges must be in full compliance with the Grand Lodge per-capita assessment, Section 16.010. This refers to Grand Lodge requirements and does not relate to the ENF.***

The Impact Grant process requires two steps. First, the Lodge **must** fill out an Impact Intent for consideration. Impact Intents will be judged in August, and Lodges will be selected to move on to the full application. Only one Impact Intent per Lodge, per grant year. Please see the instructions and timeline below.

***ENVSC Interview***

We reached out to Minnesota State Veterans Chair, Thomas Kramin, to find out how he and other Minnesota volunteers accomplish so much. Kramin helps oversee 20 volunteers at 13 Voluntary Service facilities, along with dozens of local and state projects. He shared his thoughts about managing projects and recruiting and supporting volunteers.

**ENVSC:  How have you or your Lodge initiated partnerships?**

Thomas Kramin: When it comes to getting the community involved, my experience is: If you don’t ask, the answer will always be “NO!” When we have an idea for a community event for our veterans, we find the local Service Clubs and ask for their assistance.  Offering them name recognition in the advertising of it and turning it into a joint event always makes the program more successful.

Ronald Reagan once said, “There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don’t care who gets the credit!” Minnesota is proof that this quote is truth. Elks are Doers, not Talkers!”

**ENVSC: What do you do to get more Lodge members involved in veterans’ events or fundraisers?**

TK: First of all, approach the members with a project that you have a heartfelt passion for. Passion creates Passion.

Also, make sure you have a fluid plan on how to accomplish the project. When you ask for help, you open the door for outside opinions on how to do it. Reply kindly, with something like, “I’ll take that under advisement!”. Some ideas are much better than what you came up with, which will alter your plan and make it that much more successful.

**ENVSC: How do you encourage or motivate the volunteers in your state to keep up with reporting or other requirements they may be reluctant to complete?**

TK: First off, as a State Rep, appoint those who have a passion to serve our veterans. You have the power to replace those who are not. This is 95% of the battle of keeping good representation at facilities. The other 5% is the threat of losing the funds that support their passion.

You must also realize that your representatives are volunteers, working on a volunteer income. Life gets in the way sometimes and you must remember the volunteers have families and bills to take care of first. Gentle nudges for reminders work better than dropping the hammer on them for being late in the reporting.  If it gets to the point that you need to continually remind them to complete their requirements, they may not be the best fit for the role at that time.

**ENVSC: How would you describe the planning process someone who is interested in organizing a large event for the first time?**

TK: You cannot do it alone. Find quality people to help with the project, lay out the fluid plan to them, and delegate tasks to them without micromanaging them. Present a task that needs to be accomplished and let them do the rest. This does two things; it sparks their imagination on how to accomplish the task and gives them a sense of ownership in the project.

**ENVSC: Do you have any favorite memories from the past year to encourage volunteers in their work with veterans?**

TK: We did a Welcome Home Kit for a veteran a few months ago. As we walked into his empty apartment with the supplies, the Veteran started to shake a little with wet eyes. He said the contacted every service organization requesting help and the only ones who stepped up were the Elks. He said, “The Elks only asked one question, ‘What do I need to make life better?’ and here you are!”

At our Veterans Outdoor Program, where we offer a few days away from the veterans home to hunt on a National Guard Training Facility, a 75 year old Army Veteran approached me and shook my hand for an extended amount of time, choked up and said, “You have no idea how important this event is to us! Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

You tend to lose sight on the impact after doing it for 12 years, but comments like that relight a fire to continue the work!

**ENVSC: Is there anything else you’d like to share with Elks who are considering volunteering for veteran projects?**

TK: Helping veterans is more addictive than any drug available on the market. The sense of life accomplishment and self-worth you feel in your soul afterwards is so overpowering that you want to do more. You search for things to expand on, and you realize that volunteering pays more than any paycheck you will ever receive in your work career.



**State Veterans Chairs Only** Date of award presentation: Person to send award to:

Address to send award to:

**VETERAN VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR NOMINATION FORM**

The Veteran Volunteer of the Year Award honors those who have demonstrated outstanding service to veterans and military members in need. We know that our programs could not exist without our volunteers, and this award is a way to recognize that and honor those outstanding volunteers among our members who make things happen.

To be eligible for this award, the nominee must volunteer to serve veterans in their state. This can be through the Elks Voluntary Service (aka VAVS) program, as a Lodge Veterans Chair, as a State Veterans Chair, or in another capacity. All Elks members and their spouses are eligible for the award, as long as they are engaged in direct service to veterans and military members in need. A volunteer can only receive this award once.

How it works:

* Nomination forms can be submitted directly to your State Veterans Chair by the state deadline. State [Deadlines may vary but are no later](http://www.elks.org/vets/volunteers.cfm) than January 31! (Don’t know who your State Veterans Chair is? Visit [www.elks.org/vets/volunteers.cfm](http://www.elks.org/vets/volunteers.cfm) to find out.)
* State Chairs then read all nominations and, with the help of the Judging Committee, select two winners and submit their names and information to the ENVSC by February 28.
* The ENVSC office will prepare award certificates and gifts for State Veterans Chairs to present at State Convention.
* The ENVSC office will choose one national winner from among all state’s nominees, and award them the 2018-19 Veteran Volunteer of the Year award.

**NEW THIS YEAR!** The national winner will receive formal recognition and a $500 grant to be used for the Lodge charitable project of his or her choosing. The Veteran Volunteer of the Year will also be invited to attend the 2019 Elks National Convention in Saint Louis, Missouri, expenses paid courtesy of the ENVSC.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| ***All fields are required.*** |  | |
| Name of Nominee:  Phone Number: | Email: | Nominee Lodge:  Nominee Member #: |

How does the nominee serve veterans in a meaningful way?

What are the results of their work?

Why should this person be the Veteran Volunteer of the Year?