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Elks Veterans Service Commission Manual

Our programs are always growing and improving to best meet the needs of veterans, military members and their families. Please visit elks.org/vets for up-to-date information, to submit reports, apply for grants, complete order forms and more.

THE ELKS NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION

Elks pledge "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them." The Elks National Veterans Service Commission takes that pledge one step further, and promises service to our nation's veterans and military members, with a special focus on service to those in need.

The Elks National Veterans Service Commission was officially established in 1946, though Elks have been serving veterans for much longer. The Elks National Veterans Service Commission holds a policy of non-involvement regarding legislation and matters relating to veteran's benefits.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION

Each member is a Past Grand Exalted Ruler and is appointed for a term of five years. They elect a Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary/Treasurer.

Commission members give liberally of their time and experience without remuneration. Section 4.290 states, "The Elks National Veterans Service Commission shall be composed of five members whose term of office shall be 5 years, and until their respective successors have been appointed and confirmed. The Commission shall have the following powers and duties:

COMMISSION MEMBERS

David R. Carr, PGER, Chair
John D. Amen, PGER, Vice-Chair
Ron L. Hicks, PGER, Secretary/ Treasurer
Paul D. Hesel, PGER, Past Chair
James L. Nichelson, PGER, Past Chair

- To promulgate and supervise the Order's program for the benefit of members of the Armed Forces of the United States and the veterans of such services.
- To annually elect its Officers.
- To adopt rules for the conduct of its business.
- To employ personnel.
- To require bonds from its Officers and employees.
- To pay expenses of the Commission out of the funds under its control, provided that no Commission member shall receive any compensation for his or her services.
- To keep an accurate account of its receipts and expenditures and make an annual report in writing to the Grand Lodge of its activities and expenditures.
- To receive funds appropriated by the Grand Lodge for the conduct of the program. All funds in excess of the year's operating budget shall revert to the Order and be subject to appropriation annually in accordance with the approved budgeted requirements.
- To submit its budget to the Board of Grand Trustees for review and approval.

ENVSC STAFF

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PROGRAMS

Below, you can read about our 4 largest programs. You can learn more about these, as well as other programs like Adopt-a-Veteran and Playing Cards for Veterans, at elks.org/vets.

Elks Voluntary Service Program: The cornerstone of our work, this program stations Elks volunteers in VA hospitals, State Veterans Homes and other types of veterans' facilities across the nation. More than 300 Elks serve as Elks Voluntary Service Representatives, assisting hospitalized and recovering veterans each month by providing comfort, support and friendship. The ENVSC sends a monthly allocation to Representatives to fund their service, and Representatives must file monthly reports. Hundreds more Elks serve as Deputy Representatives.

Thanks to our strong number of dedicated volunteers, the Elks are part of the National Advisory Committee for the VA Voluntary Service program, working together with other service organizations to improve the VA's service to veterans through volunteer contributions.

Welcome Home: The Elks have pledged to help end veteran homelessness and ensure that every veteran has the safe, stable home they deserve. Through the Welcome Home program, we provide funds to Lodges to serve veterans experiencing homelessness. Most formerly homeless veterans move into new homes with nothing. Elks can help by gathering things like sheets, towels, dishes and cleaning supplies. The ENVSC will reimburse your Lodge for each Welcome Home Kit you donate to a veteran in need.

Your Lodge can also partner with local veterans shelters or with the VA to connect with veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness, and use grant or local funds to provide supplies, support, activities, beds and more.

Freedom Grants: Freedom Grants provide money directly to Elks Lodges to serve the veterans in their community. Freedom Grants are awarded to Lodges that submit applications for Elks-run projects that focus on serving veterans and/or military members in need. Lodges use grants to do things like provide food baskets and infant supplies to National Guard families and military families in need; host recreation events for veterans in nursing homes or visit homebound veterans; organize adaptive sports activities for recovering veterans and veterans with disabilities.

Applications become available online every year on April 1. Funds cannot be donated. Applications must be detailed and complete.

Veterans Leather Program: Elks volunteers work with local hunters to collect and prepare donated hides. The finished leather is used for therapy kits for recovering veterans, and professionally-crafted gloves for veterans in wheelchairs, which are distributed at veterans facilities and adaptive sports events across the county.

Voluntary Service Representatives can order free leather gloves to distribute at their facilities, and Lodge Veterans Chairs can order free craft kits from our partner Help Heal Veterans for the veterans they serve.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I'm new to veterans service. Where do I start?

Check out this ENVSC blog post for tips on [Finding Local Veterans in Need](#).

You can also check out this list of [140 Ways your Lodge can Serve Veterans](#), put together by Veterans Programs Chair Stewart Israel, who's been volunteering to serve veterans for more than 40 years.

Our [ENVSC 101 slideshow](#) is a great introduction to our programs for new members and volunteers.

How do I pay for this?

We have resources! If you're interested in serving veterans at a facility like a VA Medical Center or State Veterans Home, **Voluntary Service** Representatives receive money every month to serve veterans at places like this. Consider partnering with them on new events and projects.

If you're serving veterans exiting homelessness, the **Welcome Home** program can help with funding.

In addition to the Freedom Grant, the Elks National Foundation has a \$13.7 million [Community Investments Program](#) designed to meet local needs. Many Lodges use Gratitude and Beacon Grants to serve veterans, military members and their families. And, check out the new Spotlight Grant, which offers 7 project options, including 3 that serve veterans experiencing homelessness.

Don't forget about local resources. Partner with local groups like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Hold fundraisers at the Lodge. Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day and of course Veterans Day are excellent times to do this, since veterans and military members are on many people's minds.

Get creative! Hold supply drives to collect socks for veterans at a local homeless shelter or ask Lodge members to donate home supplies and extra furniture to veterans moving into new homes. Ask local scout groups to write cards to veterans for Valentine's Day or reach out to Lodge members who are teachers and have their classes help.

Are there any restrictions?

The ENVSC mission is one of direct service to our nation's veterans and military members, with a special focus on service to those in need. While generous, memorials, appreciation ceremonies and luncheons do not qualify. Lodges are free to use local, state or other funds to hold these events.

What's the difference between a Voluntary Service Representative and a Lodge Veterans Chair?

[Elks Voluntary Service Representatives](#) receive funding from the ENVSC office each month and are accountable to their State Veterans Chairs. This funding is intended only to serve veterans at the facility where the Rep is assigned.

[Lodge Veterans Chairs](#) handle funding from the Lodge and report to their Lodge leadership. Some people hold both positions at the same time.

Dates to Remember

January 31: Veteran Volunteer of the Year nominations are due to the State Veterans Chair.

February 14: Facilities schedule extra activities because veterans get lonely around Valentine's Day.

April 1: Freedom Grants (and other Lodges Grants) become available online at elks.org/cip/dashboard.

April 1: New Elks Fiscal Year!

June 14: Consider holding Flag Day celebrations at a State Veterans Home or other veterans' facility.

November 11: Veterans Day

Many people remember veterans on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and major holidays. Be sure to reach out at other times of the year, when the general public isn't paying as much attention.