



Toolkit: Forming a New Chapter

Getting started

Easy 4-step Process

Starting a new VFP chapter is an easy 4-step process. Here's what you do:

1. Request a temporary chapter number from the Chapter Support Coordinator at the National Office.
2. Sign up 10 military veterans. Special regional circumstances, geographic or geopolitical, may allow for a charter for a local chapter being granted by a petition of 5 veterans, if approved by the Board of Directors. Contact the Chapter Support Coordinator to determine charter requirements.
3. Send a *new chapter status petition* to the VFP Chapter Support Coordinator at the National Office with the 10 (or 5) veterans listed by name and their branch of service and years served. The petition must be signed by a charter member who will serve as the initial chapter contact.
4. Send the petition to the National Office along with a copy of each veteran's DD214, retirement card, discharge papers or other qualifying military documentation; if on active duty, include a military ID card reproduction. All documents should be mailed to the attention of the VFP Chapter Support Coordinator.

Board Approval

Upon receiving the new chapter status petition, the National membership coordinator will submit the paperwork to the VFP board of directors for chapter approval. The board meets monthly and acts on petitions at the meeting nearest to the date when the petition was submitted. The National membership coordinator will notify chapter leaders when the petition has been approved, and will send to the chapter contact a Chapter Charter documenting and assigning the chapter's number and (if applied for) name*. The National Office will formally announce the new chapter to the membership through email, website and published newsletter.

Chapters may begin holding meetings before Board approval of the chapter; however, organized activities, campaigns and projects cannot begin until after the board approves the new chapter status petition and recognizes the chapter as a bona-fide VFP chapter.

* See Chapter designation on next page

Agreements

Each member of the chapter agrees to the following rules:

1. Adhere to the bylaws governing VFP's non-profit status, including the Statement of Purpose
2. Pay annual dues to National or a one-time lifetime membership

Chapter Name

Chapter names using personal names fall into one of two categories: historical names or non-historical names. Historical names, such as “Thomas Paine” Chapter, must be approved by the Board of Directors.

Procedures for Non-Historic Individual Names

Living persons will give their own approval for the use of their name by a chapter.

For deceased (non-historical) individuals, the chapter will contact all immediate family members for approval to use their loved one’s name (parents, children, siblings, spouse). After approval from the family, the Chapter Name Change Request may be submitted to the National Office for the Board of Directors. If possible, a letter of family approval will accompany the Chapter Name Change Request. ***(If there is any question of approval, the name shall not be used.)***

When the name change is approved by the Board of Directors, the National Office will prepare a Certificate of Acknowledgement for the family. We recommend a public event be held and the framed Certificate of Acknowledgement be awarded by the Chapter to a family member along with a descriptive press release.

National Membership Dues

Every chapter member is expected to help sustain the VFP organization by paying national dues:

- ✓ Basic Dues: \$40 (annual payment)
- ✓ Lifetime Membership Fee: \$1,000 (one-time payment for life; can be paid in one lump sum or in allotments for up to one year)
- ✓ Assisted Membership: \$25 (offered on an as-needed basis)
- ✓ Free membership: active duty for first year only
- ✓ Free membership: incarcerated veterans, recurring annually

Local Chapter Membership Dues

Some chapters have dues, which are collected from chapter members at the local level. National dues are independent of chapter dues and must be paid annually for members to stay in good standing as a VFP member. All VFP members must pay annual dues or the Lifetime Membership fee directly to the National Office.

Chapters are encouraged to assist veteran members who want to join VFP but are not able to pay the national dues, either by paying for or supplementing their national membership dues. In extreme hardship cases, when a chapter is not able to assist veterans in joining VFP, National Office may be able to provide scholarships to enable veterans to join the organization.

Other Categories of Giving

Members who want to increase their support of VFP may do so through a sustaining membership level at the member’s discretion, above and beyond basic dues, and by contributing to Veterans For Peace through donations, gifts and bequests. Members and proud supporters who want to give to VFP above levels of membership are encouraged to contact the VFP Executive Director.

Summary of Process

Requirements to form a VFP chapter	Agreements with National Office	Membership Dues & Categories
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Obtain temporary chapter number from the National Office ✓ Recruit 10 (or 5) military veterans ✓ Submit petition to National office* ✓ Include with petition a copy of each veteran's proof of military service+ ✓ Include a chapter name designation, if your chapter wants a name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Chapters adhere to VFP bylaws, including the Statement of Purpose* ✓ Each member of the chapter pays annual dues to National, or a one-time Lifetime Membership fee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Basic dues: \$40 ❖ Lifetime membership fee: \$1,000 ❖ Assisted membership: \$25 ❖ Free membership: active duty for first year; incarcerated veterans, recurring annually <p>NOTE: Members who want to increase their support of VFP may do so through a sustaining membership level above and beyond basic dues, by donating to VFP by becoming a Recurring Donor*</p>
<p>* See sample petition in Appendix A + DD214, discharge papers, or other military documentation; or copy of current active duty military ID</p>	<p>* See Appendix B</p>	<p>* Contact the National Office for information regarding any of these categories</p>

New chapter packet

The chapter support coordinator at National will send a New Chapter Packet to the chapter contact upon board approval of the new chapter. The packet contains the following items:

- ✓ Welcome letter from the VFP board president on VFP stationery
- ✓ Framed chapter charter
- ✓ PowerPoint of the democratization of VFP on CD-ROM
- ✓ VFP flag
- ✓ Order form for VFP materials
- ✓ Copy of VFP 501(c)(3) letter from the IRS certifying tax exemption status
- ✓ VFP bylaws

Leadership Roles

Elected Officers

Once you have formed the new chapter, you will undoubtedly want to head in a direction that leads to success. Most chapters elect officers to share responsibilities in running the chapter effectively and keeping communications open between chapter members, national office, other VFP chapters and the local community, including the media and allied organizations.

President	Vice President	Secretary	Treasurer	Other Roles
Presides over chapter meetings, interfaces with the National Office, and is the foremost spokesperson for the chapter	Performs the duties and exercises the powers of the chapter president in the president's absence	Keeps minutes of meetings for the chapter	Keeps track of the chapter's budget	Assorted roles as defined and deemed necessary by the chapter

Other Roles

Chapters are strongest when leadership is shared among many members, and when those who serve in leadership roles think first about the group as a whole. In addition to the elected officer positions, other members can play a key role to ensure chapters get off to a good start and stay on a successful course. What follows are some suggested leadership roles that have worked effectively in other VFP chapters and allied organizations.

Chapter Contact or Communications Coordinator

- ✓ Keeps chapter informed of local and national activities
- ✓ Serves as a contact for the National office
- ✓ Participates on national list-servs on behalf of the chapter
- ✓ Sets up conference calls with national when chapter is involved
- ✓ Orders VFP materials to ensure the chapter has what it needs to support chapter actions

Material/Tabling Coordinator

- ✓ Manages inventory of VFP materials and works with National Liaison to keep inventory stocked
- ✓ Gets materials to chapter members who are tabling events
- ✓ Recruits people to table chapter events

Membership Coordinator

- ✓ Sends welcome letters to new chapter members and keeps track of current members
- ✓ Works with the Material/Tabling Coordinator for recruiting new members

Press Liaison

- ✓ Helps identify press opportunities and solicits volunteers for press requests
- ✓ Cultivates relationships with local reporters and editors
- ✓ Writes press releases and letters to the editor
- ✓ Works with national office to create press packets for chapter events and email blasts
- ✓ Fields media inquiries about chapter actions

Coalition Liaison

- ✓ Attends meetings with collaborating organizations as the chapter representative
- ✓ Brings information and minutes of collaborative meetings back to the chapter

Community Relations Coordinator

- ✓ Organizes vigils, marches, and other events decided upon by chapter members
- ✓ Puts the chapter's best foot forward to win friends and influence others in the community

Grant writing/fundraising/development

- ✓ Turns chapter vision and ideas into written proposals for funding
- ✓ Works with the national office for development support
- ✓ Ensures there is a donation box for chapter contributions at community events

Graphic Designer

- ✓ Creates simple flyers and posters with the chapter's contact information to use for outreach
- ✓ Ensures designed materials are posted on community bulletin boards and kiosks
- ✓ Works with other chapter leaders to distribute graphic materials for promotion

Political Coordinator

- ✓ Represents the chapter in political venues
- ✓ Meets with elected officials in the community
- ✓ Manages the chapter's direct mailings to political leaders in the community and those who represent the community at state and federal levels
- ✓ Shows up at events planned by elected officials and brings the VFP chapter message to them
- ✓ Attends town hall meetings, speaking gigs and political rallies and fundraisers
- ✓ Researches political issues that support chapter actions and disseminates the information

Web Specialist

- ✓ Asks appropriate allied groups to link to the chapter's website and/or to the VFP website
- ✓ Searches websites and blogs for stories to see how the chapter can contribute to them
- ✓ Maintains the chapter website
- ✓ Sends web postings to national office to strengthen the chapter's presence on VFP's website

NOTE: These examples are not intended as recommended approaches to setting up a chapter structure. The roles identified above merely serve as examples of how members might contribute to building the success of a newly formed chapter. Chapters that engage members in relevant and meaningful ways generally report the greatest success in developing their chapters for long-term sustainability. For additional tips on sustaining your chapter for the long haul, please download the *VFP Chapter Development Toolkit* from the VFP website.

Relationships



National Office

The Veterans For Peace National Office supports local chapters in many ways, including:

- ✓ Direct donations of money for projects and activities
- ✓ Benefits of tax exemption status using VFP's 501(c)(3) status
- ✓ Chapter promotion to build public awareness
- ✓ Speakers bureau to raise chapter's credibility and visibility in the community
- ✓ Legal services
- ✓ Toolkits for sharing ideas and strategies for program and chapter success
- ✓ Chapter-to-chapter communications to build support and strength
- ✓ Coalition-building with allied organizations and common interest groups
- ✓ Technology resources
- ✓ Skills training: media, website development, conflict resolution, chapter development
- ✓ Reduced insurance for local events through group rates
- ✓ Assistance tailored to the needs of individual chapters

Local Chapters

VFP actions that rise to national visibility generally start at the grassroots level. It's common for local chapters to generate exciting ideas for projects, and for those ideas to morph into programs and campaigns that spread to other chapters for replication and reach the National Office for support. The power of VFP chapters is the distinctive voice of veterans acting locally to affect global change.

Allied Organizations

Working with other chapters and allied groups can increase numbers for organized efforts, sharpen public awareness about a focused issue and galvanize new champions for a cause. Collaborative efforts amplify the voice, strengthen cohesive action to build the peace movement and increase opportunities to apply for and receive grants and sponsorships to help ensure long-term sustainability of chapters. For suggested strategies for effectively forming coalitions with allied organizations, please download the *VFP Collaboration Toolkit* from the VFP website.

Media Relations

Press

Raising awareness about chapter activity is generally accomplished through the press. Getting the attention of your local print and broadcast media is easier than you think, if you adhere to the basic principles of media relations: build personal relationships with reporters and editors in your community, and become the go-to person that reporters call when they need a quote for a story that is related to your field of expertise. The *VFP Media Relations Toolkit* contains time-proven strategies for cultivating successful media relations, and is available on the VFP website.

Word-of-mouth buzz

The media is just one vehicle for getting word out about your chapter. Don't overlook ways to generate buzz through word-of-mouth. Buzz travels fast when each chapter member engages her or his circle of influence -- family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, sports, social and professional associates and other affiliates, including church, school, activist groups and clubs and online networks, to name a few. Put word-of-mouth into action and let your circles of influence help spread the word about your chapter and become champions of your cause.

Best Practices

Some VFP chapters have mastered the art of collaboration, media relations and buzz, using their savvy and skills to create dramatic campaigns and high impact actions that have resulted in replication and recognition for their mastery. Among the best practices in VFP are Arlington West, the Peace Poetry Project and the War Economy campaign. The *VFP Best Practices Toolkit* showcases the stories behind our most successful programs. The aim of the toolkit is to help strengthen chapters through cross pollination of successful ideas and strategies. It is available as a pdf download at the VFP website.

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The Chapter Start-Up Toolkit was produced to assist veterans wanting to start a new VFP chapter. If you have questions or comments about the toolkit, updates or other modifications to the document, please contact Casey at 314.725.6005, or send her an email at casey@veteransforpeace.org.