

Associate Members Committee Report

October 2011:

This committee grew out of the bylaw amendment passed at the VFP 2010 National Convention which removed the right of associate members to vote on national resolutions (see Appendix).

Committee Charge:

This committee was charged with recommending to the Board what action, if any, the Board should take in reference to the bylaw change. In addition, now that the bylaw has been changed, there have been questions about the role of associate members at the chapter level. Therefore this committee addressed actions that should be taken regarding non veteran members at the chapter level as well.

This committee was charged with the goal of developing a win-win solution that would benefit all members of VFP and enhance the strength and effectiveness of VFP.

The committee was comprised of a variety of full and associate members primarily located on the west and east coasts. Each member came to the committee with varied life experiences and opinions about the bylaw change, though each was open-minded about the ideas and opinions of others. Members were also open about her/his individual biases which brought increased objectivity to our conversations and decisions. The committee operated by consensus therefore the resulting recommendations and this document have been created by every member of the committee.

The Committee's Work:

Over several months of work, the committee developed a set of recommendations that will put in place a system within Veterans For Peace that will both secure VFP as a veterans' organization as well as give associate members as equal a place as is feasible at this time. In developing this recommended system, we considered possible future challenges to VFP, including maintaining veteran status for our organization, respecting associates' rights without compromising the veterans' voice, and facilitating VFP's fundraising potential. We encourage the VFP board to adopt our recommendations as a whole, for as a system they are designed to work together, not in parts.

Veterans For Peace as a legal entity is a 501c3 educational non profit under IRS tax exempt codes. This is consistent with our Statement of Purpose, indeed the first purpose is to educate the public as to the cost of war. Most veterans organizations are legally classified as 50123 veteran service organizations whose primary purpose is to meet the needs of individual veterans. While VFP actions can and often do address the needs of veterans, it is not our primary purpose. This in no way discredits VFP as a veterans organization, but it does make us a different kind of organization, legally and in fact.

VFP is a veteran led organization with all parts of governance exclusively accessible to only veterans. Only veterans may sit on the national board, only veterans may vote for the national board, only veterans may vote on bylaws. Resolutions are position statements that play no part in governance. Dialog and effort has occurred in recent years regarding inclusion of associates in parts of governance. For current purposes, this committee made a deliberate decision to exclude this issue from our discussion, as it was beyond the charge given to us. This is not to be construed as a judgment either

way on the appropriateness of such dialog or efforts.

Veterans for Peace was founded in 1985 by a group of Veterans, spouses and allies. The original roster of 38 charter members consisted of 31 veterans and 7 associates. The group wanted to form a new type of veterans group, one which operated with transparency, using non-violent methods for change. The group was also quite concerned with discrimination and the disenfranchisement of others, therefore worked hard to build mechanisms within the structure of the organization that recognized and honored all voices. Two levels of membership were established: full membership for veterans and associate membership for non-veterans. (For a current description of membership categories see “Membership Categories” in the Appendix.) This structure was different from other veterans groups, which at the time banned women from membership due to gender. They didn't want a hierarchical organization, but needed it for a 501c3 and to maintain integrity as a veterans' organization. The group did their best to create a structure that was built on principles of equality, transparency, non-discrimination and democracy. (For additional information see “Historical Context” in the Appendix.)

The charter members wanted to be seen as a veterans' organization, to be a place for veterans to be honest about their experiences, help themselves, and to be an effective anti war group. They wanted equal treatment for non veteran members, but also to maintain a distinction from veterans, thus wanted veterans in leadership positions and wanted the public face to be veterans. As the organization grew, national followed this pattern.

Our committee discussed in depth the inherent tension between the need for Veterans For Peace to be and be perceived by the public as a veterans' organization, and the need to promote and model our values of peace, equality, and democracy for all. According to Jerry Genesio's book, this tension has existed since the founding of VFP in 1985. Having been there from the beginning, eliminating it will be a long term process. A win-win solution would find the most reasonable and effective balance: one which will allow VFP to be an effective veterans' voice for peace, while also modeling the direction we believe society should go and internally reflecting values we see as a prerequisite for genuine peace.

Our committee convened a caucus at the national convention in Portland, OR in August 2011 specifically for the purpose of receiving input from a broader spectrum of associate members. Ten associate members attended. All were female. In an effort to identify the associate members' role within VFP, we discussed problems and suggested solutions. While many of the women present had spouses or significant others who are veterans, all were motivated to become active with VFP because the organization was viewed as a more viable voice for peace. Active on both the national and chapter levels, these women view themselves as peace activists not as peace auxiliaries.

The responsibilities of associate members have varied both on national and chapter level according to necessity. As such, associate members have participated in nearly every activity veteran members have, including community outreach, tabling, fundraising, standing vigil, marching, coalition building, networking, paying membership dues, and participating in national committees, among others. They offer support to veterans, at times providing balance and strength with a softer voice. As civilians, associates provide a collection of perspectives that differ from the veterans' experiences and often offer crucial insight into how the general public may respond to VFPs initiatives and actions.

At the caucus, the issue of associate member voting was much talked about with frustration expressed over the 2010 bylaw change which stripped associate members of their voting right. This led to a wider discussion with a diversity of opinion on the role of associate members who now have no say in the

organization that they serve so faithfully. Associate members appear to be overwhelmingly female and predominantly spouses or partners of veterans, or come from military families. (For further information see “Gender and Associate Membership” in the Appendix.) A small minority of the group came to VFP without prior involvement with military culture, yet find it a valuable place to work for peace. The women at the caucus shared the challenges of working with veterans, including many who are dealing with the impact of PTSD, the experience of bringing a healing voice to discussions, and a role in conflict resolution.

VFP is organized as opposing the war machine. It is an alternative voice, a non-violent voice enhanced through the inclusion of a civilian voice. We need strong framing that challenges accusations of not being a veterans’ organization while affirming the unique value and perspective of all members - non veteran, combat vet, resister, and every shade in between. Such framing must address outside attacks which challenge the credibility of the organization, but must not be a defensive response, which allows our opposition to set the frame.

This issue of framing is large. Not only does it challenge the basic American right wing frame to “support the troops,” and the macho male belief system, this same fundamental frame has been present throughout most of the recorded history of the world. One nearly has to go to pre-recorded history to find societies not dominated by this frame. This is the frame which VFP was created to challenge, while it has it's own internal and external challenges. It's a dilemma of a group of people, mostly male, certified by society as being the most macho, attempting to challenge machoism. This is a dilemma which is self-contradictory, yet necessary to achieve our goals. This is the challenge that VFP has bravely taken on.

Our committee feels that it is essential to the healthy functioning, growth and framing of our organization to have diversity training, as well as training in non-violent communication and conflict resolution skills at both national and chapter levels. This would develop improved listening skills and enhance the overall level of internal tolerance. Our committee commends the VFP Board’s implementation of the committee that has initiated The Active Nonviolence Training Project with its purpose to help our members and others develop these skills.

We recognize that VFP is beginning to create these changes at the national level. For example, at the 2011 VFP National Convention in Oregon there was a Sexual Harassment Policy letter to members included in the convention packet. Along with it was a statement by the current VFP Board and organizers of the convention which stated “there is sexual harassment in VFP and at VFP gatherings.” Our committee applauds the Board for providing information, encouraging reflection and conversation among membership at the convention, as well as providing training to VFP Board members in April of 2011. We believe this is an important step, as stated in the convention letter, to “move us (VFP) forward in our goal of building our culture of peace”. We agree with the written statement the board made. The committee believes VFP would benefit well to address other invisible hierarchies, such as the role of status of the type of veteran, ie. combat, non-combat, CO, etc. within VFP. We recognize these are large cultural issues that will take time to change but that doesn’t mean we should shy away from these issues. As a committee we agree this is a high priority for VFP and implore the national organization to support and develop leadership training within the chapters to look more closely at the issues of gender and veteran status at the local level.

We commend Veterans For Peace’s commitment to flexible grassroots governance in contrast to “top down” governance wherever possible. This dichotomy between grassroots and top-down is integral to

VFP, but at times manifests as a tension between national bylaws and creativity and autonomy within individual chapters and affinity groups. That said, we do find there is a place for careful and accessible written clarification of policy from national in order to maintain a framework that supports our statement of purpose, strengthens the veterans voice in the eye of the public, and internally within VFP.

This committee was formed in response to the bylaw change voted on at the annual meeting in August 2010 which resulted in loss of associate voting rights on resolutions. Persuasive evidence cited in support of the bylaw change was from a legal matter involving the Pittsburgh chapter of VFP in 1991. An examination of the case file obtained from the Archives in Philadelphia found no evidence that associate membership played a role. A challenge was made to the legitimacy of the organization based on 501c3 status, but the legal issue hinged on freedom of speech based on our political views. Though the vote was procedurally correct, in 2010 no policy existed that proposed bylaw changes be posted for the membership to become familiar with them prior to voting at the annual members meeting. This did not allow those members opposed to the bylaw change the opportunity to prepare for such an important vote.

We commend the VFP leadership for changing policy such that proposed bylaw changes were posted for the membership prior to the 2011 annual meeting.

Recommendations

1. We recommend the Board of Directors support a by law change that grants associate members the right to vote at the national level on resolutions, except for those on which military experience is directly relevant to understanding and exercising judgement on an issue.

This would ensure credibility for the integrity of the veterans voice on topics where their perspective is unique and distinctive, while allowing associate members a democratic voice, the right of participation, and the benefit of empowerment. The distinction between resolutions could be delineated by the resolutions committee, with the line narrowly drawn to respect associate voting rights. In practice this distinction would be minimally utilized, with the recognition that informed citizens can comprehend the overwhelming majority of issues addressed by VFP resolutions. This is based on a model used at the chapter level in the early years of the organization, as described by Jerry Genesisio.

2. We recommend the national organization adopt a practice of clear, articulate and accessible written policies in lieu of inaccessible or unwritten rules and cultural habits.

This would improve overall transparency, provide much more clarity to the membership, and greatly enhance accountability and the democratic process within VFP. Externally, clearly defined policies help establish VFPs identity and credibility in the public eye. Specific to this committee's charge, we find that clarification of the percentage of associate membership within the organization is a justified underlying concern within VFP, therefore a clarified national policy is needed in order to sustain the integrity of VFP as a credible veterans organization.

3. We specifically recommend that national limit the number of associate members to 25% of total membership. National should articulate it in writing as policy, and enforce it at the national level through limiting acceptance of memberships. Non veteran applicants beyond this percentage could be put on a waiting list until the percentage of non veteran members drops.

Removing the ambiguity of a poorly defined goal would help diffuse the tension and reactivity surrounding non veteran membership, protect the veteran majority voice, and allow for there to be greater equality for the non veterans who are members. The current non veteran membership is approximately 20% - 21%, thus establishing the limit at 25% would avoid the morally and politically unpalatable step of removing current members. 25% non veteran is a safe, doable number which maintains the status quo yet ensures a strong veteran majority percentage.

4. We recommend local chapters be allowed to function with the talents and skills available regardless of veteran status.

The national non veteran percentage limit should not be applied at the individual chapter level, provided each chapter have at its core a strong veteran presence and public voice, and recognize that individual and local actions impact national perceptions. Non veteran activists' participation in local chapters will be up to individual chapters to decide, whether or not the persons are members of VFP national. This is consistent with the present situation, in which there are both veteran and non-veteran participants in local chapters and local activities who have not paid dues and are not members of national VFP, but whose contribution is of value. All members, veteran and non veteran, should be free to work with the chapter of their choosing, rather than assigned a chapter by national. This is consistent with the principle of maximum autonomy at the local level and grassroots nature of VFP, and adds flexibility to how local chapters mirror national. The heart of VFP has always been grassroots organizing at the chapter level with efforts varying according to individual chapter interests and efforts.

5. We recommend the membership brochure be modified to include a place for donors.

There is currently no simple mechanism that allows the general public to make small donations to VFP without the desire to become active members to do so. This absence in the brochure also stifles outreach as care is taken to acquire just new veteran members. We do not recommend creating another level of membership or a change in member terminology. A donor category would help VFP financially, keep the veteran percentage strong, and create the space for associate members who desire to be activists to bring their skills and talents to further the goals of VFP.

6. We recommend the numerous smaller inequities between veteran and non veteran members be eliminated, including, but not limited to, exclusion from the hardship rate membership fee.

Organizational resources available to veteran members should be available equally to non veteran members. This would be consistent with the egalitarian values espoused, treat associate members with the respect and dignity to which they are entitled, and serve to develop the skills and talents of all members working for the goals of VFP.

7. We recommend completion of the Active Non Violence Training Project, that all resources for this project be available to veteran and non veteran members on an equal basis, and that the leadership be proactive in promoting this project.

This would provide a mechanism to move the membership along the path towards improved conflict resolution skills, communication, and acceptance of diversity, while enhancing all members abilities as effective activists. This is consistent with the original intent of the founders to create an organization which uses non violent methods for change, while creating a structure which honors all voices. We ask that the leadership conduct themselves as role models in dealing with internal conflict and take an active role in mitigating conflict when appropriate. This non violence project is a key step in the direction of a more functional organization with the goal of reducing conflict and violence in the larger world.

7. We recommend an associate committee, consisting of these members or others as desired, reconvene or be turned into an active working group no later than November 2012.

The purpose of this second committee would be to review the implementation of these recommendations and look at progress towards desired goals, with the understanding that resolution of these issues is a long term process.

In the spirit of an open and egalitarian organization, we ask that this report be made available to all members. We ask that the Board of Directors draft a letter to the membership detailing their actions based on our recommendations. This may be done via the newsletter or e-mail.

While the members of this committee have from the beginning expressed a wide range of opinions, we have embraced different perspectives, been flexible, and given support to one another. It has been a positive and gratifying experience. All of us, veterans and non veterans alike, have the same goal, to make Veterans For Peace a strong and united organization. We would like to thank the National Board for taking the time to hear our voice.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Wong
Nancy Nygard
Kathleen Hernandez
Mary Crane
Jim Fulmer
Kristina Wolff

October 10, 2011

Appendix

Resolution

Resolution to Amend Article X, Membership Meeting, Section 3, Voting, and Section 4, Resolutions of the By-Laws of Veterans For Peace

Whereas, Article X, Membership Meeting, Section 3, Voting, of the By-Laws of Veterans For Peace provides, in part, that each Associate Member present at the annual convention is entitled to vote on resolutions, and

Whereas, the name of the organization states, it is a veterans' organization.

Whereas, the current by-law providing for non-veterans to vote on resolutions is not consistent with the veteran status of the organization and the public and government officials are being misled to believe that veterans passed the resolution as opposed to veterans and non-veterans;

Whereas, there are various benefits, privileges and rights bestowed upon veterans' organizations;

Whereas, the By-Laws do not provide the right for Associate Members to submit resolutions or to speak to other matters coming before the Annual Convention.

Whereas, Associate Members are important and vital to VFP thus they should have a full and complete opportunity to submit resolutions and speak to all matters coming before the Annual Convention before the Full Members vote thereon.

Now, Therefore, be it Resolved, by vote at the 2010 VFP national convention that the following shall replace the current Article X, Membership Meeting, Section 3, Voting, of VFP By-Laws: Each Full Member shall be entitled to one vote on matters coming before the Annual Convention. Prior to the consideration and vote on resolutions by the Full Members, the Associate Members shall have an equal opportunity with Full Members to speak to the resolution.

Further, be it Resolved, that the below shall be added as subsection (d) to Section 4, Resolutions, of VFP By-Laws: Associate Members shall have the right to submit resolutions for consideration and vote by Full Members at Annual Conventions.

Historical Context

Veterans for Peace was founded in 1985 by a group of Veterans, spouses and allies. The original roster of 38 charter members consisted of 31 veterans and 7 associates. The group wanted to form a new type of veterans group, one which operated with transparency, using non-violent tactics for change. The group was also quite concerned with discrimination and the disenfranchisement of others, thus worked hard to build mechanisms within the structure of the organization that recognized and honored all voices. Two levels of membership were established: full membership open to anyone who had served in the armed services including the Merchant Marines, and associate membership for any non-veteran. This structure was different than other veterans groups, which at the time banned women from membership due to their gender. They didn't want a hierarchical organization, but needed it for a 501c3, and to maintain the integrity as a veterans' organization.

By the end of the first year, VFP had members in 32 states, Washington DC and Puerto Rico, and five established chapters. This was both the beginning of VFP on the grassroots level and of organizing nationally, thus the seeds which VFP national grew from. The heart of VFP has always been grassroots organizing on the chapter level. While there are members who are "at-large", the focus of VFPs efforts varies according to chapter interests and efforts.

From the beginning, while VFP was primarily a veteran's organization, its existence relied on associates who worked side-by-side with veteran members. In many chapters there is no distinction in who can or cannot vote and a significant number of chapters have associates who serve as officers. The predominant practice in terms of the "public face" of VFP is that when there is outreach, in particular to media, public officials, etc., that a veteran member is the "face" of the organization.

- Historical background from Jerry Genesio *Veterans For Peace: The First Ten Years* 1997 and communications with founding member Doug Rawlings.

Membership Categories

The current by-laws of VFP full and associate members state:

Section 1. Full Membership.

Full Members of VFP shall be veterans of the Armed Forces of the U. S., or veterans of the Armed Forces of foreign nations who reside in the U. S. They may also be Merchant Marines or other U.S. Citizens who have served in a professional capacity with or in service to the Armed Forces of the U.S. in an area and during a period of war, conflict or other hostile activity. Full Members must subscribe to the purpose, goals and ideals of VFP and pay national dues. Eligibility for Full Membership shall be determined by additional rules and regulations adopted by the Board of Directors.

Section 2. Associate Membership.

Associate Members of VFP shall be members who are not veterans, but who subscribe to the purpose, goals and ideals of VFP and pay national dues. Eligibility for Associate membership shall be determined by additional rules and regulations adopted by the Board of Directors. (VFP website, approved at the 1999 Convention in Philadelphia PA).

Please note: one of the issues brought up in the arguments related to changing the bylaw, was of having non-veterans vote on veterans' issues. Obviously, if someone is a full member, they can vote. What is not recognized is that there are a select few full-members who are technically not considered to be veterans (note above), which also includes some honorary members. The process for establishing honorary members within chapters is solely determined by the chapter and the process for establishing honorary members on a national level is unknown. This illustrates the fluidity of the membership categories, but also contains the potential to disenfranchise associate members.

Gender and Associate Membership

As noted in Genesio's book and in discussions with founding members, the group which started VFP was very cognizant of how 'white and male' the organization was, and actually still is. This is due to a variety of reasons which we will not go into here except to note that gender is an important issue related to the resolution we were charged to address.

It is no secret that women are a strong but numerically small force within VFP on both the national and chapter levels. This is partially due to years of segregation within the military and the fact that many female members are non-veterans who are often related to veteran members. As noted in the history section above, the founders struggled to find ways to create a veterans' organization that was operated

on principles of democracy, equity and non-discrimination. Structurally, unlike more traditional veterans' organizations, membership is not formally determined by gender.

As VFP has evolved, the majority of associate members have been female and this makes a large impact on the culture of the organization particularly since many full members view women members as spouses or relatives of veteran members. It is not uncommon for female members to be asked if they are veterans whereas male members are presumed to be veterans and treated as such without question – this occurs inside and outside of VFP. This reflects a cultural inequality within the organization, which obviously reflects the larger society we live in. To some this may not seem like a salient issue but this example of assumptions of veteran status, which we addressed in the larger document, is an indicator of deeper issues related in inequalities within and outside of VFP and matters, particularly in terms of maintaining VFP as a democratic, non-discriminatory organization.

It is unclear what the percentage of female to male members there are in VFP as a whole, largely due to inconsistent or non-existent record keeping since the organization began. We do know that of the ten people who were able to attend the associate caucus at the 2011 convention, all were female.

Kristina Wolff conducted a survey of VFP which started in 2010. Members participated via a link to the survey on the VFP website (July 2010 - February 2011) and through the use of paper questionnaires at the 2010 convention. Individual interviews were conducted during this same time period with female members of VFP. The data is still in the process of being analyzed.

The preliminary results of Kristina's study illustrate a disparity by gender. Of the 419 viable surveys, which is approximately 10% of the membership, 83% of the respondents were full/veteran members, 10% were associate/non-veteran members and the remaining 7% were lapsed members or non-members who were closely affiliated with VFP. Overall, women represented 18% of the respondents, males were 80% and the remaining 2% were unidentified. When gender is examined within membership categories, the percentages for full/veteran members are 89% male and 11% female; for associates the gender breakdown is 86% female and 14% male. Women who responded were close to evenly divided by membership status, 39 were full members and 37 were associates.

Some may argue that these figures do not reflect membership as a whole but in terms of research, a response rate of ten percent or more has been found to be a good measure. Also, the majority of the people responding were active in VFP on some level. One of the questions this data leads to ties into one of the arguments used in support of the resolution which was that people were concerned that non-veteran members were representing VFP in very public ways. For the sake of argument, if one were to assume that the non-veteran member was an associate, and that associates are overwhelmingly female, then perhaps one of the issues of 'who' represents VFP is related to the gender.