

VFP Board Candidate Questionnaire for Paul Cox

1) Please briefly describe your reason for joining the Board of Directors and what you hope to bring to the organization?

The Board is in the midst of a generational transition. While I am of the Vietnam-era cohort that is about to transition out, I have been an activist and leader within the veterans' movement since I returned from Vietnam in 1971 and have much to offer. I have energy, skills, historical perspective, and insights that can contribute to a smooth and thoughtful maturing of the Board's functions during this difficult and historically amazing time. It is not enough to put younger veterans on the board that do not have a significant history within the organization, no matter how committed or talented they are. The VFP chapters must be encouraged and enabled to bring in young veterans locally in order to provide a grounded cohort for the next generation of national leaders. Lastly, I will also focus on helping the organization to climb out of its current financial crisis.

2) Veterans For Peace has a hard time retaining members? What do you think VFP could do differently to keep members who join the organization?

A percentage of new veteran members of all ages who join do not renew their memberships, or do not participate at any level. Sincerely welcoming new members and working hard to integrate them into the life of the chapter will be crucial. Also, it is important for the chapters to reach out to lapsed members to determine why they left and ask them to return. This will help keep our numbers up. In contrast to, say, Iraq-Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), one of several new veteran non-organizations that counts everyone on their email/Twitter list as a member, we are activists and organizers. This fact will appeal to many younger veterans whose experiences in the military has left them intent on changing society. The chapters must be very creative and energetic in their recruiting in order to attract a critical mass of younger vets. That will require attending to and supporting the concerns of the younger generation AT THE CHAPTER LEVEL. The board will have limited but crucial influence on that effort, but can provide ideas, insights, encouragement, and hopefully some financial assistance for targeted projects.

3) How do you envision helping VFP expand its membership, particularly in terms of Veterans of recent wars, women veterans, and BIPOC Veterans? If VFP pays sufficient attention to the critical issues raised by Black Lives Matter, the struggles of Native Peoples, the oppression of people of color, immigrant populations, and women, we will attract the attention and membership of progressive veterans of all types. We must get into the streets, our communities, and halls of government to lend our

experience and status as veterans of US imperial wars to assist those struggles. To the extent that acknowledging that we are veterans is helpful to the struggle for peace and justice veterans will join us.

4) How do you envision ensuring that VFP is a safe space for our members?

VFP has passed a Code of Conduct in 2018 and 2019, but this is only a first step. What else can we do? *The Code of Conduct, as a first draft, is a major step forward for VFP. Applying it across the board, pun intended, will be another major step. All people, including veterans, carry historical and emotional baggage. As individuals and an organization, we need to be sufficiently centered and peaceful to treat every person with respect. It is of overriding importance to integrate our own histories and prejudices with the overarching needs of the Earth and the human species. This is a tall order— aspirational probably—but worth the effort.*

5) What are your thoughts about VFP's Peace At Home, Peace Abroad campaign?

An odd question. I am fully in support of it, as indicated above. Of the 800 plus US military bases about half are in other countries and half in the US and its colonies, and the military gets 53% of the US government's discretionary budget. In many cities, the police take nearly half of the budget. Those are just two of the indicators that our empire is deadly, immoral, and (thankfully) unsustainable. Our task includes reversal of the violence that has been unleashed not only in the seven countries on which we are waging war (Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), but also on our own people across the country. But the incompetence of the US government (and many states and cities), combined with their viciousness against peaceful demonstrators, is, thanks to the new mass media technologies, there for all to see in real time—and that is an important educational moment for the American people.

6) The VFP Board of Directors is striving to make directorship as accessible as possible. We conduct monthly zoom meetings, and when we meet in person VFP can and will help subsidize travel costs to ensure financial needs are not a barrier. For members who have difficulty traveling for any reason (e.g., due to work or family commitments), it is possible to attend in-person meetings by Zoom as well (which we have been doing through lockdown anyway). Will you have the time and availability to be an active member of the Board of Directors, join committees, and help with the duties and responsibilities of board members? *Yes.*

7) What do you do, or did you do if retired, for a living? *I am a civil engineer with 35 years' experience in investigations and analysis of structural failures. I work very little these days and am mostly retired.*

8) Have you served on any non-profit boards before? *1) Co-founder (2016) and current board president of Veterans Healthcare Policy Institute(www.veteranspolicy.org). 2) Swords to Plowshares Veterans Rights Organization, board member since 2005 and board president from 2009-2013 (www.Swords-to-Plowshares.org). 3) Board member since 2005 of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign (www.vn-agentorange.org), a national project of VFP. 4) A founder of Veterans Speakers Alliance, started in 1983, which became SF Chapter 69 of VFP in 1991, and remains active in the chapter, currently acting as secretary. 5) Board member since 2018 of Hoa Binh (Peace) Chapter 160, Vietnam. 6) Chair of the War Memorial Commission from 2015-2020, a committee of the American Legion in San Francisco responsible for the veterans' space in the SF Veterans' Building, and current finance officer.*

9) If so, what board committee(s) were you on? *Variously: Executive Committee, Resource Development Committee, Communications Committee, Finance Committee, Governance Committee, Strategic Planning Committee, Litigation Committee, Website Committee, Legislative Committee, Fundraising Committee, Bylaws Committee, and others.*

10) Has your work or non-profit board experience included any responsibilities in any of these areas?

Human resource/personnel: *yes*

Legal: *yes*

Development/fundraising: *yes*

Accounting/financial management: *yes*

11) When was your military service? *8-1968 through 6-1972, 18 months in Vietnam.*

12) Where do you live? *Berkeley, CA*

13) Do you belong to any racial or ethnic minority? *no*

14) Are you a member of a VFP chapter, National Project, Working Group, or other entity? *Yes, as stated above, a founder of what became SF Chapter 69; also board member of Chapter 160; and a board member of the VAORRC, a VFP National Project.*

15) Please briefly describe any other organizing experience within VFP or the broader peace and social justice community. *I and we have worked extensively with Code Pink, Ohlone Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux, World Without War, A.N.S.W.E.R., UNA-USA SF Chapter, Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange, Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations, the Vietnam Friendship Village, Peace Trees Vietnam, Project RENEW (Vietnam), Common Defense, SOVA, Veterans for Common Sense, and, gosh, many others. Though it is not a progressive organization by any stretch of the imagination, I have also been active in (and a thorn in the side of) the American Legion for many years—but that is a longer story. Happy to share.*