

VFP Board Candidate Questionnaire
Susan Schnall

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

We need to bring people in this organization together, to honor and respect the work we have done in the past, to learn from that work, and move forward to defeat the triplets of evil spoken about by Martin Luther King, Jr.: racism, poverty, materialism, and war. The future existence of the earth and our children is at stake.

I've been a member of Veterans For Peace for the past 14 years- since my retirement from the NYC public hospital system. In this new decade of my life I find myself circling back to my past of organizing active duty GIs and veterans against the wars in Southeast Asia. Today I am an elder-one who has learned a great deal and has much to give and teach to those organizing today. The Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign works to educate about Agent Orange/dioxin and to reconcile people and governments that fought a brutal war-it is but one example of how our money and resources are used to benefit the few. Native people honor their elders and learn from them. In VFP we throw away that knowledge and dismiss our elders. It is time for us to reconcile and learn from each other. The enemy is not us.

In NYC we built a successful legislative campaign with members from VFP chapters across the country as we developed coalitions with both local and national organizations: Brooklyn for Peace, numerous labor unions in our Move the Money Campaign, commemorated Hiroshima and Nagasaki Day with the Manhattan Project for a Nuclear Free World, coordinated legislative events with Pace e Bene, developed programs with Peace Action Fund of New York State, participated in the Waging Peace Campaign that brought its exhibit of the history of the GI anti war movement across the globe, starting at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City.

From my 31 years of professional administrative role in public hospitals, I bring experience in leadership and respect for all, a compassion and love for those patients whose illnesses we cured, a knowledge and understanding of how organizations work and people behave. As President of a successful local VFP chapter, I have experience of bringing people together to work successfully. I look forward to working with a board that is interested in understanding history and learning from those of us who were part of it. I look forward to learning new ideas and experience from younger colleagues. And I look forward to having us work together for a more caring world that values all its people and stops the destruction

of the earth.

I bring honesty and integrity to the board, an understanding of its role as adjunct and assist to that of the VFP chapters.

- 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?

We need to become a welcoming and inclusive organization. When new members join, we need to reach out and work with them on their interests and try to match them with our ongoing activities. Our NYC chapter has an individual assigned to welcome new members, identify their particular interests, help orient them to chapter projects and activities.

In addition, both the chapters and working groups could develop a welcome package for new members that would include information about their local chapter and link to the chapter's website or Facebook page. Information should include chapter contacts and information about local activities and national projects. We need to check in routinely with members to ask about their satisfaction with the chapter and organization and request suggestions for projects and activities. After members have left, we could do an exit interview regarding their reasons for leaving and then coordinate responses with other VFP chapters to develop a survey tool and identify opportunities to improve.

- 3) How do you envision helping VFP expand its membership, particularly in terms of Veterans of recent wars, women veterans, and BIPOC Veterans?

There are several ways of expanding membership by participating in and with those organizations with which we work and collaborate. It would be ideal to have a VFP member responsible for working with specific organizations and reporting back ongoing work to the chapter. Most colleges/universities have veteran organizations that have been formed to attract veteran students. Reach out to them. Attend a meeting and announce upcoming events. Initiate political events when the group shows interest.

Individual chapters could develop a speakers' bureau that would respond to requests from colleges, high schools, and grade schools in addition to peace and justice organizations. Today these requests would be easier to handle since most events would be handled remotely.

Would like to see national VFP work on local events and with chapters

when VFP members are involved.

- 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?

Leadership must always lead by example: to speak truth and show integrity; of inclusion; of resolving conflicts, rather than perpetuating them; of representing all members of an organization fairly and justly; of listening to all parties when there are issues; of understanding the principles involved in conflict resolution; of accepting responsibility for decisions made; of admitting when wrong and then working to correct those decisions. Most particularly, the board needs to understand its position within the organization—and that is to assist the chapters and their work.

For 31 years I was in management and administrative positions in the New York City Public Hospital System. For the first couple of years I was a community organizer, educating community advisory boards of the various hospitals about their roles and responsibilities. Because I am also a clinician, I was able to teach lay people about appropriate quality care. But I also taught the community how to relate to the hospital power structure, how to become effective community advocates. We learned from each other. Being a hospital administrator and adjunct professor at NYU, gave me both learned experience and textbook theory about the interface of respect and leadership. Team work and leading by example represent the most effective leadership.

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

We need to start with Peace at Home by bringing peace within the organization, showing respect for the work of the individual chapters and promoting them. The Peace at Home title should encompass work being done to end racism—whether its by joining together with Black Lives Matter in the streets, Wall of Veterans, through writing and teaching, and cultural events that include dancing, music, readings. The NYC Peace Council has been working on promoting a Veterans Statement based on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s three tenets that bring together the work needed to be done at home and abroad (Please note the opening statement of my platform).

Those tenets could be used to help coordinate the current work of the VFP chapters and projects. We have members who have served the American military in wars all over the globe—bring them to chapter meetings and schools to educate, to help spread information to our communities. Most Americans don't know how much we spend on the military that could be used for domestic programs. We have 800 military bases engaged at the present time when we have people of color dying in understaffed hospitals. We experience the earth overheated, polluted, and dying. We have work to do together, instead of against each other.

- 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?

During college I worked as a nurse aide in long term care facilities, including a VA hospital outside Chicago. I am a registered nurse who took care of the wounded returning from southeast Asia from 1967-1969. From 1969-1970 I worked as a fundraiser and organizer with the US Servicemen's Fund, providing resources for alternative coffeehouses near military bases. I also worked in the Intensive Care Unit of Lincoln Hospital in the South Bronx.

For 31 years I was a healthcare administrator in a number of public hospitals in NYC and retired from Bellevue Hospital in 2006.

I have been an adjunct professor at NYU, School of Professional Studies for the past 24 years, teaching medical ethics. Am currently President of the NYC VFP chapter. For the past several years I've served on the Board of Directors of the Institute for Community Living—an organization that provides services to the seriously, persistently mentally ill homeless—including veterans. Am Chair of the Quality Improvement and Outcomes Committee, overseeing compliance with regulations from city, state, and

federal agencies.

Along with Paul Cox and Dan Shea I've been a co-coordinator of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. We organized a successful campaign in the House of Representatives getting HR 326 Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act introduced by Congresswoman Barbara Lee. We've organized about 26 cosponsors, worked with the Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin to bring publicity and support for our effort to heal the wounds of war and reconcile former enemies. We formed a Science Group composed of scientists and professors to review and analyze studies and articles on the effect of the use of these chemicals on the people and land in Viet Nam, including those Americans who served and their children. We have put panels together for presentations at the annual meetings of the American Public Health Association, colleges and universities, and at the International Conference on Agent Orange/dioxin held in Hanoi, Viet Nam in 2016.

- 8) Have you served on any non-profit boards before?

Yes, please see above answer

- 9) If so, what board committee(s) were you on?

In addition to being Chair of the Quality Assurance Committee, I am also on the Development Committee that is responsible for fundraising and raising community awareness for ICL. We review the agency's financial status at our meetings and conduct an annual evaluation of the agency. As Chair of the QA Committee, I also am a member of its Executive Committee, overseeing the agency's policies and procedures and compliance issues.

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

Human resource/personnel: As a healthcare administrator, I was responsible for hiring and evaluating my staff and reviewing evaluations conducted by my department heads. Resolving problems and issues between staff was another one of my responsibilities.

Legal: During my healthcare career, I was Director of Risk Management and responsible for legal issues, some of which were discussed with the Legal Office of central office.

Development/fundraising: Please note that I serve on the Development Committee of ICL that is responsible for outreach, publicity and marketing,

and fundraising.

Accounting/financial management: My job as an administrator involved staffing the multiple departments (Quality Management, Risk Management, Utilization Management, Medical Records) under my supervision, developing the budgets for the departments, and working with the Finance Department to bring in revenue. As previously mentioned, as a board member of ICL, a non profit organization, I am responsible for reviewing the agency's financial management.

- 11) When was your military service?

1967-1969

- 12) Where do you live?

NYC

- 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?

President of the NYC Chapter; member of Chapter 160, Hoa Binh, Viet Nam; member of the Full Disclosure Working Group; and co-coordinator of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign

- 15) Please briefly describe any other organizing experience within VFP or the broader peace and social justice community.

In the late 1960's I was a member of the Medical Committee for Human Rights and served as the chair of the Northeast Region in the early 1970's; I was an active member of Medical Aid to Indochina—an organization that raised money for medical supplies for the Vietnamese and for Bach Mai Hospital in the north; in 1972 I represented Medical Aid to Indochina and spoke at an international conference in Paris against the American War in Viet Nam. My work during the 1970's included organizing community activists around conditions in city/community hospitals.

Current work includes coordinating with our sister organization in Viet Nam-Vietnam Association for the Victims of Agent Orange/dioxin. I coordinate a science group on Agent Orange that reviews studies and articles on AO/dioxin and travels to Viet Nam to meet with AO victims and review journal articles and studies.

Our NYC VFP chapter joins with sister peace and social justice organizations in the area. Until recently, we led veteran peace contingents in the Armistice Day Parade, led Memorial Day events in Battery Park, NYC; and with Full Disclosure brought Letters to the Wall in Washington, DC; and we held rallies outside the United Nations on International Peace Day. Our goal in all our work is on building a VFP chapter that works together in coalitions with other peace and justice organizations.