

FUNDRAISING IDEAS FROM THE VFW FOUNDATION FOR VFW POSTS

- **YOUR FIRST TASK IS TO DECIDE WHAT YOU NEED FUNDING FOR AND HOW MUCH IS NEEDED.** Is funding required for building improvement, handicapped accessible ramps, programs, etc.? Do you need \$5,000 or \$50,000? If it's a building project, you might want to get "free" construction estimates from contractors so as to have a "ballpark" idea of costs. Also, especially if you are expanding or changing the footprint of your building, you will want to check with your city/county to make sure that this is allowable.



- **UNFORUTNATELY THERE ARE FEW IF ANY FEDERAL GRANTS THAT ARE APPLICABLE TO VFW POSTS.** Even if there were federal grants, the application process would most usually be overwhelming and entirely too complicated. Federal grant money is also closely monitored which might require the hiring of a full-time staff member just for compliance. Thus, do not consider federal grants as a fundraising option.

- **SOME STATES PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO VETERANS GROUPS SO CHECK WITH YOUR LOCAL ELECTED STATE REPRESENTATIVES.** There might be funds for building improvement, "green" technology or energy saving innovations applicable to your building, etc.

- **KEEP TRACK OF HOW OTHER POSTS IN YOUR STATE HAVE SUCCESSFULLY RAISED MONEY.** Imitation can often be a good thing.

Now:

(1) Where is your Post located? Is it in a rural or urban area? If urban or near a larger city, I suggest you go to your local Chamber of Commerce, local community foundation or even your library (Reference Librarian) to get a free list of the largest nongovernmental employers/companies in your county. With this you can create a potential donor list.

(2) Think of the companies that the Post already has a relationship with. Private utility companies (gas, electric, water, cable TV, etc). Does the Post have a canteen? If so what about the beverage distributor? What about your bank that holds the Post's funds? Ask for a donation from all of these companies. You might only get \$50 but some Posts have actually received donations of \$5,000 or more.

(3) A bank is also a good place to speak to an individual called a Trust Officer. He/She might handle foundation money. For instance, if someone died in your community back in the 1950s or 1960s in the provisions of their will they could have set up a foundation. Perhaps, they appointed family members (son, daughter, spouse, brother) to the Foundation Board. Now, those individuals might have passed as well. The money then is typically managed by a bank (through a Trust Officer). Sometimes the money is managed by a law or accounting firm but again it's usually a bank. And that Trust Officer is almost always the decision maker each year on what nonprofit organizations get that money. Trust Officers are more common at banks in urban areas especially at the main bank headquarters (not a branch).

(4) Use your Post members as a resource. Perhaps, they know individuals with financial resources or persons who hold high positions in local companies who might consider donations. These might be neighbors, friends, other family members, people they go to church with, etc. Your Post members might be able to provide an introduction to the potential donor so that you can speak to them directly. Also, promote your Post to your members as an organization that can be designated in their wills.

(5) Are there any casinos within 50 miles of the Post? Contact regular and Indian casinos and ask to speak to a person who most usually has a title of “Public or Community Affairs Manager.” Ask for a donation. Even though (non-Indian) casinos are usually directed by the state to give a certain portion of their earnings to specific community causes (especially education) they often donate to other groups as well.

(6) The Home Depot. Once again in 2015 the Home Depot has an Internet grant that provides up to \$5,000 to improve community gathering spaces especially veteran’s buildings like VFW Posts. I have designed a very detailed how-to apply guide that will walk one through the process that I can email to Posts. Post members also might want to approach a local Home Depot or Lowe’s Store Manager and ask for product donations. Several Posts have received building materials to remodel their Posts in this manner. One of the easiest products to ask for is “oops paint” or paint that has been returned by customers because the tint might be slightly off. I know of one Post that completely repainted (for free) the interior of their building with oops paint.

(7) Assemble a one-page sheet (some Posts do a brochure) that lists all the activities that your Post does for its community. SEE SAMPLE #1. This insert can be included with any fundraising letter that you send out or something to bring with you when talking to a potential donor directly. The reality is that most people have no idea what a VFW Post does for its community. Thus, list all the activities such as:

Does your Post send care packages to local troops in Afghanistan?

Does your Post help out homeless vets?

Do Post members regularly visit the VA to see patients?

Do you allow the use of your Post building to other community groups such as the Boy or Girl Scouts?

Does your Post participate in Patriot’s Pen or Voice of Democracy? If so, how much money have you given to local students over the past 10 years (the amount might surprise you!).

(8) O.K., here is an issue that might come up. Most VFW Posts are classified by the Internal Revenue Service at 501(c)(19) not the more common 501(c)(3). A 501(c)(19) is still a nonprofit designation but it is specific to a “...group of past or present members of the American Armed Services” whereas a 501(c)(3) is simply “...a general nonprofit.” Regardless, a donor such as a company or individual would almost always get the same tax benefit contributing to a 501(c)(19) as they would to a 501(c)(3). With that said, in most instances a corporation, foundation or individual only wants to donate to a 501(c)(3) as they are not familiar with the 501(c)(19) designation. If this is the case, we can usually still make a donation possible. The donor can make their check payable to the “VFW Foundation” and send it directly to my attention (along with a letter explaining that the donation is actually for your Post). I then cash the check and send your Post a check for the exact same amount. Here are two points to emphasize to the donor (and once

they understand this they usually will go ahead and make the donation). 1. 100% of their money with no administrative or other costs will return to the Post as the VFW Foundation does this as a service to VFW Posts/Departments; 2. They will receive a tax receipt not from your Post/Department but from the VFW Foundation which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. I can also send a letter directly to the potential donor explaining all of the above.

So I can effectively track potential donations, please call me for further guidance before proceeding.

NOTE: The VFW Foundation cannot pass through government funds (federal, state, county or city). Each donation also must be in excess of \$500.

(9) Here are two other important things that the VFW Foundation can also do for VFW Posts and also Departments:

I. **I can provide you with a variety of fundraising template letters that you can edit and make specific to the needs of your Post/Department.** These are in Word format and I can email them to you.

II. **I have access to a national database that allows me to research all foundation gifts in every single U.S. County including yours.** Depending on the size of the county (whether it's urban or rural) usually determines the amount of foundation activity. Thus, with that said a county for a large urban city such as Pittsburgh, PA, might have substantial foundation activity whereas a county in the middle of Kansas might have none. I never know until I go into the database. When I identify potential foundation donors, I then send the Post/Department information that will include the name, address, contact person, telephone #, etc. If a foundation is interested in possibly funding your Post/Department, they might send you an application to fill out. If so I can usually help out there as well. By the way, getting grant money is entirely possible as for example, I've had Posts receive grants in excess of \$25,000 with information that I

provided them.

Good luck! To succeed you will have to dedicate yourself to this cause and naturally expend a fair amount of effort. A wise man once said that nothing good, ever happens by chance without commitment and determination. Do not hesitate to call me with any questions. I am here to help!

--Richard



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SAMPLE #1



VFW POST 1234 – SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

HELPING OUR COMMUNITY IN NUMEROUS WAYS WITH INNOVATIVE & NEEDED PROGRAMS!

- On November 10, 2012, our Post sponsored a fall Stand-Down Event for 350 area homeless veterans. We provided information on medical care and other social service referrals, operated a soup kitchen and handed out winter clothing.
- For the past ten years, we have contributed over \$25,000 in college scholarships to local students for *Patriot's Pen* and *Voice of Democracy* (patriotic student essay contests).
- Allowed the use of our Post building free-of-charge to various other non-profit groups such as the Boy Scouts, Rotary Club, Seattle Homeless Coalition, etc.
- Collected products and shipped over 500 care packages to Washington state troops stationed in Afghanistan.
- Our Auxiliary organized a Christmas party for the children of military personnel stationed overseas.
- Bought \$1,500 worth of needed supplies for the Lake County Orphanage.
- Regularly visit hospitalized veterans at the Seattle VA Medical Center. We also provide them with needed supplies that boost their morale.

Simply list other activities that benefitted the community that your Post conducted. Hand this out to potential donors or include it as an attachment if you are sending out a fundraising letter.