



**Your How-To Guide for
Promoting VFW Youth Programs**

**A Student You Help Could
Someday Become President**

VFW's many youth scholarship programs are quite an achievement for this organization. We annually award \$3 million in scholarships and prizes to students who participate in our Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen contests. It's your job to see that these programs are well known in your community. The following is offered as a simple, step-by-step plan to prepare for and effectively introduce these programs to teachers, school administrators or leaders of community youth groups.

Some People Still Don't Know about VFW Youth Programs

The first step is to identify likely individuals with whom you can discuss VFW youth scholarship opportunities. Here are a few suggestions of groups who might be interested in what you have to say:

- Schools
- Church or youth groups
- Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops
- Home school associations
- Parent Teacher associations or equivalent
- Youth sports teams
- JROTC and/or Civil Air Patrol

Next, you need to schedule an appointment to discuss VFW's youth scholarship opportunities. Here's what you do:

- 1) Call the school or organization, explain your mission and ask with whom you should speak. The individual who answers the phone may:

- a) connect you with that person,
- b) allow you to leave a message, or c) ask you to leave a number for the person to call. Here's what you can say:

"This is Joe Smith. I represent the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1234. We have a number of scholarship programs that will benefit your students and teachers. Is there someone on staff with whom I could make an appointment to discuss VFW youth scholarship opportunities?"

When you leave a voice mail or talk with the individual, use the approach above and end with the following:

"Is there a time when I could come by and take 15 minutes to show you how VFW can benefit your students and teachers?"

Before the appointment, do your homework. Familiarize yourself thoroughly with the programs you'll be pitching. You'll want to know who can participate and when the deadlines are. Make sure you have enough copies of the appropriate program brochures* for the teacher/leader and potential participants. Furthermore, be sure you are able to answer the following questions prior to your interview:

- Do I understand and can I answer all questions about the programs I am presenting? (Read the brochures and program manual if you don't.)
- How many young people are potential program participants?
- Is this the first time VFW programs have been presented at this location? (If it is not, you may wish to reference the relationship that already exists.)
- Am I aware of any past winners from this school or community group? (You should mention any past winners or participants from the area.)
- Do I have all the brochures I need to leave with the teacher or youth leader?

*To download or forward electronic copies of the brochures please visit: www.vfw.org log in, and look under [VFW training and support](#) or call VFW Store (800- 821-2606) to purchase copies of the brochure.

The web page listed above contains student entry forms, special brochures designed for teachers and the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year Award nomination form/brochure.

When you visit a school, take advantage of the opportunity to share about the Smart/Maher VFW National Citizenship Education Teacher of the Year Award. Teachers who use our scholarship programs are especially good candidates for this award given annually to three teachers teaching in grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. Winners receive \$1,000 for their professional development, an all expenses paid trip to the VFW National Convention to receive their award and a \$1,000 check for their school.

The day of your appointment has arrived. Show up five minutes early and leave your VFW cap in the car. (To avoid problems, most schools don't permit students to wear head-gear of any kind. But, should you ever be invited to present an award or make a classroom presentation, ask if your VFW cap would be appropriate.) Thank the individual for their time and, in 60 seconds or less, explain each scholarship program that is appropriate to the individual with whom you are speaking. (A middle school teacher probably wouldn't be interested in VOD, because that program is only open to students in grades 9-12.) Here is an example of what you could say to explain VOD:

"VFW's Voice of Democracy Program is an audio-essay contest that provides more than \$2 million in scholarships each year. Students in grades 9-12 write an essay on a patriotic theme, record their essay on an audio CD or flash drive and enter at our VFW Post. If they win at the Post level, they can proceed to the District, state and national levels and receive scholarship money at each level. The first place state winners receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., to compete for \$152,000 in scholarships. The largest scholarship is \$30,000, and everyone receives at least \$1,000."

After you have presented all the programs, ask the individual how many brochures they will need to conduct the programs. Provide the materials you have prepared and explain that you can make more available if needed. Let them know that you are willing to present the programs directly to a class if they wish. Now it's time to leave. Conclude your visit by ensuring you have:

- Answered all their questions.
- Provided the appropriate brochures.
- Left your contact information for the teacher/leader.

- Explained the deadlines and when you will pick up the entries.
- Ask if you can leave posters to publicize the programs. (See VFW Store items 4431 and 4433.) Past winning essay flyers are also available (via email). Send an email to: Kharmer@vfw.org or call 816.968.1117.

The visit is over, but you're still not done. About one week later, drop the teacher/leader a note that reaffirms:

- Your gratitude for their meeting with you.
- Your availability to provide additional materials or present the program to the participants.
- The deadlines and when you will pick up the entries.
- That you will notify them when the winners are announced and awards presented.



The 2014 Voice of Democracy winners during their awards ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition:

9th through 12th graders write and record an audio essay on a patriotic theme, competing for more than \$2 million in college scholarships. Department winners visit Washington, D.C., and compete for \$152,000 in scholarships with a \$30,000 first place scholarship.

Patriot's Pen Essay Contest:

6th, 7th and 8th-grade students express their opinion on a patriotic theme in a written essay. State winners compete for \$50,000 in awards. The first place national winner receives a \$5,000 award.

Scout of the Year Scholarship:

Eagle Scouts, Girl Scout Gold Award recipients, Venture Summit Award recipients, and Sea Scout Quartermasters can win one of three national scholarships:

- First Place:** \$5,000
- Second Place:** \$3,000
- Third Place:** \$1,000

Here are some additional tips that should help your scholarship programs run more effectively.

Judging

- Invite your judges early, preferably in the spring or summer.
- Select them carefully, looking for individuals who are familiar with good writing and/or public speaking and preferably not from your Post or Auxiliary.
- Consider local newspaper reporters, broadcasters, retired teachers, civic leaders and individuals who work with young people.
- Be sure to invite your judges to the awards presentation and recognize them publicly.
- If you choose your judges correctly, equip them adequately and honor them properly, they are often willing to serve year after year.

Important: Remember our desire is to include as many students as possible, not exclude students. An entry should never be disqualified for misinterpreting the theme. That is part of the process and there is no such thing as an incorrect interpretation of the theme. That is up to the student. Also, don't be too strict regarding time or words. If the student is less than 15 seconds over or under on their recording or 20 words too long or short, go ahead and judge the entry and make sure your judges understand this degree of latitude.

Work With The Ladies

Many of our most successful Posts enjoy the benefit of the involvement of the Ladies Auxiliary in our scholarship programs. Be sure you invite the Ladies to participate and be sure to present their Young American Creative Patriotic Art Contest when you present VFW programs.


Start Early

Seek opportunities to present our programs early in the year, particularly in a school setting. Most teachers make their curriculum decisions in the spring for the following fall. The new scholarship themes are published on the web site in early January. Contacting schools in April gives the teachers and leaders ample opportunity to consider our programs for the following year. If you do this in April, they will be anticipating your call or visit in late August or September and will be more likely to welcome your programs.

In Conclusion

We cannot say "thank you" too often. I know the hours of commitment required to run a successful scholarship program. I know that many of you give up time with your family, put miles on your car and occasionally dip into your own pocket to make our programs successful in your area. You are the reason we in the Programs Office exist. The things that you do put a positive face on your Post in the community. We deeply appreciate the commitment you bring to VFW programs. The efforts you put forth provide benefits to your community, its families and young people beyond anything you can see or imagine. Thank you for all you do.

Sincerely,


Kevin Jones
Director, VFW Programs



Help Kids Develop their Full Potential and Possibly Pay for College

VFW Youth Programs

Voice of Democracy Audio Essay Competition

Patriot's Pen Essay Contest

Scout of the Year Scholarships

Call and Ask

If you have questions regarding any aspect of our programs, don't hesitate to call VFW Programs at 816-968-1117 or e-mail Kharmer@vfw.org. We are here to serve you and make your programs more successful.

VFW Programs, VFW National Headquarters, Suite 902, 406 West 34th Street, Kansas City, MO 64111

Tel. (816) 968-1117 or E-mail: Kharmer@vfw.org

Web site: www.vfw.org



For information contact: