



Welcome Guide for New Lodge Veterans Chairs

Now that you are the Lodge Veterans Chair, you may be wondering, "Where do I start?" We can help.

ENVSC-funded projects should focus on one of these five areas of increased need: employment; homelessness and housing; military families; health (and independent living); and educational support. You can learn more about these on the [Veterans Guidelines page](#). (You must have an [elks.org](#) username and password to access this site.)

These are great places to focus your Lodge's work, whether or not you're using ENVSC funds.

Below, read about our 3 major programs. Together, these make up more than 80% of the ENVSC budget. And, check out our [ENVSC 101 slideshow](#), which is a great introduction to our programs for new members and volunteers.

Elks Voluntary Service Program: The cornerstone of our work, this program stations Elks volunteers in VA hospitals and veterans' facilities across the nation. More than 343 Elks serve as Elks Voluntary Service Representatives, assisting hospitalized and recovering veterans by providing comfort, support and friendship. In addition, hundreds more Elks serve as Deputy Representatives.

This year, we'd like to also increase Lodge support of these volunteers and rally all Elks to spend time with veterans in these facilities. Make sure you have a good relationship with your local Representatives and Deputy Representatives and coordinate with them on projects. They may appreciate help with facility-based events, and you may want to invite the veterans from their facility to community or Lodge events.

Welcome Home: We are now in the 5th year of the Welcome Home program, which has helped thousands of veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We're counting on you to help end veteran homelessness.

One way your Lodge can help is by putting together Welcome Home Kits for veterans exiting homelessness and moving into new homes. Most formerly homeless veterans move into their homes with nothing. Elks can help by gathering things like sheets, towels, dishes and cleaning supplies. The ENVSC will reimburse your Lodge for each Welcome Home Kit you donate to a veteran in need. Your Lodge can partner with local veterans shelters or with the VA to connect with these veterans.

Freedom Grants: There will be 325 Freedom Grants in 2019-20! Freedom Grants will be awarded to the first 325 Lodges that submit qualifying applications. Remember, qualifying projects will be Elks-run and focus on serving veterans in need. Funds cannot be donated. Applications must be detailed and complete. Applications go online April 1, and Lodges are encouraged to submit their applications during the month of April.

For all our programs, please visit [elks.org/vets](#) for the latest updates. Our programs are always growing and changing to ensure we are best meeting the needs of veterans, military members and their families, so our website is the place for the most up-to-date information.

While there, check out our other programs, like **Adopt-a-Veteran** and **Playing Cards for Veterans**. Keep an eye out for **Veterans Adaptive Sports Clinics** near you. Several of these events travel each year, and always need local support. Our **Veterans Leather Program** volunteers travel to a few of these events every year to support the veterans and distribute Elks wheelchair gloves.

Or, check out this list of [140 Ways your Lodge can Serve Veterans](#), put together by Veterans Programs Chair Stewart Israel, who's been volunteering to serve veterans for more than 40 years!

If you have any questions or issues, give us a call anytime at (773) 755-4736 or email us at Vets@elks.org. We love talking to volunteers and are happy to share what we've learned from other Lodges.

Frequently Asked Questions

Where do I start?

Check out this ENVSC blog post for tips on [Finding Local Veterans in Need](#).

How do I pay for this?

We have resources! If you're interested in serving veterans at a facility like a VA Medical Center or State Veterans Home, keep in mind that Voluntary Service Representatives receive money every month to serve veterans at places like this. Consider partnering with them on new events and projects.

If you're serving veterans exiting homelessness, the ENVSC will reimburse up to \$300 for each Welcome Home Kit of supplies provided to a veteran and up to \$400 for each kit that includes a bed (dependent on corresponding receipts). You can access the form at elks.org/vets/kits.

Use your grants! In addition to the Freedom Grant, the Elks National Foundation has a \$13.7 million [Community Investments Program](#) designed to meet local needs. Many Lodges use Gratitude and Beacon Grants to serve veterans, military members and their families. And, check out the new Spotlight Grant, which offers 7 project options, including 3 that serve veterans experiencing homelessness.

Don't forget about local resources. Partner with local groups like the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Hold fundraisers at the Lodge. Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day and of course Veterans Day are excellent times to do this, since veterans and military members are on many people's minds.

Get creative! Hold supply drives in the community to collect socks for veterans at a local homeless shelter or ask Lodge members to donate home supplies and extra furniture to veterans moving into new homes. Ask local scout groups to write cards to veterans for Valentine's Day or reach out to Lodge members who are teachers and have their classes help.

What's the difference between a Voluntary Service Representative and a Lodge Veterans Chair?

[Elks Voluntary Service Representatives](#) receive funding from the ENVSC office each month and are accountable to their State Veterans Chairs. This funding is intended only to serve veterans at the facility where the Rep is assigned.

[Lodge Veterans Chairs](#) handle funding from the Lodge and report to their Lodge leadership. Some people hold both positions at the same time.

How do I connect with other Veterans Chairs and Representatives?

Visit our [Volunteer Resource Center](#) webpage to find a list of all State Veterans Chairs. Consult your state directory to get in touch with other Representatives and Lodge Veterans Chairs.

Are there any restrictions?

The ENVSC mission is one of direct service to our nation's veterans and military members, with a special focus on service to those in need. While generous, memorials, appreciation ceremonies and luncheons do not qualify. Lodges are free to use local, state or other funds to hold these events.

Dates to Remember

January 31: Veteran Volunteer of the Year nominations are due to your State Veterans Chair.

February 14: Facilities schedule extra activities because veterans get lonely around Valentine's Day.

April 1: Freedom Grants (and other Lodges Grants) become available online at elks.org/cip/dashboard.

April 1: New Elks Fiscal Year! Get together with the incoming/outgoing Lodge Vets Chair to plan.

June 14: Consider holding your Flag Day celebrations at a State Veterans Home or other veterans' facility.

June 15: Applications for new Voluntary Service facilities due to your State Veterans Chair.

November 11: Veterans Day

Many people remember veterans on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and major holidays. Be sure to reach out at other times of the year, when the general public isn't paying as much attention.