



ILLINOIS SPECIFIC PROGRAMS

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POPPY PROGRAM

Please read the program carefully. The Buddy Poppy Program and Buddy Poppy Display Contest are separated into sub-categories. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

A SYNOPSIS OF BUDDY POPPY

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States was the first veteran organization to promote a nationally organized campaign for the annual distribution of Poppies assembled by disabled and needy veterans. The Poppy movement was inspired by the poem, "In Flanders Fields" written by Colonel John McCrae of the Canadian forces before the United States entered World War I. The VFW conducted a Poppy campaign prior to Memorial Day 1922, using only Poppies that were made in France.

It was during the 1923 campaign that the VFW evolved the idea which resulted in the VFW Buddy Poppy fashioned by disabled and needy veterans who were paid for their work as a practical means of providing assistance for these comrades. Immediately thereafter the VFW Buddy Poppy Factory was established in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where all VFW Buddy Poppies for the 1924 campaign were assembled by disabled veterans.

In February 1924, the VFW registered the name "Buddy Poppy" with the United States Patent Office, and a certificate was issued on May 20, 1924, granting the VFW all trademark rights in the name of "Buddy" under the classification of artificial flowers. The VFW has made that trademark a guarantee that all Poppies bearing that name and the VFW label are genuine products of the work of disabled and needy veterans. No other organization, firm or individual can make legal use of the name "Buddy Poppy". It has been noted that all Presidents since Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) have conveyed to the nation at large, endorsement and recognition of the VFW effort.

Today, VFW Buddy Poppies are no longer assembled by disabled, needy and aging veterans. The demand was greater than what could be assembled by disabled veterans. The majority of proceeds derived from each campaign conducted by VFW Posts and their Auxiliaries are retained locally to provide for veteran services and welfare. Buddy Poppy proceeds represent no profit to any VFW unit. All money contributed by the public for Buddy Poppies is used in the cause of veterans welfare, or for the well being of their needy dependents and the orphans of veterans.



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BUDDY POPPY PROGRAM

When VFW Posts acquire Poppies, they distribute these Poppies to the public for donations and those funds support the Relief Fund in the local VFW Posts. Recognition and Appreciation is noted for their displaying of the flower. All money received is used in the Post's Relief Work. All Posts should acquire extra Poppies that will not be distributed to the public so they can participate in our annual Buddy Poppy Display Contest.

The following rules apply toward our annual Buddy Poppy Distribution/eligibility for Contest:

- **When ordering** Buddy Poppies from the VFW State Headquarters, you have the option to pay when ordering or after your set date of distribution plus your Post will receive credit on the Programs Dashboard at the time the order is placed.
- **Be Advised** our Buddy Poppy Distribution Year runs from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027 and is based on the number of Poppies purchased by the Post and/or Auxiliary with its purchases through the Post from the VFW State Quartermaster and covers any and all donations and other uses of the Buddy Poppy such as displays, floats, etc. by the Post and/or Auxiliary.
- **Remember** that when ordering your Poppies, our 2026-2027 Membership Program will require that Posts order a minimum of 3 poppies per member with a minimum order of 1,000 poppies to be considered for All-State. Also, Posts should order extra Buddy Poppies if needed for their Poppy Display requirements. It is also important to put your Poppy Sale Date on your Order Form to make sure you receive your Poppies when they are needed.
- **Be sure** to check your order upon delivery for a shortage in Poppies/multiple damaged Poppies because adjustments will be made only within 30 days of delivery.
- **Checks** will be presented to the Post and/or Auxiliary showing the greatest numerical increase in Poppy purchases. Cut-off for determining winners will be April 30, 2026. A Check will be presented to one Post in each Membership Category listed below. (Must have purchased poppies during the previous year to qualify for this award). In the event of a tie, the winner will be selected by the Director.

Membership Category 1 - Up to 150 Members
Membership Category 2 - 151 to 300 Members
Membership Category 3 - 301 Members and Up

- A **Special Award** will be presented during State Convention to any Post who orders a total of 25,000 poppies or more during this Fiscal Year.
- **Special Citations** will be presented to individuals recommended by Post or Auxiliary Poppy Chairman recognizing those individuals for their outstanding services to promote the Buddy Poppy Program. Individuals can include local bankers who may voluntarily set up a display in his/her bank a week or so prior to Buddy Poppy Day, urging the community's participation; another could be a theatre manager; an editor, a printer or sign maker; or anyone who promotes the program where it is not already advertised. Citation distribution to those concerned will be conducted by the Post Commander or the Post Poppy Chairman.
- **All New Post(s)** starting during the 2026-2027 Fiscal year will receive 500 free Poppies to begin their program.
- **ANNIVERSARY POPPIES** - Posts celebrating milestone anniversaries can order special poppies. Ordering requirements are the same - place your order through State Headquarters. Remember to allow 8-12 weeks for delivery.

Note: Should there be any need for clarification, contact the State Poppy Director.

ORGANIZING A POPPY DISTRIBUTION DAY

A successful V.F.W. or Auxiliary Poppy Chairman must be a special person. He or She must be a combination executive salesman, public relations expert, accountant and advertising specialist. They must be ever ready to cooperate with and assist their partner and counterpart in the Auxiliary (or Post) and have the leadership ability to make others want to work with them. They must be ENTHUSIASTIC, AND ANXIOUS TO WORK and have a thorough knowledge of the Program. To assist you in promoting your upcoming distribution, we offer these tips... Perhaps you are using them already, perhaps you use others more adaptable to your circumstances. In any case, follow these few guidelines in preparation:

A. FIND POSSIBLE LOCATIONS: for distribution and lock in your dates. If need be, contact the Bureau of permits at City Hall or the County Clerks Office. Insurance is also required for distribution in the streets at intersections.

B. GET VOLUNTEER COMRADES from your membership.

C. START A SIGN IN SHEET at your Post for comrades to be posted at specific locations so they know you know and that you will be looking for their presence at the time they specify.

1. **Obtain your workers.** If possible, invite the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts to help assist in your distribution of Poppies. Just remember that a VFW member must be at the same location with the scout(s).
2. **Make sure** you have only one (1) or two (2) at a location distributing poppies.
3. **Allow** two (2) to four (4) hour shifts for distributors before relief. Relief is necessary because we are not getting any younger. You may even want to have a chair at each location for a rest period.
4. **Instruct your workers.** They must know why they are distributing Poppies, what they are expected to do and how to approach the public without scaring them off or getting their dandruff up for an argument.

PROMOTE THE EVENT

Advise the public of your upcoming Poppy Day(s) through various sources. Example:

1. VFW Newsletters
2. Flyers
3. Newspapers
4. Radio & TV Announcements
5. Social Media
6. And of course... "Word of Mouth"

If you can think of any other way to attract attention of the public... do it!!

REMEMBER...When ordering Buddy Poppies, please allow twelve (12) weeks for delivery. If the State Headquarters has Poppies on hand, they will ship them to you immediately if needed right away. All Poppy accessories such as Poppy Cans, Easel Boards, Poppy Seller Caps, I.D. Cards, etc. are to be ordered directly from our National Emblem & Supply Catalog. Keep in mind that poppies can be paid for with a credit card by clicking on "Donations" on our Department Website and identifying your payment as Poppy Order.



VFW Department of Illinois Poppy Sales Order

Veterans of Foreign Wars Department
of Illinois Headquarters
3300 Constitution Drive
Springfield, IL 62711

Email Form

Date:	District:	Post/Aux Name & Number:
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Traditional Buddy Poppy: \$140 for 500 or \$280 for 1,000
Tin Tab Buddy Poppy: \$70 for 500 or \$140 for 1,000
Poppies can only be ordered in increments of 500

Name to be shipped to:	
Address to be shipped to:	
City/State/Zip to be shipped to:	
Phone number:	
Type of Buddy Poppy:	Traditional
Quantity:	500
Cost:	
Shipping: 500-\$15.95, 1000-\$29.95, 1500-\$34.95, 2000-\$39.95, 2500 plus-\$69.95	\$15.95
Total Balance Due:	\$ 15.95

Payment Options:

1. Make checks out to the Department of Illinois VFW and mail them to State HQ at the address above.
2. Go to www.vfwil.org to pay online by using the "Donate Now" button. You must allocate the funds to your "Post # Poppy Order"

NOTE: _____

For Department use only

Date recorded on dashboard	Date shipped or picked up	Date invoiced	Date paid

Please allow 8 weeks when ordering your poppies. Your order will be shipped by State Headquarters; however, we may have to order the poppies from National

POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST GENERAL RULES

1. The rules governing the poppy displays for the 2026-2027 year will be in accordance with the national poppy display contest. All entrants will comply with these rules. Your entry will be judged by them. All Districts are requested to follow these rules as closely as possible when holding your display judging.

RULES

CATEGORY 1 - Public promotion of poppy sales: (Window, booth, parade, or poster displays, sales promotion, etc.)

A. Displays must be designed for public exposure and must bear a message urging the buying and wearing of the VFW Buddy Poppy.

B. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

CATEGORY 2 - Memorial or inspirational displays: (wreaths, memorial tablets or plaques, patriotic or devotional themes.)

A. Displays must be designed to honor the dead, to inspire devotion to God and country, or to dramatize the activities supported by the Buddy Poppy Program.

B. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

CATEGORY 3 - Artistic or decorative use of poppies: (Post home displays, table centerpieces, corsages, pictures, plaques, models, scenes, hats, novelty pieces, etc.)

A. Display not meeting the qualifications for categories 1 or 2 shall automatically be entered in Category 3.

B. Complete freedom shall be permitted in the use of poppies, poppy parts or poppy labels, and in the use of dyes or paints in achieving the desired artistic effect.

C. At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in their original form and color, with labels attached.

2. The scoring of the displays will be in accordance with the national rules. Originality - 25 points; Composition - 25 points; Neatness - 25 points; Poppy Story - 25 points; for a total of 100 points maximum. The Originality, Composition, and Neatness are self-explanatory, with the Poppy Story as outlined in the Buddy Poppy Story.

3. Awards - First place Poppy Displays will be awarded a \$100 gift certificate to the VFW Store. Second place Poppy Displays will be awarded a \$75 gift certificate to the VFW Store. Category One (1) must have been on display at least three days.

4. A report of District judging must be sent to the Department Buddy Poppy Display Director prior to the Department Convention. Any display not accepted at District level, or not entered in District judging, will be ineligible for State judging.

5. All Displays entered and accepted at District level will be accepted for Department judging during the Department Convention.

6. Forms for judging and reporting results will be passed out to the District Commanders at the February Council of Administration Meeting, to be forwarded to each District Chairman.

7. Poppies to be used in display contests are to be ordered from VFW Department Headquarters, 3300 Constitution Dr., Springfield, Illinois 62711.

ALL DISTRICT CONTESTS SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY MEMORIAL DAY!!

The Districts will award prizes to their winners at their discretion. Each District entry will be allowed to enter in the Department Contest, in each of the three categories. However, they must remain in the category and division as entered in the District judging.

Who may enter the contest? Any person or group of persons (except professional display builders.) The display must be entered by Post or Auxiliary.

All previous District or Department entries are ineligible for this contest.

Categories 1-2-3

A. Originality - Your own thoughts, ideas, notion, lighting, or sound in setting up a display.

Categories 1-2-3

B. Neatness - Self-Explanatory

Categories 1-2-3

C. Composition - The manner in which display is composed, and use of Buddy Poppies for effect.

Categories 1-2

D. Poppy Story - Ability to display to sell and induce the public to buy and wear poppy; tells the story of the Buddy Poppy, its use of Poppy funds, by use of words, pictures or use of toys.

NOTE- No Poppy story included in category 3.

Judging-Point System - Categories 1 and 2 can earn up to 25 points in each of the above for a top score of 100 points. Category 3, which isn't judged with a poppy story can earn up to 25 points in the other categories for a top score of 75 points.

All ties will be broken by largest Buddy Poppy count.

POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST - STATE CONVENTION

All entries in the National Display Contest must be approved and sponsored by the Department Headquarters. No other entries will be accepted by officials of the National Contest. The number of entries allocated to Illinois by National Headquarters may be flexible, and in accordance with National's rules. Department display contest winners will be notified by Department Headquarters soon after the Department Convention. Special forms will be sent to those eligible for entry in national competition. Do Not, Do Not.... take any entry to National without the proper forms as it will not be accepted.

JUDGING:

There will be four (4) judges, one of whom must be a member of the V.F.W. The other three (3) judges should not be affiliated with the organization in any manner. Each judge will be assigned a specific area to judge. It is suggested the V.F.W. Judge be assigned to the Poppy Story. All judges should be residents of the convention city.

The decision of the judges and that of the Buddy Poppy Director, and her assistants, will be final. During the judging the entire area will be closed to all except the judges so as to insure impartial judging.

Let's show that No One Does More for Veterans, and have another great year in the Buddy Poppy Display Contest. Displays will be accepted at the Department Convention from noon to 4 p.m. Thursday and Friday of Convention Week. No entries accepted after 4 p.m. Friday. Awards to be presented during the Saturday business session.

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
PROGRAMS DEPARTMENT
“BUDDY”[®] POPPY PROGRAM

NATIONAL CONVENTION BUDDY POPPY DISPLAY CONTEST

These guidelines have been designed to place emphasis on the purpose and effectiveness of the displays. It is suggested and recommended that Department (State) contests rule be established in a like form.

RULES

(1) Displays will be presented and judged in three categories:

CATEGORY 1. Public Promotion of Poppy Campaign (Window, booth, parade, poster displays, campaign promotions, etc.)

- (a) Displays must be designed for public exposure and must bear a message soliciting a donation for and wearing of the VFW “Buddy”[®] Poppy.
- (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.

CATEGORY 2. Memorial or Inspirational Displays (Wreaths, memorial tablets or plaques, patriotic or devotional themes)

- (a) Displays must be designed to honor the dead, to inspire devotion to God and Country, or to dramatize the activities supported by the Buddy Poppy.
- (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.

CATEGORY 3. Artistic or Decorative Use of Poppies (Post Home displays, table center-pieces, corsages, pictures, plaques, models, scenes, hats, novelty pieces, etc.)

- (a) Any display not meeting the qualifications for Categories 1 or 2 shall automatically be entered in Category 3.
 - (b) At least one (1) of the poppies used in the display must be in its original form and color, with label attached.
- (2) Departments purchasing over 250,000 poppies will be allowed two (2) displays in **each** of the three (3) categories for the National Display Contest all others will be allowed one (1) display in each of the three (3) categories, no deviations.
- (3) The National Programs Committee shall have no responsibility in setting up, taking down or returning displays.

- (4) Displays shall be set up in space provided in the convention facility. Prior to setting up the display, the responsible person must register with the Buddy Poppy desk and complete an entry form (unless one was forwarded earlier, approved by Department) which will show the category of competition, the number of poppies used, the purpose of the display, the Post and/or Auxiliary number and location, and the name of the person who will dismantle and remove the display at the close of the convention. **(Please be advised, all displays must be removed by 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday or it will be disposed of by convention center personnel.)**
- (5) Displays may or may not be accompanied by a white card, not to exceed 4 inches by 6 inches in size, on which is lettered in black ink an explanation of the theme for the display or other information of interest to the viewers or the judges.
- (6) Post name, number, city or state (including the shape of your state) may **not** be visible on the displays. Failure to comply will result in disqualification.
- (7) (NEW) Any use of non VFW trademarks or copyrighted material on your display must have prior approval from the trademark or copyright holder. These include but are not limited to names, logos, audio/visual graphics, images and/or props. The VFW and Buddy Poppy logo and name is authorized but use of any outside organization trademark or copyrighted material and/or logos must have prior approval through their respective organization.

JUDGING

Judging of displays will be on the basis of effectiveness, purpose, clarity of theme, suitability, originality, beauty and number of poppies used. Where a sample of a large number of identical items (such as corsages or wreaths) is entered, full credit shall be given for the total number of poppies used. Judging will be completed by Monday evening and the winning displays will have the appropriate ribbons placed on the display on Tuesday morning.

PRIZES

Plaques will be awarded to the first, second, and third place winners in each of the three categories, and will be mailed to the winning Department's adjutant after convention.

NOTE

The Department adjutant will have to notify the Programs Director, in writing, by **June 30** of the Posts that will represent the Department in each category. This will allow us the time necessary to ensure each entry has sufficient space to set up at the National Convention.

Please be advised, the Programs Committee cannot guarantee against theft of personal items placed on the displays. The exhibit hall is secured at night and monitored by security guards: however, they monitor a large area and are not assigned to one specific area. We strongly discourage using items of sentimental value, items of value or items considered to be irreplaceable on the Buddy Poppy displays.

Thank you and good luck!

(Revised 1/8/2019)

OFFICIAL ENTRY BLANK FOR DISTRICT AND STATE DISPLAY CONTESTS
TO BE FILLED OUT BY ENTRANT:

POST #	AUXILIARY #
NAME OF BUILDER OR BUILDERS	
HOME ADDRESS	
NUMBER OF POPPIES USED IN DISPLAY	

THIS DISPLAY IS ENTERED IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORY:

Circle Category and Division:

STORE OR WINDOW DISPLAY

Category #1	Division A	Division B	Division C	Store or
Poppies used in Display	100 to 750	751 to 1500	1501 and up	Window

MEMORIAL or INSPIRATIONAL DISPLAY

Category #2	Division A	Division B	Division C	Memorial or
Poppies used in Display	100 to 750	751 to 1500	1501 and up	Inspirational

ARTISTIC OR DECORATIVE DISPLAY

Category #3	Division A	Division B	Artistic or
Poppies used in Display	10 to 1000	1001 and up	Decorative

CATEGORY #1, Please have this certification form completed before entering contest

I certify that this Poppy Display was on exhibit in my place of business for a period of not less than three (3) days.

Name of Store or Business: _____

City: _____

(To be filled in by Poppy Display Chairman:)

District# _____ Display # _____

Location of Display Contest: _____

Your Display was graded	<u>ORIGINALITY</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>NEATNESS</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>COMPOSITION</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>POPPY STORY</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
	<u>TOTAL SCORE</u>	

Your Display Finished
_____ **Place**

Attest: Buddy Poppy Display Chairman _____

DISTRICT BUDDY POPPY CHAIRMAN: You must submit one copy of this ENTRY BLANK for each display entered in your District to the State Poppy Display director by June 1
Send to: Stephanie Kirksey, 7 Carol Dr., Waterloo, IL 62298 • If you need more copies, please photocopy

BLOOD DONOR PROGRAM

You will notice a major change to the Blood Donor Program. There is not a separate Blood Donor chairman this year. This year, the Blood Donor Program is under the duties of the State Surgeon. State Commander Rob Bailey's theme "*All In, All The Time*" should remind each of us to take a good hard look at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Blood Donor Program.

Reporting Requirements:

The Blood Donor Program has two parts: Blood Donations and Blood Drive. Posts and Districts must report both in the Dashboard Report.

Dashboard Report Requirements:

Post Blood Donation. To receive credit on the Dashboard Report the Post must report blood donations. Each blood donation from a Post member, Auxiliary member, or someone donating on the Post's behalf at a blood drive hosted by the Post will count as one unit for the report. Posts will also receive credit for donations if a Post member donates with another organization, for example a Post member donates at a drive with the VA the Post will receive credit for the donation.

Posts will receive one donation for a whole blood donation, one donation for a platelet donation and receive two donations for a double red donation. Only donations count for credit.

Being paid for plasma at a plasma center is not a donation and does not count for blood donation. Receiving a small in-kind gift is acceptable, such as a T-shirt or gift card. Posts may report number of hours for donations by individual and other incidentals such as mileage to get to the donation site.

Post Blood Drive: To receive credit a Post must host a blood drive. There are many ways that you can achieve this. A Post can have a Blood Center come out to the Post and hold a drive at the Post. A Post can work with another organization has have a blood drive at the other organizations location. A Post may also work with a Blood Center and adopt the site for a day and get Post and Auxiliary members to go there and donate. When reporting add the number of hours volunteers assisted and any in-kind donation, such as using your building.

District Blood Drive: A District will receive credit on the Dashboard Report for Blood Drive by coordinating more than one Post in the District to have a blood drive with in the same month. For example, for Veterans Day coordinate for two or more of your Posts will hold a blood drive that week or month.

Program begins on May 1, 2026 and will end on April 30, 2027.

This year, there is no credit on the dashboard for just donating blood. The only credit available will be for Posts and/or Districts hosting a Blood Drive.

Thank you to all who have donated and held blood drives in the past and for your future support.

Blood is a product that cannot be manufactured, the only source if blood donations. We as Veterans that have stepped up to put our lives on the line have another opportunity to step up and save our fellow citizens. Blood products are needed every day, from helping a new born child fight for life, to helping accident victims, to help cancer patients fight another day. We have fought before, so now we will help others fight.

Illinois Blood Centers

Please work with your local blood centers and see if they have any programs that can assist us with community support. For example, many of the blood centers have a scholarship program for high school students. High school students run the blood drive and have a chance to earn money. This is an easy way for us to provide a place for the drive and the students run the blood drive.

The Blood Centers are listed below:

Versiti Blood Centers of Illinois

Versiti (formerly Heartland Blood Center) provide blood products to all three of our Chicagoland VA Hospitals: Jesse Brown VA Medical Center, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, and Captain James A Lovell Federal Health Care Center. Across Chicagoland we serve over 80 hospitals and work with partners to collect 600 units of blood daily for local patients in need.

Point of Contact is:

Emily Alanis

Regional Manager, Donor Recruitment

Email: ealanis@versiti.org

Rock River Valley Blood Center (RRVBC)

RRVBC provides blood products to 13 local hospitals in the Rockford Area.

Point of Contact is:

Elizabeth Costa (Post 1461 Auxiliary Member)

Donor Recruiter

Email: ecosta@rrvbc.com

American Red Cross

Point of Contact is:

Anna Feltham

Account Manager II – American Red Cross Blood Services

Anna.feltham2@redcross.org

Vitalent

For information and to apply to host a blood drive go to their website at <https://vitalant.org>.

Impact Life

For information and to apply to host a blood drive go to their website at <https://www.bloodcenter.org>.

POC is State Surgeon

PROGRAM DONATIONS

Vital Core Programs & Donation Guidelines

Program Year: July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027

To successfully support the veterans, families, and communities across Illinois, every Post is strongly encouraged to contribute to the following vital programs.

Important Deadlines & Tracking

- **Deadline:** All donations **MUST** be received by State Headquarters no later than June 30, 2027.
- **Dashboard Credit:** Contributions are processed and posted to the online dashboard dynamically as they are received by State HQ.

1. Homeless Veterans

- **Minimum Donation:** \$50
- **Routing Note:** Must be sent directly to State HQ and clearly marked “**Homeless Veterans**” to receive dashboard credit.

This fund directly supports critical initiatives and resources for unhoused or transitioning veterans throughout the State of Illinois, including:

- Funding and hosting Homeless Veterans Stand Downs.
- Purchasing essential equipment and operational supplies for local homeless shelters.
- Supporting specialized community projects that directly benefit unhoused veterans.
- Funding programs that assist veterans successfully transitioning from homelessness into permanent housing.

2. VFW National Home

- **Minimum Donation:** \$50
- **Routing Note:** Can be sent to State HQ marked “**National Home**”. Alternatively, if paid directly to the National Home, you must send proof of payment to State HQ to receive dashboard credit.

These donations support the VFW National Home in Eaton Rapids, MI, with a focus on the two dedicated homes sponsored by our Department (Illinois 1 and Illinois 2). Funds are distributed dynamically according to the following strategic priorities:

- **1st Priority:** Operations, maintenance, and facility upkeep of Illinois Home 1 and Illinois Home 2.
- **2nd Priority:** Special campaigns or specific project needs agreed upon by the Department of Illinois (e.g., funding new playgrounds or campus golf carts).
- **3rd Priority:** General Operating Fund of the VFW National Home (utilized once Illinois 1 & 2 reserve thresholds are fully satisfied).

3. Military Assistance Program (MAP) & Unmet Needs

- **Minimum Donation:** \$50
- **Routing Note:** Must be sent to State HQ and clearly marked “**MAP/Unmet Needs**” to receive dashboard credit.

This fund provides emergency financial relief to veterans facing severe financial hardships across Illinois. All requests are evaluated case-by-case following National VFW Unmet Needs criteria.

Veteran Assistance Application Process

- **How to Apply:** Submit a detailed, specific request outlining the financial hardship and circumstances via email to vfwil@vfwil.org.
- **Required Documentation:** *Copies of the specific invoices or utility bills requiring payment.
 - Explicit proof of veteran status (if the applicant is not a current VFW member).
- **Disbursement Policy:** To ensure strict financial accountability, approved funds are paid directly to the vendor/creditor, never directly to the veteran.

Types of Relief Supported

- Housing security assistance (rent, mortgage, or lease payments).
- Essential utilities (electric, gas, water, sewer, and primary telephone services).
- Emergency food assistance or vehicle fuel.
- Dignified funeral and burial expenses for indigent veterans.

4. Service Office Support

Donations to this program directly support the Illinois VFW Veterans Service Offices, which assist veterans with VA claims, healthcare, funeral and education benefits, employment counseling, and military records. The funds are utilized for specialty office requirements, outreach, and marketing to expand their reach. The Department currently maintains:

- **Chicago:** 2 Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) and 1 Claims Consultant
- **Danville:** 1 VSO
- **Marion:** 1 VSO
- **O'Fallon:** 1 part-time VSO

Dashboard Credit Requirements

- **Minimum Donation:** \$75 is required to receive credit on the Department dashboard.
- **Routing:** The donation must be sent directly to State Headquarters and explicitly marked as **Service Office Support (SOS)**.

Recognition & Support Levels: Red, White and Blue Program

Contributions are categorized into four distinct tiers of support:

Support Level	Donation Range	Recognition and Awards
SOS Support	\$50 to \$249	Standard Dashboard Credit (if \$75 or above)
Blue Level Support	\$250 to \$499	Distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention
White Level Support	\$500 to \$999	Distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention
Red Level Support	\$1,000 or more	Distinctive plaque and special recognition at the State Convention

2026-2027 Commander's Special Project

Financially supporting VFW State Service Officers (VSO) is one of the most critical investments a Department can make. While National VFW provides a framework, the operational strength of a Service Office relies on department-level funding. Here is why strong financial backing from the State VFW is essential to the organization's mission, growth, and reputation:

1. Direct Impact on Veteran Benefits and VA Claims

State Service Officers are the frontline advocates for veterans navigating the complex Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system.

- **Maximizing Back Pay and Monthly Compensation:** VSOs help veterans secure life-changing disability compensation, pensions, and healthcare enrollment. Every dollar invested in a VSO directly translates into millions of dollars brought into the state's local economy and veteran households.
- **Keeping Services Free:** Financial support from the Department ensures that veterans and their families never have to pay for professional representation, protecting them from predatory unaccredited claim companies ("claim sharks").

2. Safeguarding the VFW's Primary Charter Mission

The foundational purpose of the Veterans of Foreign Wars is to assist comrades and protect veterans' welfare.

- **Fulfilling the VFW Congressional Charter:** The core identity of the VFW relies on service work. If a Department underfunds its service office, it risks diminishing its reputation as a premier veteran service organization.
- **Maintaining Accreditation Excellence:** High-quality training, up-to-date legal resources, and secure technology infrastructure are required to maintain strict VA accreditation standards.

3. Driving Membership and Post Growth

A robust, successful Service Office is the best recruitment and retention tool a Department possesses.

- **The Best Marketing Tool:** When a VSO wins a complex claim for a veteran, that veteran becomes a lifelong ambassador for the VFW. Many of the most dedicated, active members joined the organization simply because a Service Officer changed their life.
- **Community Relevance:** A Department known for having an elite, highly effective service office naturally attracts community respect, corporate sponsorships, and positive media coverage, which directly strengthens local Posts.

The Bottom Line: Funding State Service Officers is not an operational expense; it is the core mission. When a State VFW prioritizes its Service Office financially, it secures the well-being of its veterans, solidifies its organizational legacy, and drives the growth necessary to sustain the department for future generations.