

Guide for Communicating with Local Schools

Post chairpersons are encouraged to reach out to local schools to request their participation in conducting the Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy contests. Contacts could be with the local Schoolboard, School Superintendent, Principal, or a teacher. Listed are some thoughts and suggestions for post chairpersons to incentivize schools to conduct the programs and the materials that you will need to provide to teachers to conduct the contests. Whether you are reaching out to a school for the first time or have been doing it for years this message offered for your consideration.

Purpose of Contests

The VFW believes that participation in the Patriot's Pen and Voice of Democracy essay contests encourages students to recognize the freedoms that they are inheriting from those who have gone before and to begin to consider their role in maintaining and advancing those freedoms. After all, they are the next generation of leaders of our great nation.

The VFW appreciates that teachers and administrators have a formidable job in developing curriculum to prepare students for their future. These contests combine academic skills and good citizenship training. They fit well in the English Language Arts, Civics, or History classes. Few could argue that students being able to organize and communicate their thoughts and ideas is a skill that will serve them well.

Promoting School Recognition

School officials should be informed that your post will be working with local media to get public recognition for the school, teachers, and students. Most newspapers and radio stations are eager to share activities involving our youth and they are ready to provide the news/press releases with just who, what, and where info.

Contest levels and Prizes

Schools should be informed that the contests are conducted at the local level and winners could advance to the district, state, and national levels. And tell them of the prizes offered at each level. A complete list of state and national prizes is posted in the Illinois Commanders Leadership Manual. [YouthPrograms.pdf](#)

Encourage Broad Participation

Please encourage teachers to involve as many students as possible in the PP and VOD contests. We are not expecting youngsters to be great writers or orators but rather just hope to plant the seeds of patriotism.

- Ask teachers to choose their top entries and limit those to a manageable number to advance to post judging.
- Since 65% of the judging criteria for the VOD contest is based on the written essay it is reasonable for teachers to narrow a large group down to that manageable number based solely on the written essay and then record just those students and advance their Student Entry Form, essay, and MP3 audio to the post for judging.
- Since the PP essay is 100% of the contest judging, teachers should advance their top Student Entry Forms and essays to the post for judging.
- **Be sure that teachers report the total number of students who participated in the contests and not just the number advanced. In turn, posts should report total student participation to the district chairperson.**

Home Schooled-Students

Let's not forget that home-schooled students are eligible. While not required, most home-schooled students register with their local Regional Office of Education (**ROE**). Reach out to your local ROE. They are glad to pass along information about scholarship opportunities and parents of home-schooled students are eager to learn of those opportunities.

Contest Submission Methods:

Posts have flexibility in the method of conducting the contests this cycle. Below are the choices and the materials that posts should supply to teachers for the various methods.

1. Scholars App Method

They may choose to use the new Scholars App method, if teachers are willing. With this method students each create an account in Scholars App and fill out their application and upload their essay and audio/essays for VOD digitally through Scholars App which are then forwarded directly to your post through Scholars App.

Provide Teachers With:

- Post Flyers that you download from Scholars App. Teachers need to know that each student is required to create their own account in Scholars App to apply. Teachers can advise but cannot do it for them.
- Sample Scholars App Student entry form so teachers can view the process that students use so as to assist the students. They can be found at vfwil.org/Resources/Scholars App.
- Also, there is a Teacher Resource document that is available at [vfwil.org/ Resources/ Scholars App](http://vfwil.org/Resources/Scholars App), which instructs teachers in their role in the Scholars App method and

some other considerations such as device compatibility, operating system compatibility, etc.

2. Conventional Method

Posts may choose to use the conventional method using paper applications and collecting paper essays and audio/essays on thumb drives in MP3 format for VOD contestants as before.

Provide Teachers With:

- You can provide the Official Entry Forms in paper or there are digital entry forms that can be downloaded from the state websites at vfwil.org/Programs/VOD or PP. The downloadable digital forms are fillable which solves legibility problems. After the student fills out the form it will have to be downloaded for student and parental signatures and then scanned or screenshot and uploaded.
- If the post chairperson is comfortable with the technology, and teachers are willing, you could ask teachers to provide the essays and the MP3s digitally through email or Dropbox.

3. Combination Method

Post may choose to use a combination of both the conventional method and the Scholars App Flyers. In addition to using the conventional method in your local school, posts could download and distribute Post Flyers to local and social media, youth groups, home schooled student through your local Regional Office of Education (ROE), or many public venues, to involve as many eligible students as possible.
