

# Post Information Officer Introduction

## VFW Department of Missouri Post Information Officer Training

The Post Information Officer Program was started in order to reach as many veterans and family members as possible to provide them information about any benefits available in their community. To assist veterans and their family members who would not know where to begin or that are unaware of possible

# What is a Post Information Officer

benefits available to them. With your efforts we have been able to assist thousands of veterans to obtain VA benefits.

As a VFW Post Information Officer, you are our first line of contact with veterans and their families. Therefore, it is very important that you understand your duties as a Post Information Officer.

- PIOs are local ambassadors of the Veterans of Foreign Wars; each VFW Post has an appointed PIO.
- PIOs must be well versed on state and local benefits.
- PIOs are familiar with community programs available to veterans and their families such as local food pantries, VA

# What is expected of a Missouri VFW Post Information Officer

Facilities, homeless shelters, Accredited Service Officers, etc.

- Must attend annual post Information Officer training at the Missouri VFW State Convention.
- Provide information to veterans and family members referencing the Post Information Officers Guide.
- Provide veterans and survivors basic knowledge about VA benefits.
- Refer veterans and family members to an Accredited VFW Service Office for assistance with ALL VA benefits.
- Advise veterans to submit all forms to an Accredited VFW Representative for completion.

# Representation

- Keep Post/Members and survivors aware of events, news, and information relevant to local, state, and federal veteran services and benefits.
- Post Information Officers (PIOs) are local advocates who assist veterans and their loved ones in navigating a complicated benefits landscape. Post Information Officers serve as a conduit to critical programs and services in the community, but they are not accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purposes of representing claimants in their benefit claims before VA.
- Therefore, PIOs DO NOT hold legal standing to represent claimants in their benefit claims before the Department of Veterans Affairs. This distinction is reserved for individuals accredited by VA through the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. in accordance with Title 38 U.S.C. § 5902 Recognition of representatives of organizations and the VFW National Veterans Service Policy & Procedure.

# Representation – Why is Accreditation Important?

- VA accreditation allows organizations and/or individuals the authority to represent veterans before the Department of Veterans Affairs – if you are not accredited, VA will not disclose any information to you about other veterans.
- All Department Information Officers, Assistant Veteran Service Officers, & Claims Consultants that work for the VFW are accredited.
- Accredited individuals are professional advocates that have completed extensive training in veteran's benefits and have access to resources that non-accredited individuals do not.



# Representation – Why is Accreditation Important? continued

- There are many non-accredited organizations who engage in predatory practices.
- Many unaccredited individuals and unrecognized organizations advertise online, and some may contact veterans directly to solicit their services.
- Many times, they are illegally charging for services and may lack the qualifications required for VA accreditation.
- Non-accredited persons often provide mis-information or false hoods that most times will negatively affect the outcome of a claim.

# VFW Accredited Representatives

- PIOs are not accredited and therefore PIOs ARE NOT insured or covered by their Department or NVS. This means PIOs can personally be held financially responsible for any lawsuits brought against them for misrepresentation or misfiled claims for VA benefits.

The VFW has many types of accredited representatives (VSOs). There is the Department Service Officer (DSO), which is responsible for the Service Officer Program, Assistant Veteran Service Officers (AVSO), and Claims Consultants.

Myth: The DSO, AVSO, and Claims Consultant all have their own unique roles and responsibilities

Fact: The DSO has their own unique role and responsibilities however, the roles and responsibilities of the AVSOs and Claims Consultants are the same.

# VSOs and PIOs

When it comes to claims work, either the person is accredited or not –title doesn't matter.

Every accredited representative goes through the same extensive training under the guidance of their Department and NVS.

Myth: VSOs are authorized to give claim status updates to Post Serviceh officers.

Fact: VSOs are not authorized to give claim status updates to Post Information Officers unless the veteran is with the Post Information Officer and written permission from the veteran naming the individual PIO as a person who can receive information, is on record with the VSO.

Example: Simply writing Post 3245 PIO is not good enough – it must have the PIO's name and is non-transferrable.



# Representation - General

At no time is an accredited representative allowed to release any financial information or discuss a rating with a PIO.

At no time can a PIO tell an accredited representative to file a claim or an appeal on behalf of another veteran.

- Under no circumstances is a fee or compensation of any nature to be charged to anyone for service rendered in connection with any claim for which the VFW provides representation.
- Membership in the VFW is not required for representation.
- The VFW may represent any veteran other than those with a Dishonorable Discharge.

# Representation – How to Know if Someone is Accredited

- If a veteran has both a dishonorable discharge and an honorable period of service, we may still be able to represent them – refer these veterans to your local Accredited VFW Representative

A searchable list of accredited representatives, agents, and attorneys is available at the VA Office of General Council's website:

<http://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>

How to refer a veteran or family member to an Accredited VFW Service Office:

- Fill out a Referral Form

# Referral Forms

- DD214 or equivalent
- Fax or email all the above-mentioned forms to the VFW Department of Missouri:

Fax: (573)636-2664

Email: [deptvso@movfw.org](mailto:deptvso@movfw.org)

**THIS IS A REFERRAL FORM, NOT A CLAIM FOR BENEFITS!**



***Department of Missouri Service Office***

***Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States***

The purpose of this form is to gather some basic information so we may evaluate your possibility to receive VA benefits. **This information is held confidential and will not be released in any form or for any other use.**  
Please be thorough in the filling out of this form. **(PLEASE PRINT)**

Veteran's Name:  Birth Date:     
Spouse's Name:  Birth Date:     
Address:  City:  State:  Zip:   
Phone: (  )   Best time to call:  AM  PM  
Branch of Service:  Dates of Service: From:    To:     
Registered in VA System: YES ☐ NO ☐

Service outside the USA: YES ☐ NO ☐ Country:  MOS:   
Medals or Decorations:   
Combat Awards: Bronze Star/Higher ☐ Purple Heart ☐ Other:   
Referred By:  Post #:   
Phone: (  )   Date sent to Regional Office:

**VSO OFFICE ONLY**

Date Received:  Date Contacted:  Contacted By:

Please send this form to:  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
9700 Page Avenue  
RM 1 – 027  
St. Louis, MO 63132  
Fax: 314-253-4162  
Email: [yfw.vbastl@va.gov](mailto:yfw.vbastl@va.gov)

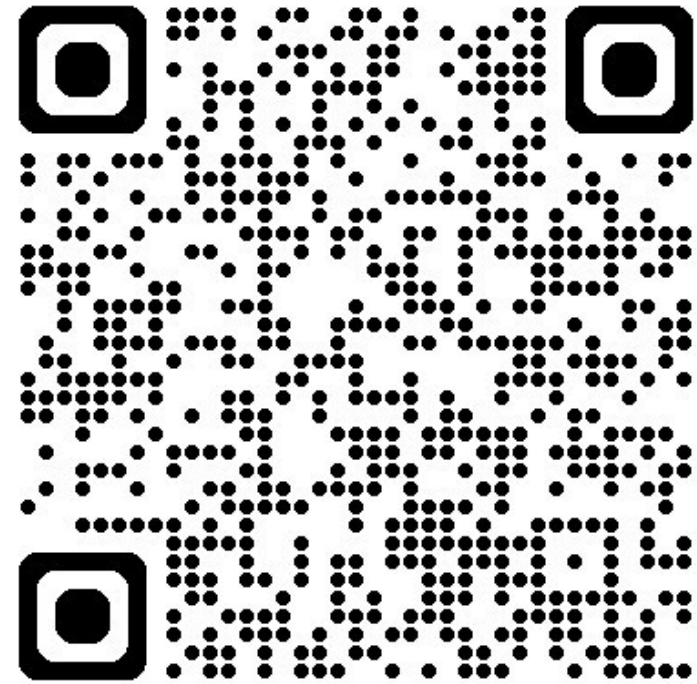
V.F.W. Membership makes this service possible, if you are entitled to a FOREIGN SERVICE RIBBON, you belong in the VFW- Join today!

**THIS IS A REFERRAL FORM, NOT A CLAIM FOR BENEFITS!**

Submit Form

Referral  
Form QR  
Code





1. Use your smart phone to scan the QR code with your camera.

# Code of Conduct for Missouri PIOs

## QR Code Referral Form instructions

2. If you do not have Adobe Acrobat on your device, you will have to email the form to yourself to use the fillable feature or print it out.
3. If you do have Adobe Acrobat on your device, you can open and auto fill the referral.
4. Once completed, email to [deptvso@movfw.org](mailto:deptvso@movfw.org) Fax (573) 636-2664

The VFW webmaster is trying to convert the QR Code to a fillable format and will update it as soon as its completed.

1. Will perform their duties under the general supervision of the Department Service Officer.
2. Will not take possession of or release confidential information (Personally Identifiable Information, or PII), such as

# Code of Conduct for Missouri PIOs continued

what conditions were claimed or the address of the claimant, to anyone other than the VFW Accredited Service Officer without the express written consent of the claimant.

3. Will provide guidance and assistance to veterans and survivors free of charge; under no circumstances, shall they request, demand or accept cash or any other form of payment for such assistance or use their knowledge of a veteran's claim status or compensation to solicit funds.
4. May serve as a "scribe" to assist veterans in filling out prescribed form VA Form 21-22 for the veteran to immediately transmit directly to the proper accredited VFW representative.
5. Shall not fill out forms on behalf of a claimant or act as the representative of the claimant before VA or be signing/submitting forms on the claimant's behalf. These are representative functions reserved for VFW accredited representatives(VSOs), in accordance with VA laws and regulations.

# Code of Conduct for Missouri PIOs continued

6. Shall not under any circumstances present themselves as **accredited representatives** for the purposes of claims representation before the Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the VFW.
7. Shall return all claims forms, documents, and protected health and personal information to potential claimants so that the claimant may transmit the claim and documents to the accredited VFW representative, Since VA awards benefits based on the date of receipt; it is vital to advise claimants that claims should be sent to the VFW accredited representative immediately.
8. Will not keep any forms, documents, evidence, records, or materials of any kind pertaining to the veteran's claims and containing PII of the claimant.

# Code of Conduct for Missouri PIOs continued

9. Will attend all Post Information Officer training conducted by the VFW Department Service Officer. While the Department Service Officer is responsible for providing training to the Post Information Officers, the District Information Officer is responsible for ensuring that their Post Information Officers attend training.
10. Shall not under any circumstances represent themselves as “certified VFW Service Officers” or any variation thereof that implies they are legally qualified to assist and represent claimants in their VA benefit claims. This distinction is reserved for VFW representatives accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs for prosecution of benefits claims before VA and can only be approved by the Director, VFW National Veterans Service in accordance with the VFW National Veterans Service Policy & Procedure.
11. Shall not refuse to assist any veteran or survivor unless it is clear the claim is fraudulent. Shall not refuse to assist any veteran or survivor because they do not feel the veteran or



# Code of Conduct for PIOs continued

survivor is eligible for the benefit sought. The accredited Department Service Officer will make the final decision as to whether the VFW will provide representation in all cases.

12. Will refrain from the use of racial, religious, age-related, sexual, or ethnic epithets, innuendoes, slurs or jokes in the workplace.
  13. Must conduct themselves in a totally professional manner and refrain from sexual advances, verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, or requests for sexual favors.
  14. Further requirements are listed in the VFW National Veterans Service Policy & Procedure, which can be found on [www.vfw.org/NVS](http://www.vfw.org/NVS).
- DO NOT under any circumstances file any claims for VA benefits!

# What a Post Information Officer should NOT do

- Shall not under any circumstances present themselves as accredited representatives for the purposes of claims representation before the Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of the VFW.
- Do not keep any type of Personal Identifiable Information on any veteran or claimant under any circumstance.
- Never submit any documentation, forms, or evidence directly to VA on behalf of a veteran or claimant.
- Do not try to counsel or advise a veteran, claimant, or family member on what VA benefits or disabilities he or she are entitled to or should apply for.
- A Post Information Officer is not a VFW employee and should not be using any type of VFW letterhead to contact veterans, claimants, or family members.

# What a Post Information Officer should NOT do continued

- Shall not establish or solicit to establish office hours at VA facilities (not limited, but to include, Regional Benefits Offices, VA hospitals, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, & Vet Centers).
- **Do not let a veteran, claimant, or family member believe you are filing their claim for VA benefits or that you are their accredited representative.**
- Do not try to contact the VA or an Accredited VFW Representative and ask for information about a veteran's claim. Neither the VA nor the VFW is allowed by HIPAA Regulations to discuss a veteran's claim with anyone but the veteran or claimant.

If it is found that any of the above has been conducted by a Post Information Officer, it will be reported to VFW Department of

# What does all that mean? Do's

Missouri and the VFW National Veterans Service Office and will likely result in the removal from the Post Information Officer position.

## DO:

- Provide guidance to claimants and assist them in obtaining state and local benefits using the links provided in this PowerPoint or additional government sites.
- Attend VSO events and complete referrals.
- Refer claimants to an VFW Accredited Representative for assistance with obtaining VA benefits.
- Conduct yourself in a professional manner.
- Attend Annual PIO training.

# What does all that mean? Don'ts

## DON'T:

- Identify yourself as an **accredited representative**
- Attempt to represent claimants before the VA in any capacity such as signing forms on behalf of, filing claims, or representing claimants during VA hearings etc.
- Request or accept payment or any other form of compensation for the advice/assistance provided
- Take possession of or release a claimant's personal information to anyone other than a VFW Accredited Representative or the claimant
- Initiate or participate in unprofessional conduct in the workplace or in public view
- Refuse service to claimants unless the claim is clearly fraudulent or there is unprofessional conduct by the claimant



# VFW Benefits and Resources

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- VFW National Home for Children- The National Home's community is open to the families of active-duty military personnel, veterans and relatives of VFW and VFW Auxiliary members. The family can be one or both parents with one or more children.
- Families may accomplish significant life goals by participating in the program
- The National Home offers:
  - Case Management services
  - Educational, recreational, and enrichment opportunities
  - Community resources and counseling - Free housing and daycare

# VFW Benefits and Resources

<https://www.vfwnationalhome.org>

- Unmet Needs Program- provides grants (not loans) and referrals to other organizations to active-duty service members, veterans and their immediate families to assist with basic life needs. <https://www.vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants>
- Sport Clips Help a Hero Scholarship- Provides service members and veterans with the financial assistance they need to complete their educational goals without incurring excessive student loan debt.
- Scholarships of up to \$5,000 will be awarded to qualified applicants.
- Awarded scholarships are limited to one per family per semester.

# VA Benefits and Services

- 1 Student Veteran- offers direct assistance to student veterans who have questions or are experiencing problems accessing their VA benefits.

<https://www.vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support>

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers a wide variety of benefits and services to veterans and their families including:

- Compensation
- Pension
- Healthcare
- Education
- Home Loan Guarantee
- Life Insurance

# VA Benefits and Services

- Survivors' benefits
- Burial benefits

Fact Sheets for many VA benefits can be found at:

<https://benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp>

- Remember, the role of the PIO is to explain available benefits, then refer the veteran to an Accredited VFW Representative for additional information and assistance in obtaining benefits.
- Prepare the veteran for the process, DO NOT promise or guess anything

# Eligibility References

- Eligibility doesn't always equal payment
- VA will review the file and request applicable examinations and documentation in order to determine entitlement and potential payment

## Guide for Post Information Officers:

- <https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits>
- <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/>
- <https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/>



## Service- Connected Compensation & Non Service- Connected Pension

- <https://www.va.gov/pension/eligibility/>
- <https://www.va.gov/housing-assistance/home-loans/eligibility/> Service-Connected Compensation:  
A disability that VA determines was caused, incurred, or aggravated by military service.

### Non Service-Connected Pension:

A benefit paid to wartime veterans who have limited or no income, and who are age 65 or older, or if under 65, are permanently and totally disabled. (INCOME BASED PROGRAM)

# Education Benefits

## VA provides numerous Health Care Services

- Hospital, outpatient medical, dental, pharmacy and prosthetic services
  - Domiciliary, nursing home and community based residential care
- VA administers education benefits for active-duty troops, veterans, reservists, and qualifying dependents.
- Forever GI Bill, Post 9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill
  - MGIB Selected Reserve (Section 1606) for Reservists

# Survivors' Benefits

- Dependents Educational Assistance (Chapter 35) for dependents
- Veteran Readiness and Employment (VRE) provides assistance to veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and maintain suitable employment.

## Survivors Pension Program

A benefit paid to a surviving spouse of a wartime veteran who have limited or no income. (INCOME BASED PROGRAM)

## Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)

A flat rate monthly benefit paid to a surviving spouse based on one of the following criteria:

- Service-member died on active duty

# Burial Benefits

- Veteran died from service-related disabilities, including disabilities that can be proven to be service-related (did not have to be receiving disability compensation before death)
- Eligibility could also be established if the veteran was deemed permanently and totally disabled by VA for 10 or more years at the time of death

## Burial

- VA offers certain benefits and services to honor deceased veterans to include burial flags, burial allowance, plot or interment allowance, and transportation allowance

## Headstones and Markers

- VA can furnish a marker or headstone for the unmarked grave of an eligible veteran

# Burial Benefits continued

## Presidential Memorial Certificate

- A Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC) is a paper certificate that bears the official signature of the current President of the United States. This certificate can be requested by any of the veteran's loved ones

## Pre-need eligibility for burial in a VA cemetery

- Veterans can apply to find out in advance if they can be buried in a VA national cemetery. This is called a pre-need determination of eligibility—and it can help make the burial planning process easier for the veteran's family members in their time of need.

# VSO Events and All State Requirements

- This is not a reservation; receiving a pre-need determination of eligibility doesn't guarantee that the veteran will be buried in a specific VA national cemetery or a specific plot.

<https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits>

- Small events count just the same as large events.
- An Accredited Service Officer does not have to be in attendance.
- Must enter VSO Event on VFW Department Dashboard.
- It must be Advertised- On Radio, in News Papers, Facebook pages, etc.
- Someone from the Post must be in attendance to complete referrals.



# QUESTIONS?

- One referral equals an event for All State requirements. As long as it's reported on the dashboard, it's advertised, someone attended, and at least one referral is completed, it counts.
- If you are having a major event and you would like to have an Accredited Service Officer in attendance, you need to contact the DSO to get one scheduled.



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