



# **VFW VOICE OF DEMOCRACY AND PATRIOT'S PEN CHAIRMAN'S MANUAL**

Revised as of 1/30/17

## **The Role of the Chairman**

VFW's chairmen do more than just plan projects to improve their communities. They also recruit volunteers, build relationships with community leaders, organize partnerships with civic groups, and promote the VFW.

## **You Are the Point Person**

A program chairman should understand one important fact right from the outset: You are the Post's point man in your community. As chairman you will be your Post's liaison to:

- school teachers and administrators
- community leaders
- local military personnel
- city government officials
- members of civic groups
- members of the media
- your fellow veterans

Seek out these new relationships. When it comes time to recruit volunteers or you need specialized expertise for Post projects, these community contacts will prove invaluable.

Project an outgoing, friendly personality. Speak positively about your Post, your community and your projects. Articulate your thoughts and plans clearly, concisely and coherently. Remember, you represent not only your Post, but the entire VFW organization as well.

## **Reporting Your Activities**

You may have heard it said that "the job's not over until the paperwork is done!" That is especially true of VFW Programs.

Chairman must report their Post activities in their respective areas at least twice each year. Check with your respective Department chairman to learn what should be reported and in what form. Documentation of your programmatic efforts is the thing that ensures the VFW's reputation and our not-for-profit status.

## **Master Organizational Skills**

As chairman, your talents must be varied. Consequently, your organizational skills should be fully developed.

Some of your specific duties include:

- recruiting and maintaining a pool of active volunteers
- identifying and initiating programs needed in your community
- motivating your Post members, community volunteers and sponsors involved in your various projects
- recognizing your volunteers efforts
- organizing and maintaining records, photos and newspaper clippings the document your activities
- reporting to your Department chairman the volunteer hours, dollars donated by VFW, VFW Auxiliary, Cooties, and Men's Auxiliary members and other information requested.

Through the contacts you've developed in your community, cooperate with other civic or fraternal groups. They may already be involved in community service programs you would like to undertake, or they may be eager to help with projects that you've planned. Also identify resources at your Post, talk with members and find out what special skills or hobbies they may have.

### **VFW Scholarships**

At the turn of the 20th century, the founders of the Veterans of Foreign Wars created an organization that would honor and serve veterans and perpetuate the values and ideals for which those veterans had served. Although men of vision, it is doubtful they could imagine the millions of Americans impacted today by the VFW's youth, scholarship and recognition programs. Every year, tens of thousands of students nationwide participate in the Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition and the Patriot's Pen Essay Contest, garnering more than \$3 million in scholarships, awards, and incentives.

### **Patriot's Pen Essay Contest**

Patriot's Pen gives 6th, 7th and 8th grade students the opportunity to express their opinion on a patriotic theme and improve their writing skills, while they compete for awards and prizes. Cumulatively, the awards provided from all levels of the competition total \$1.2 million each year. Each first place Department (state) winner competes for \$54,500 in award money at the national level with the first place national winner receiving \$5,000 and a trip to Washington, DC. Each state winner will receive at least \$500 at the national level.

### **Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition**

The National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) started the Voice of Democracy Scholarship Competition in 1947. The Veterans of Foreign Wars became a national sponsor in the late 1950s and

assumed sole responsibility for the program in 1961. Many notables have participated in the Voice of Democracy including journalist Charles Kuralt, Miss America Anita Bryant and former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft. The Voice of Democracy competition provides high school freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors the opportunity to write and record an audio essay on a patriotic theme, competing for more than \$2.1 million in college scholarships and incentives. Each first place Department (state) winner is brought to Washington, DC. in February to enjoy our nation's capital and compete for \$154,000 in national college scholarships — first place receiving \$30,000. Each state winner will receive at least \$1,000 at the national level.

### **Promote the Programs**

Contact all schools and youth groups in your area in the spring (before the school year ends) and again in the Fall after school starts, to make them aware of these opportunities. Contact the media in September to help you publicize the programs and again in November and December to announce your winners after the judging. Encourage teachers and other youth leaders to visit the VFW web site at <http://www.vfw.org/Youth/>

Please announce that the National Association of Secondary School Principals has placed both the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen programs on the [NASSP National Advisory List of Contests and Activities for 2016-2017](#).



### **Your Commitment**

To ensure a successful competition, Posts and Auxiliaries must commit knowledgeable chairmen, enthusiastic volunteers and resources to both competitions. Our goal is to increase the number of participating students every year. Approach schools in the spring because that is when most curriculum decisions are made for the coming Fall. In late summer, revisit to ensure they have the necessary materials and are prepared to do the program. Don't hesitate to involve school administrators, PTA/PTO/PSO parents, teachers, counselors, radio and TV stations, newspapers, churches and other service, civic and community groups and organizations to encourage and facilitate student participation, help

with the judging and generally promote the programs. We provide score sheets, brochures, sample news releases and PSAs on [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org) – you would **log-in** at [www.vfw.org](http://www.vfw.org) as a VFW member, then click on MY VFW and look for the [VFW Training and Support](#) section under the [Resources](#) column. Then click on [Citizenship Education, Youth Scholarships and Activities](#). Present VFW Scholarship Programs anywhere there are groups of students who might be interested. In addition to schools and home school programs; chairman should consider church youth groups, athletic teams, and Boy Scout and Girl Scout units – any place where young people can be reached.

## Work Together

The VFW Chairmen, the Auxiliary Chairmen and volunteers should work together. It is the responsibility of the chairman to recruit and equip their volunteers with the basic contest details to conduct a successful scholarship program from start to finish.

## Deadlines

The deadlines for both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen are as follows:

1. **Midnight, October 31**, Entries to the Post\*
2. **November 15**, Completion of Post judging\*\*
3. **December 15**, Completion of District judging\*\*
4. **January 10**, Completion of Department judging\*\*
5. **January 15**, District participation reports to Department Chairmen\*\*
6. **January 15**, Department winners to National\*
7. **January 31**, Department reports to National\*

\*required deadlines \*\*suggested deadlines

## Order or Download Materials Early

Order or download and print out Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen student entry forms early in the year so you can provide a copy to anyone who needs one. These forms explain the programs: complete rules, who can enter, how to enter, how schools can handle the program and how students and teacher can connect with a VFW Post to present their entries. The entry forms can be downloaded online at <http://www.vfw.org/Youth/> (click on **Youth Education** from this link.) Anyone (students, teachers, chairmen, etc) can visit these web pages. The new themes are announced and new entry forms will be available by April 1 annually....for the following Oct 31 student entry deadline.

Additional program items, student awards and gifts are available through the VFW Store at (800) 821-2606, or online at [www.vfwstore.org](http://www.vfwstore.org)

All information needed for chairmen to conduct the programs are online now under "My VFW." VFW Chairmen can visit this website <http://www.vfw.org/Login.aspx> where you would log in as a VFW member (then click on "MY VFW.") Under the "Member Resources" heading you would click on "VFW Training and Support." Go to the "Community Service & Youth Programs" area. If you have any questions, or you need assistance, please e-mail Kris Harmer, Youth Scholarships Coordinator, VFW Programs, VFW National Headquarters in Kansas City, Missouri, at [kharmer@vfw.org](mailto:kharmer@vfw.org) or call her at 816-968-1117.

## Judging the Contest

For both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen (at each level of competition) the suggested number of judges is five to nine (or a minimum of three.) Judges should be from outside your Posts/Auxiliaries and should represent your community. Leaders from education, broadcasting, corporations, small business, and other fraternal and civic groups are ideal. Judges must not be connected in any way with the students in the competition. Set the date for your judging and invite the judges at least 90 days in advance. Remind them a week before the competition with a letter or e-mail and two days before with a telephone call. Ask permission to publicize their selection (along with the program) to the media, then follow up after the judging with a thank you. Invite them to your awards event and publicly express your appreciation for their help. A judges award citation is available through the [VFW Store](#) (800) 821-2606 (item number #4363 for Voice of Democracy and #4329 for Patriot's Pen.)

All Patriot's Pen essays and Voice of Democracy audio essays should be reviewed by the chairman several days before the judgments, so that small errors like too many words, an audio CD or USB drive that will not play on your equipment, a Voice of Democracy audio essay that is a bit too long/short, or a reference that inadvertently identifies them might be corrected by the student rather than a chairman eliminating them from the competition. Chairmen should never forget that our priority is to increase the number of students participating, rather than eliminate them. In the case of Voice of Democracy, the Program Chairman must be present for the judging at a site that avoids distractions.. The chairman does not need to be present while Patriot's Pen essays are being judged (the reading/scoring of the Patriot's Pen essays by the judges usually occurs somewhere not at the VFW Post, but off-site.) If the Voice of Democracy judging begins before 9 a.m., you may wish to provide coffee and juice. If judging continues through a mealtime, provide lunch. For Patriot's Pen, each judge should be provided their own copy of the essays and a score sheet (score sheets are available online on MY VFW.) For the Voice of Democracy judging, judges need only score sheets and pencils. Voice of Democracy entries must be judged on the **audio recording only**, so the judges usually do not see a typed copy of each essay, unless a judge requests one from the chairman. All Patriot's Pen essays and Voice of Democracy recordings should be identified by number to ensure the anonymity of the competitor. Competitors should never be asked to present their essay in person during the actual judging. Judges should be discouraged from discussing the Patriot's Pen essays or Voice of Democracy audio-recordings during the judging process and should have no contact with the competitors. They should not see a photograph of the competitor. The judges' decisions are **always FINAL**.

## Judging Criteria

**Voice of Democracy** contestants are judged on the following criteria:

**Originality** (possible 30 pts.) Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

**Content** (possible 35 pts.) Ideas are expressed clearly and in an organized manner.

**Delivery** (possible 35 pts.) Speaking voice is clear and credible.

**Patriot's Pen** contestants are judged on the following criteria:

**Theme knowledge** (possible 30 pts.) Has the student researched and understood the theme?

**Theme development** (possible 35 pts.) Does the essay answer relevant questions: who, what, where and why?

**Clarity of ideas** (possible 35 pts.) Is the writer's interpretation of the theme presented clearly?

REMEMBER....INTERPRETATION OF THE THEME IS UP TO THE STUDENT. ENTRIES SHOULD NOT BE DISQUALIFIED BECAUSE THEIR INTERPRETATION SEEMS INCORRECT OR INAPPROPRIATE.

(NOTE: no limit)

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## Local Competition Alternatives

Recently, teachers and school leaders have shown reluctance to participate in our scholarship competition if they devote precious class time to completing entry forms and (in the case of the Voice of Democracy) record essays. For this reason, we offer teachers/youth leaders the option to simply use Voice of Democracy or Patriot's Pen as a writing exercise. The teacher/leader may submit all entries to the Post for judging or conduct a judging within the group/class and advance a winner for every fifteen (15) participants. Note: This decision should be determined by the Post Chairman; working closely with the teacher or group leader.

## School/Youth Group to Post (both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen)

1-15 essays – One (1) entry to Post

16-30 essays – Two (2) entries

31-45 essays – Three (3) entries

(NOTE: no limit)

## Post Competition

Post entries are required to include the following:

**Patriot's Pen:** Typed essay in English of 300-400 words (+/- 5 words -- no graphics) and a student entry form completed legibly. All words must be counted (except the theme.)

**Voice of Democracy:** Typed essay, audio CD (or flash/USB drive) of the recorded essay (3-5 minutes, +/- 5 seconds), and a student entry form completed legibly. Please refer to the student Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen entry forms to review the complete rules and guidelines. For both programs, Posts must accept and judge all eligible entries received by midnight, October 31. If a Post decides on a later student entry deadline, that is acceptable, as long as they can meet the District deadline for submitting their Post winner(s).

## Post to District (for both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen)

1-15 essays – One (1) entry to District

16-30 essays – Two (2) entries

31-45 essays – Three (3) entries

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## District to Department

One (1) entry per District (**with student's head & shoulders photo added at this time for first place District winner.**) *This applies to both Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen.*

## Judging CDs

For Voice of Democracy, the preferred format for CDs is the audio CD format. Flash Drives/USBs can also be accepted. When burning your CD, make sure that 'Create Audio CD' option (or similar) is selected so the program can properly convert your sound file and burn it to CD. After it has finished, be sure to play back your audio CD on a system other than your computer, such as a standard radio or car CD player, to verify that the conversion/burning process was successful."

NOTE: If the entry has been recorded according to the criteria specified above; Posts, Districts and Departments should never reject an entry because they are unable to play the CD or flash drive. Part of the chairman's responsibility is to review the entries to ensure appropriate equipment is available to properly judge the entry.

## Handicapped Student Criteria

The Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen competitions are offered to the public primarily through our nation's school systems. In compliance with the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, we provide "reasonable accommodation" for someone with a documented permanent disability. Requests for accommodation must be submitted in writing with the student's entry materials. As an example, a hearing/speech-impaired student may select another student of the same age and gender to read and record their Voice of Democracy essay. The volunteer assisting the disabled student is not eligible for any scholarship compensation, awards or benefits from the program. All questions regarding accommodation of a disabled student should be directed to the Programs Department, VFW National Headquarters, 406 West 34th St., Kansas City, Missouri 64111 (816) 968-1117 [kharmar@vfw.org](mailto:kharmar@vfw.org)

## Reporting Guidelines

VFW Post reporting (to District level) is part of each student entry form. Department Chairmen will be e-mailed District and Department reporting forms in August, and blank forms can be e-mailed from the Programs Department upon request in either Word or PDF format. District and Department report forms are also online at MY VFW. January 15 is the deadline for **District** reports to be sent to the **Department** Chairman. The deadline for **Department** reports to arrive at **National** is January 31st. (NOTE: the state winners' packet deadline is two weeks sooner - **January 15.**) Please ensure that a photograph of your Department winner is included, along with the notification date. **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON VOICE OF DEMOCRACY OR PATRIOT'S PEN, CONTACT:**

**Kris Harmer**  
**Youth Scholarships Coordinator**  
**VFW Programs**  
**VFW National Headquarters**  
**406 W 34<sup>th</sup> Street**  
**Kansas City, Missouri 64111**  
**Phone: (816) 968-1117**  
**e-mail: [kharter@vfw.org](mailto:kharter@vfw.org)**

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