



# **VFW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE BEST PRACTICES**



# COMMUNITY SERVICE BEST PRACTICES

How a VFW Post interacts with its community determines the relevancy of the VFW. Someone once said, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” The VFW and its Auxiliary’s ability to impact veterans, youth, political issues, patriotism, civic pride, volunteerism and almost anything you can name, is directly dependent upon our Posts being recognized as caring and involved participants in their communities.

It is our goal that this guide will provide ideas to aid Posts as they develop and expand the kind of reputation that will benefit their community and themselves. The impact on the community is immeasurable. The benefit to the Post is new members, more effective fundraising, greater participation in events and tremendous goodwill. The Post is, for most Americans, the only thing they know about the VFW. It’s up to us to make sure our communities have a favorable opinion of our great organization and our veterans.

**Definition of Community Service** – The National Community Service Trust Act defines community service: “encompasses any human act serving the common good; in the interest of the community.” Community service is further defined as “a service that is performed for the benefit of the public or its institutions.” Since 1899, community service has been a cornerstone of the VFW and reporting the millions of hours our members spend each year is important. It not only helps us ensure proper recognition for our members, but it helps showcase to the public our hard work and dedication.



**Reporting** – For the purposes of volunteer recognition, VFW community service hours must be performed by and as a representative of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. As it is the intent of VFW community service to impact a broad spectrum of the local community, the work must also be performed for an organization outside of the VFW and its Auxiliary, and must be verified by an authorized representative of that organization. In addition, efforts performed for the benefit of the Post or Auxiliary should not be considered as community service. This kind of effort could be maintenance, upkeep, or beautification of the Post home, cooking or serving a meal for a Post fund raiser, or working on bingo night. Please keep in mind that efforts that are part of the normal requirements of a Post or Auxiliary would not be considered community service. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, flying the American flag or the POW flag, conducting flag retirement programs, placing flags on graves, hosting bingo, Post dinners, “Buddy”® Poppy drives, or anything that only benefits the Post. A particularly controversial area in VFW community service is service to one’s church. Generally, these efforts are not considered community service for two reasons: They are not performed for the community at large; and they are part of an individual’s service to their faith and not to the VFW.

**The community service year is July 1 - June 30 annually.** Events should be reported 365 days a year and not weekly, monthly, or quarterly. This will prevent forgetting the specific details of what events happened. All events should be reported online through VFW Department (state) online reporting websites or through the VFW Programs Dashboard Tool for those Departments who do not have an online solution. Lastly, do not forget that Posts can – and are highly encouraged – to report their Auxiliary community service events also. However, this is not mandatory because the Auxiliary has their own community service report which will only be submitted at the Post level.

**Value of a Volunteer Hour** – Volunteers in the United States hold up the foundation of civil society. They help their neighbors, serve their communities and provide their expertise. No matter what kind of volunteer work they do, they contribute in invaluable ways. According to its Value of Volunteer Time report, Independent Sector, together with the Do-Good Institute, announced in April 2023, that the latest value of a volunteer hour is \$31.80, which is an increase from \$29.95 from last year.

**Value of a Mile** – You may already be familiar with the standard mileage rate for business. Every year the IRS issues standard mileage rates for business, medical and moving purposes, and charity. The rate for mileage in service or charitable organizations remains the same at \$0.14 per mile.

**Total Impact** – When figuring the total impact of your community service event, you must calculate the money spent on hosting and organizing the event, plus total hours all participating volunteers spent executing the event, plus the mileage for all volunteers who participated. This equals the total impact for the event, and when added up throughout the year can provide the Post’s annual community service total impact.

**\$ + Hours + Mileage = Total Impact**

**Ways to Support Your Community** – In many cases, the brainstorming process of planning community service can be the most difficult. We've compiled a list of both good and non-qualifying events in an effort to help you plan the perfect community event.

### **Examples of Good Community Service**

- Assisting of veterans within the community
- Scholarships to youth
- Sponsoring of youth teams
- VA hospital work on behalf of the VFW
- Blood drives
- Legislative town halls
- Care packages for troops, homeless etc.
- Register to Vote campaigns
- Food Bank support
- Building of ramps for disabled veterans
- Hosting job fairs
- Visiting VA Homes & nursing facilities
- Community Clean Up activities
- Natural Disaster Relief support
- Clothing Drives
- Donations to civic organizations within the community that align with our values

### **Examples of Non-Qualified Community Service Events**

- Flying the U.S. Flag
- Flying the POW Flag
- Post dinners
- Bingo
- Paid VFW Service Officer work
- Personal efforts of a member volunteering at a church or other nonprofit organizations
- Buddy Poppy Drives
- Membership Drives
- Anything that directly benefits the Post
- Reciting the pledge of allegiance at a Post meeting
- Charging, renting or loaning the Post hall to their Auxiliary or Cootie Pup-Tent

**Please note: These lists are not all inclusive but rather a frame of reference of what is good to host and report versus what events should not be reported.**