



Lodge Veterans Chair Welcome Guide

Thank you for stepping up for veterans! We hope this quick overview helps you plan a successful year of serving local veterans in need.

ENVSC-funded projects should focus on one of these five areas of increased need: employment; homelessness and housing; military families; health (and independent living); and educational support. These are great places to focus your Lodge's work, whether or not you're using ENVSC funds.

Below, read about our 3 major programs. Together, these make up more than 80% of the ENVSC budget. And, check out our [ENVSC 101 slideshow](#), which is a great introduction to our programs for new members and volunteers.

Elks Voluntary Service Program: The cornerstone of our work, this program stations Elks volunteers in VA hospitals and veterans' facilities across the nation. More than 350 Elks serve as Elks Voluntary Service Representatives, assisting hospitalized and recovering veterans by providing comfort, support and friendship. Hundreds more Elks serve as Deputy Representatives.

Stay connected! Make sure you have a good relationship with your local Representatives and Deputy Representatives and coordinate with them on projects. They may appreciate help with facility-based events, and you may want to invite the veterans from their facility to community or Lodge events.

Welcome Home Kits: We're counting on you to help end veteran homelessness. One way your Lodge can help is by putting together Welcome Home Kits for veterans exiting homelessness and moving into new homes. Most formerly homeless veterans move into their homes with nothing. Elks can help by gathering things like sheets, towels, dishes and cleaning supplies. The ENVSC will reimburse your Lodge for each Welcome Home Kit you donate to a veteran in need. Your Lodge can partner with local veterans' shelters or with the VA to connect with these veterans.

Freedom Grants: In 2024-25, we will award \$1,000 Freedom Grants to the first 1,000 Lodges who design projects that meet the needs of today's veterans. Applications are available April 1. Please take the time to craft a detailed and complete application that explains what your Lodge will do with the funds. Remember, grants must focus on serving veterans and/ or military members in need. Visit the [Freedom Grant webpage](#) for details and to learn more about guidelines.

Lodges in these 12 cities are also available for additional grant funding in the form of [Focus Grants](#) to address the issue of veteran homelessness: New York; Washington, D.C.; Miami; Chicago; Seattle; Los Angeles; Loma Linda; San Diego; San Francisco; Las Vegas; Orlando; and Phoenix. Focus Grants are large-scale, Elks-led projects that provide direct service to veterans experiencing homelessness.

For more about all our programs, visit elks.org/vets. Programs are always growing and changing so our website is the place for the most up-to-date information. While there, learn about our other programs, like:

- [Veterans Leather Program](#)
- [Playing Cards for Veterans](#)
- [Elks Emergency Assistance Fund](#) (to help veterans exit or prevent homelessness)

For more program ideas, read the document [Elks in Action: Ideas for Serving Veterans](#), put together by National Veterans Programs Chair Stewart Israel.

To stay up to date on all ENVSC news, [sign up for our monthly email](#).

If you have any questions or issues, give us a call anytime at (773) 755-4736 or email us at Vets@elks.org. We love talking to volunteers and are happy to share what we've learned from other Lodges.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I find project partners and connect with veterans in need in my area?

Check out this ENVSC blog post for tips on [Finding Local Veterans in Need](#).

How do I pay for this?

If you're interested in serving veterans at a facility like a VA Medical Center or State Veterans Home, keep in mind that Voluntary Service Representatives receive money every month to serve veterans at places like this. Consider partnering with them on new events and projects. If you're serving veterans exiting homelessness, don't forget about the Welcome Home Kit program, which provides home supplies for veterans exiting homelessness.

Use your grants! In addition to Freedom and Focus Grants, the Elks National Foundation [Community Investments Program](#) grants are designed to meet local needs. Many Lodges use Gratitude, Spotlight and Beacon Grants to serve veterans, military members and their families.

Take advantage of local resources. Partner with local groups like the American Legion or the VFW. Hold fundraisers at the Lodge. Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day and of course Veterans Day are excellent times to do this since veterans and military members are on many people's minds. Hold supply drives in the community to collect socks for a local veterans' shelter or ask Lodge members to donate home supplies and extra furniture to veterans moving into new homes. Ask scout groups or local schools to write cards to veterans for Valentine's Day.

What's the difference between a Voluntary Service Representative and a Lodge Veterans Chair?

Elks Voluntary Service Representatives receive monthly funding from the ENVSC office and are accountable to their State Veterans Chairs. This funding is intended only to serve veterans at the facility where the Representative is assigned, which is usually a VA Facility or State Veterans Home. Representative's ENVSC allocations are not to be co-mingled with Lodge funds under any circumstance.

Lodge Veterans Chairs handle funding from the Lodge and report to their Lodge leadership. Some people hold both positions at the same time.

How do I connect with other Elks doing this work?

Visit our [Volunteer Resource Center*](#) webpage to find a list of all State Veterans Chairs. Visit the [Voluntary Service webpage](#) for a list of Voluntary Service Representatives and Deputy Representatives.

Are there any restrictions?

The ENVSC mission is one of direct service to our nation's veterans and military members, with a special focus on service to those in need. While admirable, memorials, appreciation ceremonies and luncheons do not qualify. Lodges are free to use local, state, or other funds to hold these events.

Dates to Remember

January 31: [Veteran Volunteer of the Year](#) nominations are due to your State Veterans Chair.

February 14: Facilities schedule extra activities because veterans get lonely around Valentine's Day.

April 1: New Elks Fiscal Year! Get together with the incoming/outgoing Lodge Veterans Chair to plan.

April 1: Freedom Grants and Focus Grants available at elks.org/cip/dashboard.

June 14: Consider holding your Flag Day celebrations at a State Veterans Home or other veterans' facility.

June 15: Applications for new Voluntary Service facilities due to your State Veterans Chair.

November 11: Veterans Day

Many people remember veterans on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and major holidays. Be sure to reach out at other times of the year, when the general public isn't paying as much attention.