



Elks National Veterans Service Commission

Freedom Grant Frequently Asked Questions

Who is eligible to apply?

All Lodges are eligible to apply for a Freedom Grant! Eligibility is not dependent on meeting the GER's per-member-giving goal for donations to the ENF.

However, Lodges must submit their 2025-26 Freedom Grant Final Report to be eligible and be in compliance with all their other grants.

When will Freedom Grant applications become available? How will the process work?

2025-26 Freedom Grant applications will be available April 1. Please ensure your initial application is detailed, complete, and follows all guidelines.

Applications arrive over a series of months and will be reviewed and approved on a rolling basis.

I usually stay up past midnight to submit my Lodge's application. Is this worth it?

There is no need to do this. There are plenty of grants available. Take your time.

When will Freedom Grant applications close?

The Freedom Grant application will remain open until we receive and approve 1,000 qualifying Freedom Grant applications. This will take months, not weeks.

What is a qualifying application?

Freedom Grant projects must serve a population in need. Projects must focus on one of these five areas: employment, homelessness and housing, military families, health, and educational support. Qualifying applications will describe in detail:

- How and why the Lodge chose the project
- How the project will address the needs of veterans and/or active-duty military members
- How the Lodge will budget the grant, with details about why the funds are needed

How big is the Freedom Grant this year?

Lodges can apply for a \$1,000 Freedom Grant. We encourage Lodges to apply for the full amount.

My Lodge has a large veterans project that costs more than \$1,000. What should I do?

Don't forget about the ENF's Community Investments Program Grants program. Lodges can now receive up to \$10,500 in grants from the ENF in one year (not including the Impact Grant). Many Lodges will be eligible for even more Gratitude Grant funds this year. ENF Grants can be split between multiple projects.

Ask the community for support. There are many people and organizations that would be happy to support a project serving local veterans.

My Lodge wants to use the Freedom Grant and Gratitude Grant for the same project. Is this okay?

Yes, a Lodge can use different grants for the same project. In this case, it would have to submit two separate applications. If possible, we would encourage your Lodge to be clear about what each grant will pay for, so your Lodge can complete the required Final Reports more easily. (For example, the Gratitude Grant will pay for canned food and the Freedom Grant will pay for turkeys for food baskets for veterans.) Please keep separate receipts.

My Lodge wants to use the whole grant to serve one person. Is this allowed?

Projects must serve at least 4 veterans in need and cannot focus on just one or two individual veterans.

My Lodge wants to use the grant funds to hold an appreciation dinner for all community veterans. Does this qualify?

No. General appreciation dinners open to all veterans do not qualify for grant funds. If your Lodge applies for this project, the application will not be approved. Grants must focus on serving veterans in need.

Can the Freedom Grant be split among multiple projects?

While the Freedom Grant may be used for more than one project, we encourage your Lodge to focus on one project where you will make the most impact.

My Lodge would like to make a donation. Is that possible?

While we prefer active projects, your Lodge may use its grant to make a monetary donation to an eligible organization. Eligible organizations include nonprofit organizations that specifically serve veterans in need.

Can the Freedom Grant be used to fund a project my Lodge already holds?

Like all Lodge grants, it should be used to expand the Lodge's charitable activities. Grants are not intended to help Lodges financially or to replace other charitable funds. Ideally, grants should be used to start new projects or expand current ones.

My Lodge wants to donate to the local VFW or American Legion. Is that possible?

Donations to member organizations like the VFW and the American Legion are allowed only in certain circumstances. Funds must be specifically designated for a project that serves veterans in need and you must include information about the specific charitable project in your application. Funds can't go toward general operations. If your application only mentions a monetary donation and doesn't include details, it will not be approved.

We encourage you to consider partnering with these organizations on projects. For example, instead of donating funds to a VFW food basket project, your Lodge could purchase some of the food directly and have Elks members help assemble and deliver the baskets.

How were the five areas of need identified?

We know our volunteers have busy lives, and so we've done the research to help ensure that Elks' time and grant funds are used in the most effective ways. These five areas were identified as being of the greatest need through research and data obtained from the government and Veterans Administration, through partnerships and collaboration with leading veterans service organizations, and through engagement with veterans and veterans advocates.

My Lodge wants to partner with other Lodges to run a project together. Is this possible? Lodges can apply for the same project, if they are close to one another. (This is essential because grants should be used to serve local veterans, not support state or national projects).

Lodges would have to submit separate applications, and each Lodge would need full receipts for their purchases. If one Lodge is taking the lead, another Lodge wouldn't be able to submit a receipt showing that they gave funds to that Lodge. Each Lodge needs its own receipts for purchases.

Finally, each individual grant application would have to address how the project is serving veterans in their Lodge community since grants should be locally focused.

Are there any other restrictions?

Grants may not be used for appreciation dinners, fundraisers or general community events. Grants may not be used to distribute cash. Grants must target a veteran population in need. Dinners and events open to all veterans do not qualify.

My Lodge needs to change how we use our Freedom Grant. What should I do?

We understand that things change and are willing to work with your Lodge. Please keep us informed. Any and all changes to approved Freedom Grant activities must be approved by the ENVSC office in advance via email.

Grant changes within appropriate guidelines will be approved. If you have questions, feel free to contact the ENVSC office before submitting a proposal to revise the project. We know that things change and we are happy to work with your Lodge to adapt to changes.

My grant activity is complete. What now?

Tell us about it! When the activity is complete and the grant funds are spent, it's time to submit a Final Report through the Grants Dashboard. The Final Report should include itemized receipts and documentation of how all grant funds were spent, as well as information about the event. Attachments, photos, thank you notes, and other information is always welcome.

What if my Lodge doesn't get a Freedom Grant?

Lodges that do not receive Freedom Grants this year are encouraged to apply for Community Investments Program Grants, like the Gratitude Grant or the Spotlight Grant. Visit elks.org/cip for more information. And, don't forget about our other ENVSC programs! Look into using Welcome Home Kits to serve veterans exiting homelessness or partnering with your Voluntary Service Representative to serve veterans at a local facility. Visit elks.org/vets to learn more.

How do I document meals provided by my Lodge for an event?

If your project includes meals provided by the Lodge, remember that all food must be provided at cost. Please ensure your receipt and documentation reflect this and include details about the event including number of meals provided and date of service.

Copies of invoices included with Final Reports must include that the invoices were paid.

For the complete guidelines, please visit elks.org/vets or contact the ENVSC Office at Vets@elks.org or 773.755.4736.