

Senior Corps Guide to Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service and Veteran Programming



Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 



PREFACE

This Guide contains information and suggestions on Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service and Veteran programming for CNCS Senior Corps grantees.

Special thank you to The American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) for providing information used in this guide. Basic to the American Legion Auxiliary is the principle of Service, Not Self. This belief is reflected in the Auxiliary's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program which provides services that enhance the lives of veterans, active duty military and their families.

INTRODUCTION

The Corporation for National and Community Service has made a strong commitment to supporting our nation's troops, Veterans, and military families. Thousands of Veterans are served each year by AmeriCorps and Senior Corps programs, and many more are provided opportunities to continue their service to the nation through National Service programs. CNCS believes that Veterans are valuable assets and that volunteer service improves meaningful transitions to life after service for our nation's heroes.

Over the course of the next five years, CNCS seeks to increase the number of national service participants and volunteers serving in VA facilities as well as the number of Veterans serving with Senior Corps. The agency will also provide training and technical assistance necessary to Senior Corps programs so that they may create and sustain national opportunities through VA Voluntary Service (VAVS).

VAVS volunteers assist Veterans by augmenting staff in settings such as hospital wards, nursing homes, ambulatory care, outpatient clinics, domiciles, community-based volunteer programs, home-based respite programs, end-of-life care programs, Veterans outreach centers, national cemeteries, and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Offices.

In March, 2012, The Corporation for National and Community Service was approved for membership on the VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee. Members of this committee provide volunteer service to VA medical centers across the country. It is the Corporation's hope to encourage RSVP and SCP projects to become active on their local councils by placing a Representative an/or Deputy Representative to serve on the local VA council. While RSVP volunteers can be placed at the VA without a formal Representative or Deputy in place, this step provides Senior Corps with an opportunity for increased programming for senior volunteers to support veterans, increased awareness and visibility, and strengthened relationships with VAVS and committee members. It also provides a better national narrative for Senior Corps about how its volunteers support VA facilities throughout the country.

VA VOLUNTARY SERVICE DEFINITIONS

VA – Refers to the Office of Veterans Affairs. The VA is divided into three components: Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration and Research.

VAMC – VA Medical Center. Currently there are 153 Medical Center Facilities and 11 independent mobile clinics in the VA system across the country serving inpatient and outpatient needs.

CBOC – Community-Based Outpatient Clinic. There are currently 718 in the VA system.

Chief, Voluntary Services - Refers to the VAMC staff person who has full responsibility for the recruitment, training, scheduling and retention of volunteers at a specific center.

VAVS – VA Voluntary Services. This is the department within the VA that coordinates all volunteer services affecting the 882 medical facilities and the 125 VA Cemeteries.

VAVS Rep – The term used to identify a local Senior Corps representative assigned by the grantee to serve as a liaison between the project and a specific VAMC.

VAVS Dep – The term used to identify a local Senior Corps deputy representative assigned by the grantee to serve as an assistant to the Senior Corps Rep.

Facility VAVS Committee – Each VA Medical Center and independent outpatient clinic must establish a VAVS Committee to assist the coordination of plans and policies for community participation in the VAVS program. VAVS Reps and Deps serve as members on this committee. Organizations with membership on the Facility Committee are responsible for:

- Identifying ways to improve the Facility VAVS program
- Assisting in obtaining financial, material, and human resources in accordance with specific needs
- Communicating policies and procedures established by the organization to VA

- Training committee members with emphasis on duties, liaison role, and the quantity and quality of volunteer services to be provided by the organization.

The National Advisory Committee (NAC) - The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee was established in 1947 and became a federally chartered advisory committee in 1975. Led by the Under Secretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs, VAVS assists in recruitment and orientation of volunteers, and keeps the officers and members of participating organizations informed of volunteer needs and accomplishments. The NAC members are responsible for:

- Promoting the VAVS Program.
- Communicating VA policies to their constituencies
- Making recommendations to improve volunteer services to veterans

National VAVS Rep – The National Rep represents CNCS on the National VA Advisory Committee for Voluntary Services. CNCS Senior Advisory for Wounded Warriors, Veterans and Military Families, Koby Langley serves as the CNCS National Rep. Koby may be contacted via email at klangley@cns.gov or phone 202-606-6602.

National VAVS Dep – The National Dep works closely with the CNCS National VAVS Rep and also represents CNCS on the National VA Advisory Committee. Theresa Long, Oklahoma State Director serves as the National Dep. Theresa may be contacted via email at tlong@cns.gov or phone at 405-231-5203.

National VAVS Certifying Official – The National Certifying Official provides approval for all local Reps and Deps and works closely with the CNCS National Rep and Dep on the VA National Advisory Committee. Senior Corps Program Officer, Jan Newsome serves as the National Certifying Officer. Jan may be contacted via email at jnewsome@cns.gov or phone at 202-606-6625.

Veteran Service Organization (VSO) - A commonly used reference to identify organizations such as the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, VFW, and VFW.

Regularly Scheduled Volunteer – Individuals who have regularly scheduled assignments under VA supervision and who have completed a volunteer orientation through a VA facility.

Occasional Volunteer – Individuals serving with the VAVS program who volunteer on an occasional basis.

WOC Volunteer – VA's term to define a volunteer accepted into the VAVS program who is classified in the VA system as Employees Without Compensation.

Annual Joint Review (AJR) – The Annual Joint Review is conducted to assess organization's participating in the VAVS program during the preceding year and to develop goals for the next year. The AJR provides an opportunity for the organization's Reps and Deps and VAVS Program Manager to develop plans to ensure active participation by the organization in programs for the welfare of Veteran patients.

WORKING WITH VA VOLUNTARY SERVICE

The VA Voluntary Service Program Manager is responsible for the overall administration and operation of the facility volunteer program and is the authorized official for all volunteers.

The Program Manager is responsible for:

- Providing orientation to volunteers
- Directing volunteer recruitment, placement, training, evaluation and recognition
- Managing the Voluntary Service System (VSS) timekeeping for volunteer records
- Educating VA staff in the management of volunteers
- Terminating volunteers from service, in cooperation with the Representative of affiliated organization
- Providing National Certifying Official with a copy of the acknowledgement of a Local Representative or Deputy's certification
- Signing all Volunteer Applications
- Conducting position risk and sensitivity assessments for volunteer assignments
- Determining the appropriateness of a volunteer assignment if positive results are found in the background check

VAVS VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AND REQUIREMENTS

Volunteers are vital to the successful operation of any VA Medical Center program. VAVS volunteers assist Veterans by augmenting clinics, domiciles, community-based volunteer programs, home-based respite, Veterans outreach centers, national cemeteries, and end of life care.

In 2011, over 400 RSVP and SCP volunteers contributed more than 37,000 hours at VA facilities across the country. These volunteers provide valuable assistance to Medical Center staff that allows them to focus on patient care

The goals of VA Voluntary service include:

- Ensure VAVS Program is supportive of VA's mission
- Provide Veterans served by VA with a range of supplemental services
- Provide a safe, clean and comfortable working environment
- Promote cooperation among employees and volunteers
- Ensure volunteers are given assignments that provide satisfaction, utilize knowledge and skills, and offer learning opportunities
- Maintain volunteer recognition system
- Maintain interaction between volunteers and patients that foster healing
- Ensure all volunteers serve under VA staff supervision
- Ensure that participation in VAVS program does not discriminate on basis of age, sex, race, sexual orientation, religion, or national origin
- Ensure appropriate volunteer assignments

. Generally VAMC volunteers fall into two categories:

Regularly Scheduled (RS) Volunteer: RS volunteers are individuals who participate in the VAVS Program on a regularly scheduled assignment under VA supervision. Frequency of participation is determined locally. Individuals are officially authorized to serve as RS volunteers when the individual has:

- Signed the "Waiver of Claims to Remuneration and Appointment Agreement
- Been approved for assignment by the Voluntary Service Program Manager, or designee
- Participated in required screenings, interviews, orientations, and training prescribed by the VA facility
- Completed a trial period established by the VA facility

Occasional Volunteer: Occasional volunteers are those individuals serving under the VAVS Program who do not meet the requirements of regularly scheduled (RS) volunteers. Individuals frequently volunteer with a group or organization on an occasional basis.

Volunteers from Community Organizations: VAVS will accept volunteer services from members of community organizations provided the organization is in a position to provide volunteers or other resources and agrees to VA supervision of its affiliated volunteers while participating in VAVS program and that its volunteers will participate in all VA facility-required orientation and training.

Non-Citizen Volunteers: Individuals who are not US citizens are eligible to participate in the VAVS program. However they must provide a copy of a visa prior to accepting a volunteer assignment.

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENT CATEGORIES

The VA Voluntary Service program has established four specific groups of volunteers for the purpose of accepting new volunteers and determining the level of training and access. Each group has specific requirements that correlate with the level of security risk involved with their assignment and also indicates the type of Identification (ID) badge required.

The four different categories are:

Group A – This group consists of VA employees who have volunteer assignments

Group B – Volunteers with recreation, cemetery, book cart, or similar assignments

Group C – Includes assignments associated with home health care, provision of patient care or working alone with a patient, contact with pharmaceuticals or other biological agents, access to patient records, and access to computers.

Group D – This group consists of volunteers who have computer access to the VA Local Area Network.

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING

Some consistency exists within the VA Healthcare System however each VA Medical Center is responsible for the orientation and placement of volunteers. New volunteers at a VA facility should generally expect the following:

- Interview with a member of the VAVS staff to discuss their skills, interest and intent.
- Participation in formal VA orientation program that is produced and scheduled by the facility. This orientation includes information about the facility, working in a hospital environment, patient interaction, emergency procedures, assignment discussions and volunteer opportunities, and volunteer limitations.
- Depending on the assignment, volunteers may be fingerprinted and photographed for an ID and given a tuberculosis test. For some positions, the VA requires a background check and special training if the volunteer will have access to the VA's information technology system. This background check will be addition to those required by Senior Corps.
- Volunteers must sign in at the beginning of each shift. All VA facilities track volunteer hours electronically and this sign in serves as the official record. This process ensures coverage under Federal Tort Claims and for Workman's Compensation and guarantees that your organization receives proper credit. These hours are recorded in the VAVS annual report to Congress so accurate reporting is critical.

VAVS VOLUNTEER BENEFITS AND RECOGNITION

Meals: Meals may be furnished without charge to RS volunteers provided their scheduled assignment is at least 4 hours and the value of the service is commensurate with the value of the meal. Meals may be provided to others at the discretion of the Facility Director, if the Facility Director determines that the individuals render a service which benefits VA in discharging its responsibilities to patients. Meals provided to volunteers are non-transferable.

Parking: Facilities must make every effort to provide parking for RS volunteers without charge.

Identification for Volunteers: All VA facilities must issue the same type of identification for RS volunteers as they do for paid staff, and in accordance with

policy. Affiliated volunteers are authorized to wear insignia and uniforms identifying their affiliation, except where it is medically inadvisable. In these instances, VA must explain to the concerned volunteers and to their representatives the reasons for the exceptions.

Medical Treatment: Volunteers are considered WOC employees and are provided health services in accordance with established policy for employees. This means that:

- New volunteers, not normally required to have a physical examination, when deemed necessary for the protection of patients or volunteers, must be provided a physical without charge.
- A physical evaluation may be mandatory based upon the requirements of the volunteer position (at no cost to the volunteer) or to determine fitness for duty.
- Emergency outpatient treatment for injuries sustained while performing assigned volunteer service must be provided to volunteers.
- Voluntary Service, in cooperation with the facility's Infection Control Committee, must determine the need for tuberculin tests and examinations, including chest x-rays, for RS volunteers. These procedures are provided without cost to the volunteer.
- Volunteers must receive other employee benefits and services as determined locally, including cholesterol testing, blood pressure screening, and influenza shots.

Use of VA Facility Services: As determined locally, volunteers may use facilities authorized for employees.

Recognition: VAVS is committed to providing appropriate recognition for contributions of the VAVS volunteers and their organizations to the VAVS Program. Recognition may consist of tangible awards, such as certificates, pins, plaques, etc. as well as, verbal acknowledgment and the sense of belonging to the health care team.

VAVS VOLUNTEER RECORDS AND REPORTING

Individual VA medical centers will maintain a system of records for each RS volunteer and documentation of participation for Occasional Volunteers. All volunteers are required to sign in electronically and their hours are entered into an automated information system. Hours for Senior Companion volunteers should be reported to the VAVS Program Manager who will enter them into the electronic record keeping system. Senior Corps grantees with VA volunteers can generally expect to receive reports on a monthly or quarterly basis.

NATIONAL SALUTE TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS

The National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans is celebrated each year during the week of February 14.

The purpose of this program is to:

Pay tribute and express appreciation to hospitalized Veterans

Increase community awareness of the role of the medical center

Encourage individuals to visit hospitalized Veterans and to become involved as volunteers.

During the National Salute, VA invites individuals, groups and community leaders to participate in a variety of activities at the VA Medical Centers. The activities and events include special ward visits and valentine distributions, photo opportunities, school essay contests, special recreation activities and Veteran recognition programs. The week also provides an opportunity for the community to become acquainted with volunteer opportunities.

For Senior Corps grantees, this program would serve as an excellent vehicle for volunteer engagement, as well as an opportunity to become better acquainted with potential volunteer activities.

Additional information may be obtained from your local VA Voluntary Service Program Manager or may be found at

www.volunteer.va.gov/NationalSaluteVeteranPatients.asp.

LOCAL VAVS REPRESENTATIVES AND DEPUTY REPRESENTATIVES

These individuals are critical to Senior Corps, CNCS and VA in establishing relationships with a specific VAMC. In addition, they serve as managers of their organization's volunteers for the respective VA Medical Center. CNCS recommends that RSVP and SCP projector directors serve in this role. However, there is no restriction on program volunteers serving in this capacity.

Responsibilities Include:

- Be registered as a regularly scheduled volunteer.
- Develop strong working relationship with the VA Medical Center Voluntary Service Program Manager.
- Attend quarterly VAVS Committee Meetings at the VA Medical Center, and arrange for Deputy to attend if necessary. Note: Membership on the VAVS Committee may be terminated if absent at three consecutive meetings. In this case, the CNCS National Rep will be notified to determine appropriate action.
- Review quarterly VAVS Assignment and Donation Needs list provided by the VAVS staff and fill assignment vacancies when possible.
- Develop recruitment strategies for Regularly Scheduled and Occasional Volunteers. This might include Drivers for transportation, administrative roles, and other opportunities identified by the VAVS Program Manager.
- Ensure volunteer hours are properly recorded and attributed to your organization.
- Make sure volunteer hours are rewarded and apply, or recommend someone for the VA Volunteer of the Year Award.
- Conduct Annual Joint Review with VAVS Program Manager.
- Work with VAVS Program Manager and VAVS staff to assist in the management of the program. The VAVS Program Manager and VAVS staff are in charge of screening, training, tracking and reporting volunteers and hours at each VAMC.
- Ensure that the CNCS National VAVS Rep and Dep receive minutes of quarterly meetings and is aware of any changes in your organization's status with the VAMC.

ANNUAL JOINT REVIEWS

The Annual Joint Review (AJR) is conducted to assess organization's participation in the VA Voluntary Service program during the previous year and to develop goals for the next year. The Annual Joint Review Team will consist of organization Representative, Deputy Representative and the VA Service Program Manager. This review provides an opportunity to develop plans that will ensure active program participation, as well as time to update the Memorandum of Agreement. A review summary will be distributed within 15 working days upon completion of the review.

VAVS REP AND DEP APPLICATION PROCESS

All Senior Corps Project Directors, staff and volunteers are eligible to serve as VA Representatives and Deputies. The main requirement is that the individual must be a registered volunteer at the VA medical center. The individual does not need to volunteer on a regular basis but must go through the volunteer registration process. For project directors and staff, this provides an excellent learning opportunity to experience the same orientation volunteers will go through.

While volunteers are eligible to serve in this capacity, CNCS Senior Corps believes Project Directors and staff are most appropriate for this role. Serving as a VAVS Rep or Dep would provide an excellent opportunity for project staff to develop relationships with the VA Medical Center and VAVS Committee members, as well as increased visibility and awareness for the program. Additionally, project staff will have knowledge of available resources to meet VAVS needs.

The CNCS National Certifying Official is responsible for approving all local VAVS Representatives and Deputies. Individuals interested in taking advantage of this opportunity should submit written request for approval including name, project, position, VA Medical Center location and contact information to:

Jan Newsome
CNCS
1201 New York Ave NW
Washington, DC 20525
jnewsome@cns.gov

For additional information, please contact Jan Newsome at jnewsome@cns.gov or 202-606- or Theresa Long at tlong@cns.gov or 405-231-5203.

ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND VETERAN PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Partnering with Veteran Service Organizations

Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) are private nonprofit organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501(c)19 of the IRS Code.

Organization membership is comprised of past or present members of the US Armed Forces (USAF), military cadets, and/or relatives of members of the USAF. Examples include The American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary (ALA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Gold Star Mothers and Gold Star Wives, Wounded Warrior Project and Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA).

The common meaning of the term “veteran service organization” may also encompass organizations that serve veterans but are not VSOs. For example, government agencies and veteran service providers that are not membership organizations.

There are approximately 100 “top tier” Veteran Service Organizations. When you account for the state or local affiliates, VSOs in the US number into the thousands. Characteristics of various VSOs include:

- Member type (service member, veteran, relative)
- Membership size
- Period of military Service
- Organization age

Veteran Service Organizations such as American Legion Auxiliary have established traditions and decades of service to veterans, their families, and military service members. Additionally, VSOs have a strong community base, significant volunteer networks and strong fundraising abilities.

Many Veteran Service Organizations are experiencing increased demand for services while dealing with aging and declining memberships. Other challenges include organizational structure, and rotating leadership.

With these challenges comes great opportunity for partnership through direct services to veterans, direct service to transitioning service members, capacity building, and participation in welcome home and stand down events.

Examples of Partnership Opportunities Include:

- Care and support in VA facilities or community-based settings
- Transportation to medical appointments, job interviews, or to other service agencies
- Respite care for family members
- Assistance with benefits paperwork
- Life and Job Skills Training
- Family Support such as Child Care, Spouse to Spouse Mentoring
- Participation in Stand Downs for homeless veterans
- Nonprofit leadership development
- Volunteer Management Improvement
- Special Visibility or Fundraising Events

Veteran Service Organization in your community can be identified by contacting County Veteran Service Officers and State Director of Veterans' Affairs, talking with VA Voluntary Service Program Staff at local VA Medical Center, and the VA Online Director of VSOs.

When making initial contact, you will probably speak with the local leader or Community Service Committee Chair. If you are having difficulty finding the appropriate contact and engaging in your community, you may find assistance through the organization's national office.

Suggestions for forming collaborations include:

- Telephone call with follow-up email recommended as first step
- Speak of general interest first rather than offer immediate proposal
- Request personal meeting or invite leaders to an organization event to observe your group in action
- Develop project proposal
 - Identify a specific project or area of joint work, roles, and plan of action
- Explain how partnership or project connects to veterans or service members
- Be specific about the project purpose, date and time, who will participate, etc.
- Provide a timeline for decision. Be aware that VSOs have decision making layers
- Formalize the collaboration through letters, Memorandum of Agreements, or resolutions
- Announce collaboration to members and public
- Offer guidance to members on project implementation

Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training (DOLVETS)

DOLVETS is a pilot program and currently doesn't exist in every area of the country. It was initiated through the Department of Labor's (DOL) desire to conduct targeted outreach to unemployed and underemployed veterans. With a focus on employment opportunities, DOLVETS has evolved into a one-stop training and employment resource since its initial pilot.

DOL is interested in expanding this effort and strategic partnerships with local RSVO programs can be one way to do so.

Additional information about the overall DOLVETS mission and services, as well as contact information for the VETS office(s) in your state or region may be found at <http://www.dol.gov/vets/>

Examples from the Field

The following program snapshots demonstrate how senior volunteers currently engage and support Veterans and Military Families.

In **California**, RSVP volunteers in the Bay Area provide health and social services to homeless persons (including veterans) by setting up daylong one-stop social and medical services clinics for homeless persons. On average, 13 RSVP volunteers serve 15 veterans each over the course of the day, totaling 195 veterans served on average per event.

A homeless shelter in **Colorado**, houses two veterans programs with 9 RSVP volunteers. One partners with the VA to provide vouchers and government payment for homeless veterans to stay at the shelter. The other provides apartment housing for up to two years for qualifying veterans. RSVP Volunteers cook and serve meals at the shelter, work in the shelter, work at the thrift store, and serve as community liaisons.

A **Maryland** RSVP program engaging veterans as volunteers partners with another organization to send care packages to military members overseas. RSVP volunteers (including veterans) collect items, assist with marketing the event, help decorate the insides of the boxes, deliver the items to the site on the day of the project, and help package the items for shipping. One volunteer who is also a veteran was instrumental in establishing a partnership with the local VA hospital, through which she helps veterans make sure they are accessing all of the benefits available to them.

Fifty-percent of the 40-plus volunteers at an RSVP program in **New York State** are veterans or spouses of veterans. They provide transportation for veterans to doctor's appointments, physical therapy sessions, visits to the food bank and clothing store, and assist in the filing of veterans' claims. Their work has been lauded by the local Veterans' Administration Office for providing assistance in helping them to meet the needs of local veterans.

In **Texas**, RSVP volunteers help mobilize and organize returning veterans. In partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission, Veterans' Commission, VA hospital systems, VA Research Foundation, and a local community college returning service men and women are connected to volunteer positions while they are seeking employment, receiving medical treatment, or are otherwise transitioning into the community. Veterans volunteer in nonprofits that match their interests or skills and they receive training and possible employment opportunities. The community college, the RSVP sponsoring agency, provides workforce readiness training.

RSVP members serve in a variety of roles at the **Idaho** Veterans Hospital and Veterans Home. These roles include acting as escorts on Veterans Hospital and Veterans Home grounds, transporting veterans to and from the Veterans complex and other community resources in southwest Idaho, and acting as social support for residents of the Veterans Home who do not have family close by.

In **Pennsylvania**, RSVP volunteers who are also veterans are recruiting fellow veterans to join the program, which supports veterans in accomplishing daily living tasks, such as transportation, friendly visits, and minor household repairs.

RESOURCES

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service

www.va.gov

VA Medical Center Facilities

www.va.gov/directory

VA Homeless Veterans Program Office

www.va.gov/homeless

VA National Cemetery Program

www.cem.va.gov

Center for Women Vets

www.va.gov/womenvet

National Center for PTSD

www.ptsd.va.gov

VA Recognized Veteran Service Organizations

www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditations/index.asp

National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH)

www.nationalhomeless.org

National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs

www.nasdva.net

National Association of County Veteran Service Officers

www.nacvso.org

Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training (DOLVETS)

www.dol.gov/vets

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if I don't have a local VA or DOLVETS?

Contact your local Veterans Service Organization (VSO) community. They will have important knowledge about the needs and existing services in your community. Some communities may have a veterans' task force, which is a good starting point. If your local community doesn't have such a resource, every county has a county veterans service officer and every state has a director of veterans affairs. Identify and contact these individuals to learn more about what's going on in your community and where there are opportunities for partnerships.

What exactly is a Veterans Service Organization?

VSOs are private nonprofit organizations whose membership is comprised of past or present members of the U.S. Armed Forces, military cadets, and/or relatives of U.S. Armed Services members. VSOs must be operated exclusively for one or more stated purposes, all of which support the social welfare of the community and assist disabled and needy veterans, members of the USAF and their dependants, and the widows or orphans or deceased veterans.

What do VSOs do?

VSOs provide entertainment, care, and assistance to hospitalized veterans or members of the USAF. They carry on programs to perpetuate the memory of deceased veterans and USAF members and to comfort their survivors. They also conduct programs for religious, charitable, scientific, literary, or educational purposes. VSOs sponsor or participate in activities of a patriotic nature, provide insurance benefits for members or their dependants, and host social and recreational activities.

Are all agencies that serve veterans VSOs?

No. In common usage, the term VSO may encompass organizations that are not technically VSOs, based on nonprofit tax-exempt status (see definition above). Examples include government agencies and veterans service providers that are not membership organizations.