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Gifts for Yanks

GFY User Manual

The American Legion Department of Ohio created this manual for ease of use with the Gifts for Yanks Program. This manual is intended to explain the policies and program for VA Voluntary Services Chiefs, Legionnaire Deputies and Representatives at VA Medical Centers, Community Based Outpatient Clinics, and the Ohio Veterans Homes in Ohio.

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History of “Gifts for Yanks” Program

During World War II, comedian Eddie Cantor started a fundraising effort to provide Christmas gifts for American military personnel who were hospitalized because of the war. His national project was called “Give to a Yank Who Gave” and has since been renamed in Ohio as “Gifts for Yanks” (GFY).

In 1952, Ohio began the program collecting \$8,000.00 which was used to purchase cigarettes for veterans in Ohio veterans’ hospitals. By 1994, the program had grown to support volunteers in all the Ohio VA Medical Centers (VAM), Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH) in Georgetown and Sandusky, and volunteer efforts at VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) and VA Vet Centers.

The GFY program has expanded throughout the years. In 2015, the GFY Committee dedicated a portion of its resources to support VA Homeless Veteran Standowns each year.

Voluntary service positions serve to keep Legionnaires active and engaged with other veterans. Retirement or the inability to be gainfully employed can be a difficult transition for a veteran. This program serves to prevent isolation and gives purpose and meaning to the Legionnaire volunteer and the beneficiary of the program. The donors of the GFY program should be proud that their monies are being spent with the purpose of providing camaraderie, comfort, and care to veterans at various stages throughout their lives.

Where does the money come from?

The GFY program operates within The American Legion Department of Ohio fiscal year of 1 August to 31 July. Donations to this program are calculated during this time frame, one year in advance. Each year the GFY Committee sets a fundraising goal for the following year. *For example, the anticipated budget and fundraising goal of \$260K was set in April of 2017 to fund the program for 2018-2019.*

Each American Legion Post in Ohio is encouraged to have a Gifts for Yanks Chairman who oversees the local fundraising efforts and communications on behalf of the program to its members. The GFY Department Committee consists of an active Legionnaire, appointed by a District Commander, from each of the 14 Districts. They normally serve the committee for one year and can be reappointed each year. The GFY District Chairman is to connect with the Post GFY Chairman to secure donations for the GFY program. The camaraderie and competition amongst the Posts and Districts is very strong. They are recognized and awarded at each Department Convention and at District conferences and meetings each year.

Donations are forwarded to Department HQ with strict oversight, according to IRS Publication 1771¹. Each contribution is documented by Post, District, and individuals who have donated to the program.

¹ <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p1771.pdf>

The GFY Department Committee Chairman are notified at least monthly of the Posts that donated.

Where are the donated monies spent?

In the spring of each year, the GFY Committee Chairman selects a five-person subcommittee from the fourteen-person department committee to review the voluntary services locations, donations and fundraising, budget, policies, special projects, and Christmas gifts.

Voluntary Services Locations

There are over 60 locations eligible to receive funding in the form of an allocated budget, or grant, from the GFY program. All VA locations must have an **ACTIVE** Legionnaire who is registered as the VA Voluntary Services Representative or Deputy Representative² according to the VAVS Handbook provided by The American Legion National Organization. Legionnaires located at the Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH) must be approved by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, OVH, Voluntary Services Coordinator to act as the liaison between OVH and Department HQ.

VA Medical Centers, Community Based Outpatient Clinics (VAMC/CBOC), & VET Centers

There are four VAMC's in Ohio located in Chillicothe, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Dayton. The

² <https://www.legion.org/sons/files/vavshandbook.pdf>

Columbus VA Ambulatory Care Center which acts like a VAMC without inpatient care. Each of these parent facilities has clinics called CBOC's within their VA prescribed catchment areas and some areas have more clinics than others. There are also VA Vet Centers separate from the parent facilities and specialize in survivor support, combat trauma, and family therapy.

The GFY program currently allocates \$1,250.00 to each clinic, \$5,000.00 or more to a parent VAMC, and \$500.00 to a VA Vet Center. The allocations only exist if there is an **ACTIVE** Legionnaire serving in a voluntary services role at the VA location and if the funding is available.

Ohio Veterans Homes (OVH)

Currently there are two veterans' homes in Ohio. They are in Sandusky and Georgetown. These facilities are operated by the Ohio Department of Veterans Services. They too receive funding from our organization each year, submit for special projects and are part of the Gift for Yanks Christmas distribution each year.

How do you apply for funds?

To receive funds from the GFY Program, the active Legionnaire who is in the voluntary service role can apply for reimbursement or request purchasing from Department HQ. They also have an account at the parent VAMC called “General Post Fund” (GPF) accounts that GFY funds can be deposited into.

There is a specific form to request funds from the GFY program at Department HQ. This document can be found on the Department website at www.ohiolegion.com³ or by contacting the GFY Program Director.

What are the different GFY funds and projects?

The GFY program currently has funds available for VAWS General Fund, Special Projects, Christmas Gifts, Christmas Special Units, Christmas Cash, Canteen Books, Gift Shops, Homeless Veterans Projects.

VAWS General Funds

General funds consist of a set amount allocated to each location based on the number of veterans that utilize the facility and the scope of active voluntary services activity. Typically, a VAMC will receive \$5,000.00 and a CBOC will receive \$1,250.00. The allocations only exist if there is an **ACTIVE**

³ <https://www.ohiolegion.com/wp-content/uploads/GFY-Request-Form.pdf>

Legionnaire who serves as the Representative or Deputy Representative to the facility.

The GFY program does not automatically give the fundraised monies to VA facilities. These funds are held at Department HQ and are accessible to the Legionnaire by request for reimbursement or a special purchase is made from Department HQ and the product is shipped to the facility. The purpose of keeping VAVS funds at Department HQ is for flexibility of spending within the program. There are items that VA is restricted from purchasing from the GPF accounts due to time, vendor, accessibility, and cost. The Legionnaire is not required to have approval from the VA to purchase the items, which allows the Legionnaire to be creative in their role as a VAVS Representative.

Department HQ provides strict oversight of all items purchased and must be approved by the GFY program coordinator before reimbursement occurs. Examples of items purchased from VAVS general funds may be supplies for coffee stations, Christmas Ornaments with a Legion logo for veterans at a small CBOC, calendars for veterans to keep up with appointments, barbecue, pizza and refreshments for veteran's appreciation days, tickets for a local zoo outing for a specific unit at a VAMC, water coolers accessible to veterans, healthy snacks for quick access for veterans with diabetes. VAVS funds are to enhance quality of life for veterans who are utilizing the facility.

