

STUDENT VETERANS OF AMERICA

CHAPTER GUIDE



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WHO WE ARE

Student Veterans of America (SVA) is a leading organization for veterans in higher education. With a network of over 1,500 on-campus chapters across the United States and overseas, SVA connects student veterans, provides resources, and advocates for their success. Our headquarters staff are dedicated to supporting student veterans in achieving their greatest potential by offering resources, networking opportunities, and advocacy in higher education focusing on the unique needs of student veterans. SVA also conducts data-driven research to highlight the achievements of today's student veterans and works to preserve the integrity of the GI Bill.

SVA Chapters, representing over three-quarters of a million student veterans, play a crucial role in empowering tomorrow's leaders. SVA aims to reduce barriers, provide opportunities, build community, and empower student veterans to reach their full potential through a chapter-based model. By engaging with mature Chapters supported by SVA programs, advocacy, and research, student veterans can surpass their assumed potential and participate in a transformative experience tailored to their unique circumstances and needs.

BENEFITS

Networking and Community Building

The Chapter network is a powerful platform for building rich and meaningful relationships. Founded on the camaraderie developed through military service, this global network of student veterans, families, supporters, and allies offers unique access to programming, advocacy, research, and more. Being part of a Chapter also provides the opportunity to receive guidance from top individuals in various industries, fostering personal and professional growth.

Resources and Programming Opportunities

Through affiliation with SVA Chapters, members gain access to valuable resources, opportunities, and programming. This includes the use of the SVA name, seal, logo, and branding to showcase their affiliation with a global network of student veteran success. Strategic partnerships offer benefits such as internships, events, certificate programs, webinars, scholarships, and career opportunities. Additionally, leadership and professional development curricula and programs like Washington Week, Regional Summits, the Leadership Institute, and NatCon are available. Online networking and support forums, advocacy support at campus and national levels, and access to the Chapter Toolkit for managing the Chapter effectively are also provided.

No National Membership Dues or Fees

SVA's philosophy reflects the belief that student veterans have already made significant sacrifices through their military service. Therefore, there are no dues or fees associated with SVA membership. However, individual Chapters have the discretion to establish their own policies, although they are encouraged to avoid any financial barriers to membership and participation. Before implementing any dues or fees, Chapters should consult with their respective institutions to ensure compliance with university rules and regulations.





ACTIVE CHAPTER REQUIREMENTS

All SVA chapters must meet and maintain the following requirements:

1. REGISTERED STUDENT ORGANIZATION (RSO):

- Must be a registered student organization at an accredited institution.
- Contact the university's Student Life or Student Affairs office for information on the registration process.

2. GOVERNING DOCUMENTS:

- Must maintain bylaws or a constitution, outlining the Chapter's purpose and management.
- Should include mission statement, membership eligibility, officer positions, election procedures, and meeting requirements.

3. CHAPTER LEADERS:

- Must have at least one President or equivalent position. (Position can be filled via election or appointed, depending on the needs of the chapter at the time.)
- Responsibilities include reporting to National Headquarters, coordinating recruitment and meetings, planning events, and communicating effectively.

4. CHAPTER ADVISOR:

- Must have at least one faculty or staff member serving as the Chapter Advisor.
- Advisor responsibilities include facilitating communication with university administration, assisting with recruitment and events, helping set goals, and ensuring chapter continuity by facilitating proper officer turnover procedures.

Active Chapters should regularly update their MySVA account, and ensure all Chapter members create and have access to their own MySVA account when they join the Chapter.

ESTABLISHING A NEW CHAPTER

Step 1: Connect with the Community

Create and share your vision and mission with those around you. Chapters connect student veterans, administrators, community organizations, and other student groups. Connecting with these stakeholders will help you gauge interest and gain support for your mission. Tap into existing networks on campus to raise awareness of your group of students, as well as the entirety of the student veteran experience.

Step 2: Establish Your Network

We recommend organizing a roster or contact list for all of the organization's members, as well as contacts in your campus and neighborhood communities who have expressed interest in supporting your mission. Creating these channels to facilitate your network will help streamline communications within your student veteran organization.

Don't forget to begin considering who will act as your Chapter President and Chapter Advisor as you begin considering your application for official SVA Membership.

During this phase, the group should also be applying for recognition as an official student organization on campus. Every institution is different, so connect with your student life administration or student affairs department for specific details on how to complete this process.

Step 3: Set the Standard

To further streamline your organization's activities, it is important to create a governing document, such as a constitution or set of bylaws. This is not only a prerequisite to becoming an official SVA Chapter but will also establish the structure within which your SVA Chapter will function.

The governing document should include information on the scope of your organization's mission, as well as details on membership requirements and meeting frequency. The content of governing documents will vary by campus, but reviewing examples of other bylaws or constitutions will be useful in drafting your organization's own unique document.

Step 4: Apply for SVA Membership

Your application will be reviewed by our team, and you'll receive a decision within one to two business days. Upon approval, a welcome email will be sent to your chapter's point of contact with information about your membership. There are no dues or fees associated with SVA membership.

Questions about the steps involved in establishing a new chapter? Connect with SVA HQ for a personal consultation on the process.

CHAPTER LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The leadership structure of each chapter will differ depending upon several factors. This section provides a base model for the creation of that structure. Officer positions should be created to fit the needs of the school and the chapter.

At minimum, the Chapter must have a President, but the institution may require additional leadership roles. Leadership responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

Ensuring that the Chapter is properly reporting membership and Chapter information to National Headquarters.

Coordinating membership recruitment, Chapter Officer installation/transition, and Chapter meetings.

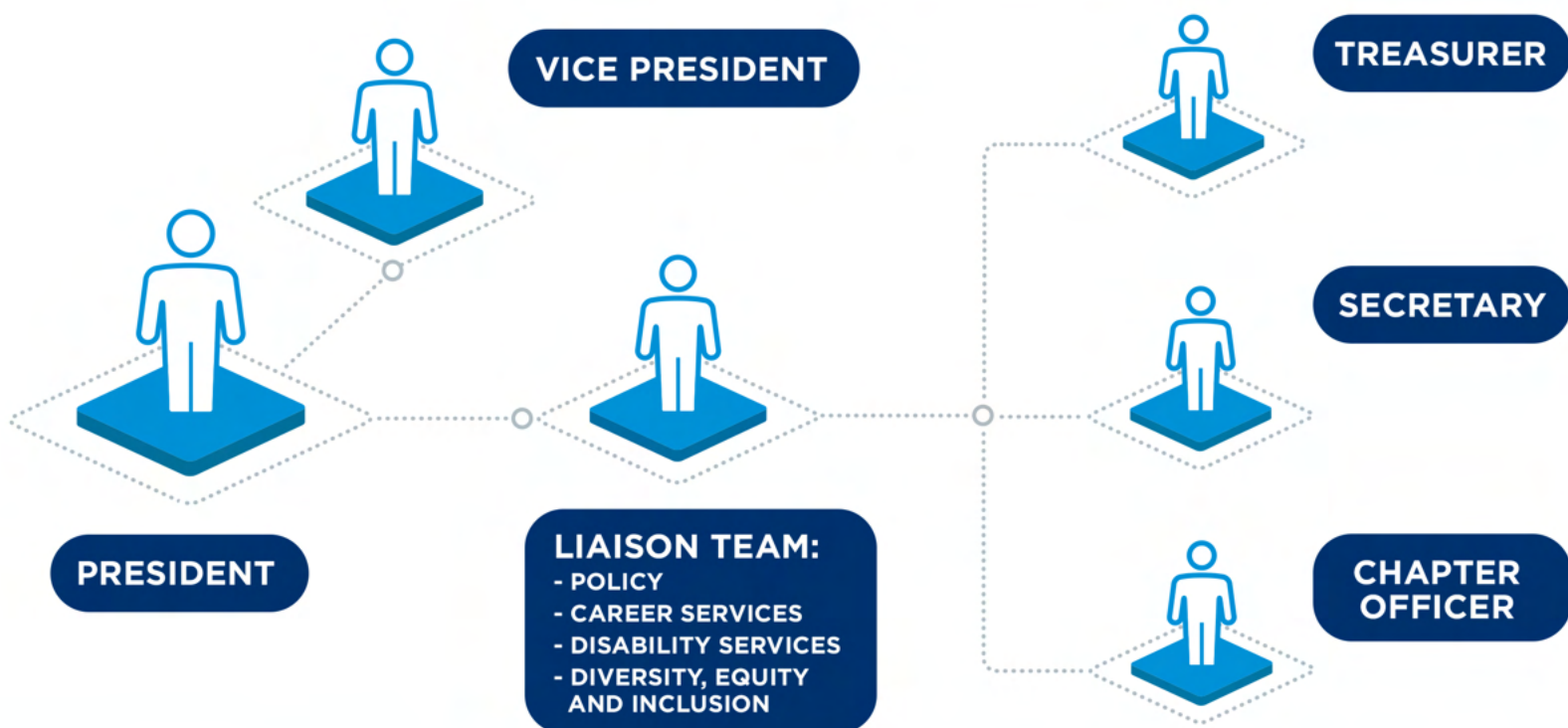
Being familiar with the Chapter's constitution and/or bylaws, membership requirements, and Chapter reporting procedures.

Planning Chapter events and promoting SVA on campus.

Encouraging the Chapter's attendance at university functions.

Communicating effectively with the active membership, the university, community partners, and National Headquarters.

Setting and evaluating Chapter goals annually.



The exact organizational structure, definition of roles, and responsibility of Chapter Officers will depend on a variety of factors, including the size of the Chapter and the scope of its mission, any relevant school or campus policies, individual Chapter preferences, and individual skills.

SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS

Leadership transition is a crucial process that requires careful planning and preparation. Here are the key steps to ensure a smooth handover:

Full Team Meeting:

The incoming and outgoing executive boards should meet to establish a timeline, structure the transition process, and address any pressing questions or shared responsibilities.

Individual Meetings by Role:

Outgoing Chapter Leaders should meet one-on-one with their incoming counterparts to familiarize them with resources and records, share best practices, and provide necessary instructions for maintaining the role.

Introductory Meetings:

Outgoing Chapter Leaders should introduce incoming leaders to formal and informal contacts within the school or campus, fostering relationships and opening lines of communication.

Old Business Wrap-up:

All ongoing tasks or programs should be concluded during the transition period, with options for complete handover, delayed handover, or shared responsibility depending on the circumstances.

Documents and Resources:

Handover of physical and virtual resources should be organized, with inventory checks and consolidation of virtual documents if necessary.

Final Team Meeting:

The outgoing leadership team should systematically confirm the handover of all necessary resources, offer advice, and address any remaining questions. The incoming team should review documents, come prepared with questions, and discuss logistics and expectations.

MySVA Chapter Update:

The incoming leadership team should ensure the Chapter and individual members' MySVA accounts are updated with their contact information.



CHAPTER STRATEGIES

Chapter strategies are the backbone of successful SVA chapters. They encompass a range of essential elements that contribute to strategic management and overall effectiveness. These operations include strategic planning, collaboration, the establishment of a steering committee, understanding and aligning with campus culture, crafting a mission statement, setting goals and objectives, and implementing strategies. By effectively managing these aspects, chapters can create a solid foundation for their activities, ensuring they are well-organized, purposeful, and capable of meeting the needs of student veterans.



Strategic Planning:

Process of articulating and formalizing the chapter's mission, goals, objectives, and strategies.

Requires periodic reassessment for chapter growth.

Involves tailored training at Regional Summits and collaboration among leaders, members, faculty, and staff.



Steering Committee:

Manages the chapter's operations and priorities.

Includes chapter leaders, university administration, faculty, staff, and community members.

Established chapters may not require a steering committee.



Campus Culture:

Understanding the unique characteristics of the campus.

Considers factors such as student and student veteran populations, campus location, setting, and student life.

Involves exploring key questions to align the chapter's approach with campus culture.



Mission Statement:

Clearly defines the purpose, representation, and value of the chapter.

Reflects the chapter's identity and desired role on campus.

Typically reviewed and revised by new leadership teams.



Goals:

Clear action statements that align with the chapter's mission.

Regularly reassessed to stay in line with the mission statement, campus culture, and leadership strengths.

Serve as guiding principles and establish priorities.



Objectives:

Specific actions designed to achieve the chapter's goals.

Goal-specific, measurable, and time-bound.

Prioritized within the strategic plan to enhance efficiency and progress.



Strategies:

Itemized to-do list for accomplishing objectives.

Directly connected to objectives.

Describes specific actions and steps to be taken.



Strategic Review:

Anticipating and adapting to changing conditions.

Capacity building for maintaining a positive impact.

Steps include developing a theory of change, regular communication with stakeholders, plan revisions, and planning for leadership turnover.

CHAPTER MANAGEMENT

Strategic planning is crucial for the success of Student Veterans of America chapters, but effective chapter management is another important piece to the success of an SVA chapter. It involves establishing rules and guidelines, budgeting wisely, and implementing a transition plan for chapter leaders to ensure smooth operations and a legacy of success. Maintaining clear and accessible records is vital to overcome information silos and promote continuity.

Leadership

- **Manage the Strategic Plan:** the document that outlines the chapter's goals, objectives, and strategies for long-term success and growth
- **Maintain Founding Documents:** the by-laws, constitution, mission statement, and other guiding documents that detail internal chapter affairs and guide the organization
- **Hold Elections and Transition Officers:** the continuous hand-off of important information, processes, and goals between old and new chapter leaders

Operations

- **Maintain Budget and Chapter Finances:** the financial planning and management documents critical to Chapter operations
- **Maintain Inventory:** a record of the Chapter's assets and resources
- **Hold Meetings and Take Minutes:** the documentation of meeting discussions, decisions, and action items
- **Maintain Membership Rolls and Contact Lists:** a list of chapter members and their contact information (this includes ensuring members' MySVA accounts are accurate)

Programming and Events

- **Host Chapter Events and Programming:** the activities hosted by the chapter to encourage social development and leadership, networking, and learning opportunities
- **Attend National and Campus Programs:** the programs provided to members at the national and campus-wide levels for personal growth and leadership development
- **Maintain Events Calendar:** the schedule of Chapter events and activities

Membership and Engagement

- **Connect with New Members:** the process of meeting and engaging with potential new members that are part of the larger campus and veteran community
- **Maintain External Communications:** the important communication with external stakeholders including newsletters, social media, and more
- **Collect Letters of Support or Recognition:** the correspondence that acknowledges the chapter's achievements or collaborations



CHAPTER FINANCES

Effective financial management is essential for the success of SVA chapters. A budget serves as a strategic tool for planning, control, and decision-making. It helps refine goals, allocate funds efficiently, provide accurate information for analysis, and serves as a historical reference.

Developing a budget involves studying available funds, determining income sources, and considering expenses. Prioritizing and making wise expenditure choices are important with a limited budget. Chapter leaders should negotiate, eliminate non-essential expenses, and revise the budget accordingly.

Once approved, the budget should be actively managed. Maintaining a minimum cash balance, accurate financial records, and implementing internal controls are necessary. Chapter leaders should regularly assess the budget and adhere to approved expenditures.

In addition to expenditures, exploring revenue sources such as institutional funding, membership dues, merchandise sales, grants, and fundraising can support chapter finances. Grant and funding documents should be maintained as per university guidelines for registered student organizations.

By effectively managing the budget and exploring revenue opportunities, chapter leaders can implement plans to support the chapter's activities and initiatives.

EXPENSES

LINE ITEM	LINE ITEM DESCRIPTION	BUDGET	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE	
Meetings	Pizza, soda, room rental fees	\$350.00	\$0.00	-\$350.00	
Office Supplies	Printer Ink, Paper, Staples	\$150.00	\$0.00	-\$150.00	
Social/Philanthropic Events	Potluck and War Movie	\$20.00	\$0.00	-\$20.00	
	First State Cup Tailgate	\$350.00	\$290.00	-\$60.00	
	Homecoming Veteran Tailgate	\$200.00	\$0.00	-\$200.00	
	Homecoming Gala	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	-\$1,000.00	
	Vererans Day Flag Ceremony	\$20.00	\$0.00	-\$20.00	
	Face Of American Bike Ride	\$5,500.00	\$0.00	-\$5,500.00	
Apparel	T-Shirts (33)	\$330.00	\$0.00	-\$330.00	
	Challenge Coins (100)	\$450.00	\$392.00	-\$58.00	
Office Improvement	Posters, Flags, Chairs	\$200.00	\$0.00	-\$200.00	
Organizational Branding	Business Cards (50)	\$50.00	\$20.00	-\$30.00	
	Pens (330)	\$200.00	\$126.30	-\$73.70	
	Laptop Stickers (30)	\$20.00	\$12.00	-\$8.00	
	Calendars (50)	\$2,000.00	\$1,520.00	-\$480.00	
New Student Orientation	Folder Materials	\$500.00	\$223.18	-\$376.82	
SEMESTER TOTAL		BUDGET	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE (\$)	DIFFERENCE (%)
		\$11,340.00	\$2,583.48	\$11,756.23	103.7%

REVENUES

LINE ITEM	LINE ITEM DESCRIPTION	BUDGET	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE	
Flag Ceremony	Ribbons	\$500.00		\$500.00	
Fundraising	Raffles	\$500.00		\$500.00	
	Silent Auction	\$500.00		\$500.00	
	Tailgate	\$500.00	\$160.00	\$340.00	
	Fountain Coins	\$3,000.00		\$3,000.00	
	Donations	\$500.00		\$500.00	
Grants	SVA Chapter Grant				
	First Step Award	\$5,000.00	\$5000.00		
University of Delaware	Standard Budget Allocation	\$800.00	\$800.00		
Carry-Over	Money from 2015-2016 Year	\$190.95	\$190.95		
VFW Fundraising	Local VFW Funding	\$750.00	\$350.00	\$400.00	
SEMESTER TOTAL		BUDGET	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE(\$)	DIFFERENCE(%)
		\$12,240.95	\$6,500.95	\$5,740.00	-46.9%

BALANCE

BALANCE	PROJECTED	CASH ON HAND	DIFFERENCE(\$)	DIFFERENCE(%)
	\$900.95	\$3,917.47	\$3,017.00	334.8%

CHAPTER MEETINGS

There are three common types of meetings within Student Veterans of America chapters: regular Chapter meetings, ad hoc/planning meetings, and open meetings/town halls. Successful meetings involve setting a date, time, and space, announcing the meeting to members, circulating an agenda, and distributing a follow-up message. Regular meetings provide a venue for discussing Chapter business and planning activities, with all Chapter Officers encouraged to attend. Ad hoc/planning meetings are called as needed, while open meetings/town halls address specific topics or seek feedback. Meeting agendas should have clear goals and be shared in advance. Records in the form of agendas and minutes should be maintained for all meetings.

Regular Meetings:

- Convened by the Chapter President at a regular time and place
- Follow a standard format for discussing Chapter programs and ongoing business
- All Chapter Officers highly suggested to attend
- Agendas created and shared in advance, allowing for additions or amendments by Chapter Officers
- Minutes taken and shared with members, ensuring transparency and availability upon request
- Clear start and end time
- Occasional inclusion of student leaders, special guests, or campus administrators



Ad-hoc and Planning Meetings:

- Called as needed and coordinated based on attendee availability
- May use the same agenda/minute format as regular meetings, particularly for series of planning meetings for large events
- Updates from planning meetings can be shared in regular meetings



Open Meetings and Town Halls:

- Incorporate open meetings or town hall-style events into the Chapter calendar
- Address specific topics or solicit feedback and ideas
- Town hall meetings can be held in response to emergent national, local or campus issues
- Opportunity for Chapter Officers to introduce themselves and their plans to members and student veterans
- Presentations by Veteran Resource Center personnel or administrators on educational resources and benefits can be included in town hall events



By following these meeting guidelines, Student Veterans of America chapters can foster effective communication, collaboration, and engagement among their members.



CHAPTER PROGRAMMING

SVA chapters prioritize impactful programming to support student veteran success. Beyond event hosting, programming focuses on creating meaningful experiences for members and alumni. The strategic programming aligns with the organization's mission of providing resources, network support, and advocacy to, through, and beyond higher education. Chapters develop programming through a strategic plan that considers campus culture, member interests, and needs. Social programming, such as dinners and tailgates, enhances social support and engagement. Chapters are encouraged to think creatively and share experiences at events like Regional Summits to continually innovate and improve programming for student veterans' success.

DEFINITIONS

Bylaws: An established, written collection of rules and procedures that Chapter Leaders follow to ensure efficient, fair, and sustainable operations.

Chapter Member: Someone who has met the criteria set by the Chapter affording them the benefits of membership.

Chapter Advisor: A faculty/staff member of the university (or college, or school) that holds a formal status within the organization, providing counsel and guidance on the university's behalf.

Chapter Leader: Any member of the Chapter that serves, in any capacity (elected, appointed, or neither) to lead other members of the Chapter or otherwise steps into a role outside of the traditional, participatory member role. Chapter Leaders may also be referred to as “officers” (see below).

Chapter Officer: A specific Chapter Leader who holds one of the elected or appointed leadership positions within the Chapter. Suggestions for Chapter Officers include:

President	Vice President	Policy Liaison	Career Services Liaison
Treasurer	Secretary	Disability Services Liaison	DEI Liaison

National Conference: Often referred to as “NatCon”, this event is held annually. NatCon is the largest annual convening of Post-9/11 veterans in the world.

National Headquarters: The office is located in Washington, D.C. in which the executive leadership and their staff execute their roles to support our Chapters and our mission.

Philanthropy: A charitable fundraiser or service project sponsored by a Chapter.

SVA Alumni: Any former student veterans, military-affiliated students, supporters, or allies who choose to identify as members of our community after graduation.

SVA Chapter: A local group affiliated with the larger global organization, commonly designated by the University (college/school) name affixed to SVA (i.e., “Chapter of State University”). To be considered a registered SVA Chapter, the group must be a registered student organization on campus and maintain current contact information with National Headquarters.

SVA Leadership Continuum: A series of core annual programming and events that support and enhance the growth of chapters and individuals designed to transform the SVA Experience into personal and professional success.



Through a network of nearly 1,600 on-campus chapters, Student Veterans of America® ensures that student veterans and military-connected students achieve their greatest potential.

Student Veterans of America

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