



Blinded Veterans Association

Regional Group Manual

**Approved by the
BVA Board of Directors
August 11, 2019**

“Blinded Veterans Helping Blinded Veterans”

Regional Group Manual

Please consult with the BVA National Headquarters or District Director if you require clarification or to confirm accuracy before implementation of items covered within this manual.

LETTER FROM THE PAST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since 1945, the BVA has operated on the principle of our founding members at Avon Old Farms Convalescent Home in Avon, Connecticut. The BVA would be an organization of blinded veterans providing assistance to other blinded veterans. Over the years, BVA has attempted to provide assistance to blinded veterans in a variety of ways and with a variety of programs. On the National level, BVA has conducted the National Field Service Program for years assisting veterans in adjusting to blindness, obtaining Federal, State and local benefits to which they are entitled, receiving blind rehabilitation and a host of other obstacles they may be encountering. Additionally, for many years, BVA operated an Outreach Employment Program assisting veterans seeking employment and educating prospective employers to the abilities of blind veterans and how jobs can be modified to accommodate the blind.

BVA has also conducted an aggressive Advocacy Program on a national level in an effort to influence and educate the legislative and executive branches of government regarding the special needs of blinded veterans. Consistent with this objective, BVA has worked closely with organizations of and for the blind as well as other disability groups to enhance the lives of all disabled Americans. If BVA is to truly maximize its efforts and goal of assisting other blinded veterans, the best place to provide this assistance is at the local level. This means BVA must have a solid, stable, active network of regional groups. The regional group is where the bulk of the work can be most effectively accomplished and is closest to the blinded veteran and most keenly aware of his/her needs. If BVA is to provide more assistance to blinded veterans and positively impact their lives it must occur at the RG level.

Service can be delivered more efficiently and timely at the RG level and grass root advocacy must occur at the RG local level if BVA National's efforts are to be effective. Advocacy within the state or states composing a RG must occur at the RG level if meaningful improvements in the lives of blinded veterans are to be affected within the state.

Recognizing the need for a strong, stable, vital regional group Network, BVA National Board of Directors has directed the production of a RG Manual that can serve as a guide not only for the formation of new RG's but also for existing groups so they can be more effective and attractive to other blinded veterans. Given our mission to provide assistance to other blinded veterans, RG programs and service activities should be defined by the needs of the blind veterans in their geographic areas. Therefore, no two RG's are exactly the same nor do the same activities necessarily work for each RG. The members of the RG must define how and what they do within the context of the BVA National By-Laws.

This manual is an attempt to provide guidance on the formation and operation of a RG clearly pointing out what the National By-Laws prescribe and where the RG can use its own discretion. RG officers should refer frequently to this manual for suggestions and guidance, particularly those who are newly elected and may not have a great deal of experience in BVA. The RG leaders should never hesitate to contact BVA National Headquarters for clarification of anything contained in this manual. Regional group officers should understand their respective District Directors (see list in Appendix) are their direct contacts with the National Board of Directors. Additionally, BVA professional staff, field Representatives and Washington office staff are always willing to provide assistance or answer questions.

The bottom line is that the success of any RG is almost entirely dependent upon the desires of the membership and the amount of energy devoted to making it work and the commitment to providing service to other blinded veterans.

Regional groups must actively pursue ways of involving more blinded veterans into becoming active. Find ways to encourage attendance at meetings. Investigate what the membership needs or wants that would attract them to the meetings. Actively pursue organizational models that would facilitate greater participation such as dividing the group into districts or chapters who could have their own officers and meeting schedule pointing towards annual meetings of the entire group. RG's are only limited by their own initiative and creativity.

Your BVA National Board of Directors is committed to revitalizing BVA and is convinced that effort must begin at the RG level. A first step to meeting this commitment is the production of this manual. Use this as a guide and where it is lacking let us know if it does not meet your needs. We welcome your input and Ideas for improvement. Your Board of Directors is planning other initiatives to provide a greater level of assistance to the RG's such as Leadership Training programs and other ideas. Clearly the Board is making an investment in the RG,

and now it is up to each group to decide for itself how it can best assist in successfully meeting our goal of providing assistance to blinded veterans.

Sincerely,

Thomas H. Miller
Past Executive Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I - BVA ORIGINS AND HISTORY

1. OVERVIEW
2. HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS AND EARLY EVENTS
3. AVON 'OLD FARMS' CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL
4. MEMBERSHIP
5. THE BVA BULLETIN
6. EARLY ACCEPTANCE BY THE VA
7. FORMATION OF REGIONAL GROUPS
8. EARLY FINANCES
9. BVA CHARTERED BY CONGRESS
10. FIRST BLIND REHABILITATION CENTER OPENS
11. THE FIELD SERVICE PROGRAM
12. BVA AUXILIARY

CHAPTER II - ORGANIZING A BVA REGIONAL GROUP

1. ORGANIZING/CONVENING A MEETING
2. APPLYING FOR A REGIONAL GROUP CHARTER
3. PREPARING & SUBMITTING RG BYLAWS
4. INCORPORATING A REGIONAL GROUP
5. ACQUIRING TAX EXEMPT STATUS

CHAPTER III - ELECTION OF OFFICERS

1. NOTIFYING REGIONAL GROUP MEMBERS OF THE MEETING TO ELECT OFFICERS
2. NOTIFYING BVA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS OF ELECTION RESULTS
3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICERS

CHAPTER IV - ELECTION OF DELEGATE TO NATIONAL CONVENTION

1. NOTIFYING REGIONAL GROUP MEMBERS OF MEETING
2. INSTRUCTING REGIONAL GROUP DELEGATE
3. SUBMITTING REGIONAL GROUP CREDENTIALS
4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF DELEGATE

CHAPTER V - CONDUCTING REGIONAL GROUP MEETINGS

1. ANNUAL MEETING PLAN
2. SELECTING THE MEETING SITE
3. NOTIFYING MEMBERS OF MEETINGS
4. ASSURING A QUORUM FOR MEETING
5. KEEPING MINUTES OF THE MEETING
6. SUBMITTING MINUTES TO BVA NATIONAL OFFICE & DISTRICT DIRECTOR
7. SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR REGIONAL GROUP MEETING

CHAPTER VI - REGIONAL GROUP FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

1. OPENING A BANK ACCOUNT
2. ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORT TO BVA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
3. APPROPRIATE USE OF REGIONAL GROUP FUNDS

CHAPTER VII - BVA MEMBERSHIP

1. MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES
2. DUES STRUCTURE
3. APPORTIONMENT OF DUES
4. LIFE MEMBERSHIP APPORTIONMENT
5. NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM
6. REGIONAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM
7. HOW TO ORDER LABELS AND PRINTOUTS

CHAPTER VIII - REGIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. REGIONAL GROUP NEWSLETTER
2. PUBLIC RELATIONS
3. FUND-RAISING
4. REGIONAL GROUP SUPPORT OF BVA LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

5. OTHER SUGGESTED REGIONAL GROUP PROGRAMS & ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER IX - REGIONAL GROUP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

1. CHANGE IN VOLUNTEER TERMINOLOGY
2. ESTABLISHING VOLUNTEER OFFICES
3. SELECTING, TRAINING AND ASSIGNING VOLUNTEERS
4. VOLUNTEER DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
5. VOLUNTEER AWARDS

CHAPTER X - REGIONAL GROUP AUXILIARY

1. MEMBERSHIP
2. MEETINGS
3. OFFICERS & ELECTIONS
4. DUTIES OF THE OFFICERS
5. DUES
6. FINANCES

CHAPTER XI – THE BVA NATIONAL CONVENTION

1. INTRODUCTION
2. THE CALL FOR A NATIONAL CONVENTION
3. PROXY
4. QUORUM
5. DELEGATE
6. HOSTING

CHAPTER XII - AWARDS

1. GENERAL
2. BVA THREE-TIERED SYSTEM
3. KATHERN F. GRUBER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS
4. THOMAS H. MILLER SCHOLAARSHIP PROGRAM

CHAPTER XIII - POLICIES ADOPTED BY BVA NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS PERTAINING TO REGIONAL GROUPS

1. GENERAL
2. PAST POLICIES (FROM 1965 TO PRESENT)

APPENDICES /Links

- A. SAMPLE BVA REGIONAL GROUP BYLAWS: Please contact the Administrative Director
- B. SAMPLE BVA REGIONAL GROUP CHARTER: Please contact the Administrative Director
- C. BVA NATIONAL OFFICERS AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS (DISTRICT DIRECTOR AREAS)
- D. BVA NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS STAFF; TITLES AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY
- E. FIELD SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES; MISSION STATEMENT, TELEPHONE NUMBERS AND AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY
- F. LIST OF REGIONAL GROUP OFFICERS, ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS
- G. BVA NATIONAL BYLAWS
- H. BVA CONGRESSIONAL CHARTER
- I. LIST OF KEY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND CHAIRPERSONS, ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS
- J. LIST OF STATE BENEFITS FOR BLINDED VETERANS
- K. CHECKLIST OF REQUIRED ANNUAL ACTIONS
- L. SAMPLE CREDENTIAL FORM
- M. SAMPLE FINANCIAL REPORT
- N. SAMPLE PROXY
- O. IRVING DIENER AWARD CRITERIA
- P. MELVIN J. MAAS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD CRITERIA
- Q. CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION

CHAPTER I - BVA ORIGINS AND HISTORY

Section 1. Overview

A. BVA is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1945 by a group of soldiers blinded in World War II. BVA was incorporated in 1947 in New York State and was subsequently chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1958 as a veterans' service and membership organization exclusively devoted to assisting blind and severely visually-impaired men and women who served in the United States Armed Forces.

B. The mission of BVA, as reflected in its charter, is to promote the welfare of blinded veterans so that notwithstanding their disabilities, they may take their rightful place in their communities.

C. The Blinded Veterans Association is governed by a Board of Directors, conducting business in accordance with the BVA National By-Laws. Basic authority on all matters concerning the Association is vested in the membership assembled and voting in convention.

D. The following information is provided to give regional group officers some background and understanding of BVA's early history and traditions, as well as some of the early concerns and developments that influence the activities of the Association today.

Section 2. Historical Highlights and Early Events

A. The Blinded Veterans Association was formed when blinded soldiers, home from Europe and the Pacific, began personally experiencing the bitter, often intolerable loss of dignity and independence due in large part from the public ignorance and prejudice concerning blindness.

B. There were real and important reasons for forming BVA. In addition to the attitudes of the general public, some of the members of that original group remember the lack of rehabilitation, job training, educational programs, and a lack of sensitivity on the part of military and federal officials. Blinded veterans soon learned that they couldn't rely on others for the help they needed.

C. One of BVA's founders recalls, "We wanted to get away from having to rely on other veterans organizations, where blinded veterans were put in the position of begging for help. We were out there with our 'lights out' and the other organizations just couldn't understand this."

D. Blinded veterans formed BVA from the frustration of being denied the opportunity to prove themselves and make their own contribution to society. BVA was born out of a longing to stay together; to stick together and support one another in the fight that lay ahead.

E. A letter written in 1946 by another BVA founder speaks so well of the emotions, hopes and the determination behind the founding of BVA as follows:

1. "We must begin to realize the effectiveness of a concentrated attack against our common problem, blindness."
2. "When this attack is launched by a group of blind people working together with a purpose, the old fears, taboos, and misconceptions which have long made blindness a tragedy, must be defeated."
3. "This is our own fight. As a result of the recent war, we find ourselves in a battle against darkness and ignorance which rivals any engagement we have ever experienced."
4. "This battle has been raging for hundreds of years, but perhaps the most effective tactics have not yet been employed."
5. "If we stick together, we can spearhead the advance which must be made against public misunderstanding and the voluntary limitations which the sighted and unsighted alike have placed on the capabilities of the blind."
6. "Let's not sit down and wait for someone to make it easy for us. If we try that method, the result will be 1,000 blinded and disappointed veterans still waiting with sad glass eyes, and rusty discharge buttons in 1990."
7. "We cannot expect much help or cooperation in our fight unless we prove worthy of it. If we do not wish to be considered hopeless, we must begin to produce. Telling people about our independence and capabilities will not convince them. We must demonstrate these attributes again and again."

Section 3. Avon 'Old Farms' Convalescent Hospital

A. BVA was organized at the Army Convalescent Hospital in Avon, Connecticut. 'Old Farms', as the site was called, opened in June 1944 under the direction of the Army Surgeon General. Between one hundred and two hundred war blinded soldiers were in treatment at any given time. By the time 'Old Farms' closed in June 1947, it had treated almost 900 men.

B. BVA was officially organized on March 28, 1945 during a meeting of about 100 blinded soldiers at 'Old Farms'. A blinded veteran, Pincus Hoffman, chaired the meeting, and the group approved a constitution that had been carefully worked out at earlier meetings and drafted by Arthur Brothers, a New York City attorney.

C. Nine blinded veterans were chosen to form the Board of Directors. Baynard Kendrick, a sighted author, editor, writing instructor, and an earnest crusader for blinded veterans, was named Honorary Chairman of the Board, until a blinded veteran could be selected. Raymond Frey was subsequently elected as BVA's first National President.

D. A temporary BVA office was set up in New York City. Free office space and secretarial help for one year was provided by the American Foundation for the Blind through Ms. Kathern Gruber.

E. Ms. Gruber also convinced AFB's Board to donate funds to pay BVA's expenses during the first year. Letters were sent to blinded veterans encouraging them to join the new BVA, and the first edition of the BVA BULLETIN was prepared.

F. At the time of BVA's founding, Ms. Gruber was the Director of War Blinded Services for the American Foundation for the Blind. She had visited and guided blinded veterans at Valley Forge Army Hospital since the early days of World War II. For many years, Ms. Gruber wrote a special column for the BVA BULLETIN, attended Board meetings and national conventions. Always a true friend to blinded veterans, BVA's Scholarship Program--the Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship--was established in her honor.

G. The name of Father Thomas J. Carroll is another name often heard at BVA meetings and conventions. Father Carroll was a source of wisdom and inspiration for the young soldiers who formed BVA. He encouraged and guided blinded veterans through the beginning years of the Association, and gave generously of his time and energy, constantly reminding and urging blinded veterans that they could and should be more. He felt strongly that BVA could make the world a better place for the blind and the sighted alike. Each year, a luncheon in Father Carroll's memory is held at the BVA National Convention.

Section 4. Membership

A. The BVA Charter and By-Laws speak of Members, Associate Members, and Honorary Members. However, membership in the early years consisted solely of war-blinded veterans. Later, a category of non-voting Associate Members was established to allow blinded veterans who had regained their sight to remain with

the Association. The Associate Member category was later changed to include non-service-connected blinded veterans.

B. Membership dues in the new Association were set deliberately low - \$5.00 per year - so no blinded veteran would be denied a chance to join.

C. Shortly after BVA was formed, it was decided that blinded Navy and Marine Corps veterans would be encouraged to be members of BVA. At the time, blinded Marines and Navy personnel were treated at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital.

D. Another early decision was that BVA would push for uniform blind rehabilitation and training. The veterans felt that the program at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital was not to the standard being set by the Army at Avon 'Old Farms'.

Section 5. The BVA BULLETIN

A. The blinded veterans who formed BVA faced a serious communications problem - how to keep the organization vital, together, and growing - how to keep in touch with blinded veterans across the nation - how to keep them informed and involved in issues crucial to their needs. Many blinded veterans had written the new BVA and asked for their own newsletter.

B. One of the first decisions made by the new BVA was to begin publishing the BVA BULLETIN. The first edition was released in April 1946, prepared by blinded veterans and sighted volunteers. Lloyd Greenwood, a blinded veteran, was the first editor. The membership voted to change the BULLETIN to a quarterly publication.

C. In the early years, the BVA BULLETIN often served as a personal communications link for blinded veterans who had been discharged from the hospitals, particularly 'Old Farms' and Valley Forge. Blinded veterans would write in telling what they were doing and how they were solving problems, and often there would be announcements of graduations, new jobs, marriages, and the births of children. Today, as well as in the early years, BVA uses the BVA BULLETIN to tell of VA programs and services, new equipment and aids, and developments within the Association.

Section 6. Early Acceptance by the VA

A. In early years, as today, much time and energy was devoted to issues involving the Veterans Administration - struggling with what was felt to be an insensitive

bureaucracy and trying to cut through 'red tape' that effectively excluded blinded veterans from VA Programs.

B. Often, blinded veterans were unfairly denied housing, job training, educational benefits and access to other programs because it was felt they were unsuitable. At the time, BVA had no official standing or recognition or influence with VA.

C. However, in May 1946, BVA officers were able to meet with General Omar Bradley, the VA Administrator, and air their grievances; the problems being encountered at VA by blinded veterans.

D. At the time, there were over 350 new veterans' organizations clamoring for VA attention. BVA's high goals and standards, as well as its non-political posture, were judged to be reasons for General Bradley's receptivity to the new Association, and helped greatly in BVA's subsequent status as a recognized veterans' service organization. Again, in 1946, BVA convinced the Veterans Administration to set up an advisory committee on the rehabilitation of blinded veterans.

Section 7. Formation of Regional Groups

A. In forming BVA, blinded veterans realized that when they finally went home, some local BVA structure would be needed where they could meet, bring in new blinded veterans, and provide the 'mutual aid and assistance' spoken to in the BVA constitution. Just receiving the BVA BULLETIN would not be enough. Fellowship, sharing, working toward common goals - that could best be done in their own local BVA groups.

B. Regional groups were formed from this need and later tied to the BVA governing structure by amendments to the National By-Laws. The first BVA regional group was organized in Baltimore, Maryland in 1946, and other groups followed quickly. A current list of regional groups can be found on the BVA website.

Section 8. Early Finances

A. Finding the money needed to operate the new BVA was a major problem. The Association had no funds when it was organized, and membership dues were too low to provide significant funding for Association activities. Free office space and volunteer help would work for only a short time. Moreover, the BVA founders were hesitant to ask for help, and certainly did not want to appear as blind people begging for money. Perhaps, it was not understood that the American people would help support the goals of BVA and help blinded veterans if they were just

asked. So finding the money to keep BVA in business was a continuing concern. Often it appeared that BVA could not survive.

B. Fortunately, on July 15, 1946, just when the situation looked terminal, BVA received a gift of \$25,000 from the Women's International Bowling Congress of Louisville, Kentucky. This gift was followed by others. It was a real break and BVA was saved, but the critical nature of the problem remained for years. Finding enough money to do the things BVA must do is a problem that remains with us today.

Section 9. BVA Chartered by Congress

A. On August 27, 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law, an act of the 85th Congress formally incorporating and chartering the Blinded Veterans Association.

B. Congressman T.A. Thompson of Louisiana introduced the bill to incorporate BVA on June 21, 1957, remarking: "The worthy efforts of the membership of the Blinded Veterans Association deserve no less than recognition by the Congress of the United States."

C. The Charter placed BVA in a league with other larger and better known veterans' service organizations such as the American Legion, the Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The BVA had proven itself, and was now officially recognized as the organization primarily responsible for serving America's blinded veterans.

Section 10. First Blind Rehabilitation Center Opens

A. The first VA Blind Rehabilitation Center was opened on May 20, 1948, at the VA Hospital in Hines, Illinois. The new Rehabilitation Center had beds for nine blinded veterans. Though small, it was the realization of one of BVA's most cherished dreams.

B. An article in the July, 1948 BVA BULLETIN announced the Center's opening: "A basic and remedial adjustment and training center for veterans with service-connected blindness requiring hospitalization for treatment thereof, or a condition flowing therefrom, is being placed in operation at this time in the VA Hospital, Hines, Illinois."

C. "The purpose of the training to be given at this center is to prevent the development of further physical or mental disorders which may arise as the result

of blindness. The Center will be open to eligible blinded veterans from any branch area."

D. The BVA BULLETIN article told of an 18-week course of rehabilitation and training in a new facility equipped with fluorescent lighting, a fine staff of instructors, and orientation and mobility program, shop, woodworking, and metal working programs, occupational therapy, recreational, sports and social activities, instruction on the latest recording devices, and braille and typing classes, too. Rehabilitation for blinded veterans had finally arrived.

Section 11. The Field Service Program

A. The concept of a BVA Field Service Program began with early regional group efforts. George 'Buck' Gillespie began travelling throughout the Southern California Regional Group area to reach and help blinded veterans.

B. The BVA National Field Service Program was established in June, 1953. The program initially concentrated on the large numbers of blinded veterans who were not in training or not employed. An article in the BVA BULLETIN announced the Program which was to get underway in late 1953. Limited financial backing for the Program was provided by the Community Chest in 1953 and 1954.

C. Buck Gillespie was hired as the first BVA Field Representative. Dr. William Thompson was selected as the first National Field Service Director in 1954.

D. The Field Service Program has operated at various levels of intensity over the years. In 1974, BVA entered into a contract with the Veterans Administration to reach and help veterans blinded in the Vietnam War. The Field Service Program operated under the VA contract through 1987. The Program is not funded entirely by BVA.

Section 12. BVA Auxiliary

A. The BVA Auxiliary was organized during the BVA National Convention in New Orleans in 1978. Over the years, the Auxiliary has served as a forum where spouses of blinded veterans could meet and share common problems and concerns, and as a basis for carrying out projects supporting the overall mission of BVA. Membership in the BVA Auxiliary is open to spouses, family members, and sighted friends of BVA.

CHAPTER II -- ORGANIZING A REGIONAL GROUP

Section 1. Organizing/Convening a Meeting

A. In accordance with the provisions of Section 2 of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws, five (5) or more eligible Members and/or Associate Members of the BVA, in good standing, may form a new regional group.

1. An eligible Member is a service-connected blinded veteran BVA member whose dues are current or paid in full.

2. An eligible Associate Member is a non-service-connected blinded veteran, BVA member, whose blindness is non-service connected and whose dues are current or paid in full.

B. The procedure is to announce by letter or flyer to all interested members in the area in which the group is to be formed, that there will be an organizational meeting at a certain place and time. At the meeting, temporary officers must be elected, and the group must be named.

Section 2. Applying for a Regional Group Charter

A. Once the organizational meeting has been held, the group named (the regional group must have the geographical name in its title), and temporary officers elected, the Group must submit an application, signed by at least five (5) eligible Members and/or Associate Members in attendance, to the BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director) requesting the issuance of a charter. A sample application for a BVA regional group charter can be obtained from BVA HQ.

1. An alternative is to send a copy of certified minutes of the organizational meeting at which a motion is adopted requesting the issuance of a charter. The minutes must list the names of five (5) or more eligible Members and/or Associate Members present and show that they adopted the motion.

2. If a regional group exists which has jurisdiction of the area in which the new group is being formed, then the consent of that regional group for the formation of the new group must be obtained by the new group being formed. Such consent must be in the form of a letter, or the minutes of a meeting of that group, stating that the group consents to the formation of the new group (Section 3, Article XIV, BVA National Bylaws refers).

B. If it is desired that the group have a special name, then that name should be included in the application, or in the minutes of the organizational meeting. In either case, the boundaries of the desired new group must be specified (state boundaries, names of counties, etc.).

C. The BVA National Office will submit the written application, or written meeting minutes, whichever the case may be, to the BVA National Board of Directors which will decide whether or not to issue a new charter.

Section 3. Preparing and Submitting Regional Group Bylaws

A. Section 10 of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws requires that "immediately after its organization, each new regional group shall elect a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer (provided that the group, in its discretion, may combine the offices of Secretary and Treasurer), and other officers from among its Members and/or Associate Members considered necessary for its operation and shall forthwith adopt and forward to the National Headquarters bylaws for its government and control. Such bylaws shall not be effective unless or until approved by the National Board of Directors."

B. The newly formed regional group must prepare and submit its bylaws to the National Headquarters in a timely manner for approval by the BVA National Board of Directors.

C. In accordance with Section 10a(2) of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws, no bylaws or provisions thereof, not required of all regional groups under the same or similar circumstances, shall be required of any one regional group.

D. Sample regional group bylaws can be obtained from BVA HQ. It must be emphasized that these are sample bylaws only, and the regional group is not bound to tailor their bylaws exactly to these sample bylaws.

Section 4. Incorporating a Regional Group

A. From time to time, the question arises from members of an unincorporated BVA regional group whether the group should incorporate. There are two main advantages to incorporating as follows:

1. The first advantage to incorporation is the limitation of liability - that is, only the corporation (and not the members) can be held liable for debts, judgments, etc., of the organization if it is in corporate form. This is the normal reason for a business

to incorporate, because it runs up liabilities as it operates. But a regional group is not a business and ordinarily does not run up liabilities except on a very minimal scale.

2. The second major reason for incorporation is to obtain tax-exempt status, normally under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Code, and to make contributions to the organization deductible for tax purposes, under Section 170(c) of the IRS Code, and this cannot be achieved unless the organization is in corporate form.

2a. The first part of this - the exemption from taxation - would seem to be of virtually no importance to a BVA regional group since it normally does not generate any taxable income.

2b. The other part - the tax deduction for contributions - could be important (if a regional group had a prospective donor who wanted to give a substantial sum) because donors practically always want to be assured that their contributions will be tax deductible, and indeed, some foundations and perhaps other organizations are prohibited from donating to any organization that is not a Section 501(c)(3) entity.

2b(1) A pertinent question here is: What are the chances of a regional group having a really substantial contributor?

2b(2) The disadvantage of becoming a corporation is that the regional group generally subjects itself to some regulation by the state and by the federal government. This involves filing reports, possibly paying some fees, and perhaps other requirements. These are generally not substantial but possibly could be; however, they are in most cases a nuisance.

2c. The decision of whether to incorporate or not is a decision strictly for the regional group leadership. Any state or federal regulations impacting a regional group as a result of incorporation as well as payment of fees and other requirements are strictly the responsibility of the regional group.

B. Should a regional group consider incorporation, it is strongly recommended that the regional group enlist the services of a lawyer familiar with matters of incorporation to assist the group and/or act as a consultant.

Section 5. Acquiring Tax Exempt Status

A. The National Organization of the Blinded Veterans Association is exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Code, such exemption having been originally granted on August 5, 1946, and subsequently reaffirmed by the IRS on March 28, 1966.

1. On August 11, 1980, the BVA National Board of Directors made a policy decision not to extend the tax-exempt status of the National Organization to BVA regional groups based on the IRS guidelines and codes. Accordingly, BVA regional groups are not automatically exempt from Federal income taxes.

2. Only those regional groups which have independently applied for and received a tax-exemption from the IRS are exempt. Such groups are directly responsible to the IRS and are subject to filing their own IRS Form 990 (Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax).

B. Any BVA regional group which is not currently exempt from Federal income tax may, if they wish, apply for exemption on their own. Application may be made for exemption as either a "charitable and educational organization" (Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code), or as a "war veterans organization" (Section 501(c)(19) of the IRS Code).

1. The proper IRS forms are Forms 1023 and 1024 respectively. In addition, Groups filing for IRS exemption are also required to apply for an "Employer Identification Number" by filing an IRS Form SS-4 (Application for Employer Identification Number).

2. The aforementioned IRS forms are available through the regional group's nearest IRS regional office, the BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director), or by calling the IRS toll-free number 1-800-829-3676 (Federal Tax Form Distribution Center, Richmond, Virginia) and requesting the form(s). As online services improve these forms may be downloaded from the IRS website.

C. Regional groups filing for exempt status should be aware that an additional requirement exists to file an IRS Form 8718 (User Fee for Exempt Organization Determination Letter Request) together with an appropriate fee when filing for exempt status. Check with the IRS for the current Fees for filing for exemption status. They range depending on the organization's annual gross receipts and the type of organization.

1. In most cases, the fee for a Regional Group filing for exempt status will be \$450 if gross income is under \$25,000 and \$800 if over \$25,000. (Note: This number needs to be periodically updated to reflect current base fee)

2. IRS Form 8718 is available through the Regional Group's nearest IRS regional office, or by calling the IRS toll-free number 1-800-829-3676 (Federal Tax Form Distribution Center, Richmond, Virginia) and requesting the form(s).

D. Regional groups should be aware of the merits of applying under the two aforementioned sections of the IRS Code.

1. Organizations exempt under Section 501(c)(3) will most likely find it easier to obtain contributions since the rules governing many foundations and other organizations place restrictions on donations to organizations which do not fall under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3).

2. However, Section 501(c)(3) organizations have strict limitations upon the amount of expenditures that they can make for the purpose of influencing legislation (such as lobbying and attempting to influence public opinion). Groups that engage in an abundance of this type of activity might want to consider applying under Section 501(c)(19) instead. Note: both (3) and (19) afford donors tax exemption for their respective donations.

E. Regional groups should also be aware of the annual income tax filing requirements that tax-exempt organizations are required to meet. Depending upon the classification of the group and the annual gross receipts that it receives, it will be required to file an end of year IRS Form 990 (series), which is dependent on the annual Gross income of the Regional Group. Note See Paragraph H. below.

F. As the application process for tax-exemption is complex and will probably vary according to the specific circumstances of each group, interested regional groups are advised to consult their nearest IRS regional office for information relating specifically to them and/or consult a tax attorney.

G. Additionally, it is strongly recommended that interested regional groups consult IRS Publication 557 (Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organization). Copies of this publication may be obtained from the nearest IRS office, or by calling the IRS toll-free number listed in the second paragraph on this page.

H. How to File

1. For Regional Groups with gross income normally \$50,000 or less use this link to file the 990 N e-Postcard (<http://epostcard.form990.org>). For Regional Groups with gross income normally over \$50,000 it is recommended to seek professional advice to complete the required IRS tax forms.

2. When you access the system, you will be filing the e-Postcard with the IRS through an IRS trusted partner. The form must be completed and filed electronically. There is no paper form.

3. For questions about filing the e-Postcard call IRS Customer Account Services at 1-877-829-5500 (Phone Number current as of date of this RG Manual). You may be able to file the e-postcard over the phone at this same phone number. Inform the service representative of the disability blindness and ask if the form can be file during the conversation.

4. Failure to file can result in loss of tax exempt status, and require the regional group to have to repeat the complete process of filing to regain tax exempt status. On the third year of failure to file IRS will automatically revoke the regional group's tax-exempt status.

CHAPTER III - ELECTIONS OF OFFICERS

Section 1. Notifying Regional Group Members of the Meeting to Elect Officers

A. Election of regional group officers usually occurs annually or biannually, depending on the regional group's bylaws, and is one of the most important events to the regional group. Every effort should be made to facilitate the maximum turnout of the membership for the meeting to elect new regional group officers.

B. The regional group secretary should notify all of the members of the regional group in good standing in a timely manner of the date, time and location of the meeting to elect new officers.

1. Such notification should be no less than ten (10) days prior to date of the meeting, and should be by written letter and email. In accordance with a policy established by the BVA National Board of Directors in August of 1999, address labels from BVA National Headquarters must be used on all such notification letters.

2. In accordance with the provisions of Section 11 of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws, the meeting to elect regional group officers must be held in a location within the regional group's territorial boundaries as set forth in the regional group's charter.

3. Upon request, the BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Membership) will provide gummed labels containing the names and addresses of all of the members of the regional group. This will serve to facilitate the regional group Secretary's mailout of the notice of the meeting to elect new officers.

Section 2. Notifying BVA National Headquarters of the Election Results

A. The BVA National Headquarters requires up-to-date rosters of all regional group officers to facilitate accurate and correct mailout of BVA business documentation, regional group dues apportionment checks, Life Membership Fund apportionment checks, etc. Therefore it is necessary that the regional groups provide the BVA National Headquarters with timely officer election results.

B. Section 10b of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National By-Laws requires that regional groups submit an up-to-date listing of its officers (to include name, office held, address and telephone number) to BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director) immediately after its initial organization, and there-after within thirty (30) days after an election of officers or any change of officer(s) for any reason.

Section 3. Responsibilities of Officers

A. The following are the general responsibilities of regional group officers. It should be emphasized that the regional group by-laws should spell out in detail the specific duties of the regional group officers. In this regard, the responsibilities listed below are general in nature, and not necessarily all-encompassing. Additionally, all officers shall be familiar with the BVA National By-laws and the contents of this Regional Group Manual.

1. President: The President is the executive head of the regional group, and should have full power to enforce the provisions of the regional group constitution/by-laws as well as the policies adopted by the membership. He should preside at all meetings of the membership unless ill, disabled or absent, in which case the Vice-President should preside.

2. Vice-President: The Vice-President should perform such duties as are assigned him by the President and/or the Regional Group membership, and should act as Acting President during the absence, illness or disability of the President.

3. Secretary: The Secretary should keep minutes of all meetings of the membership and the regional group Executive Committee, if one is established, and should furnish a copy of all such minutes to the National Secretary (BVA National

Office/Attn: Administrative Director) within two months of the meeting. The Secretary should notify all members in good standing and the National Headquarters of all Regional Group meetings, including the purposes for which they are called. The Secretary should perform such other duties as are assigned him/her by the President, Vice-President and/or the membership.

4. Treasurer: The Treasurer should be required to maintain accurate and complete books and records of account reflecting all of the income and expenditures of the Regional Group. The Treasurer should be required to report regularly to the membership on the finances of the group, and to file budgets and financial reports with the National Association as requested/required.

B. The regional group may, in its discretion, combine the offices of Secretary and Treasurer, and may elect other officers from among its membership considered necessary for its operations.

C. If other officers are elected, or appointed, the regional group by-laws should spell out what the duties and responsibilities of each additional elected and/or appointed officer are.

CHAPTER IV - ELECTION OF DELEGATE TO THE BVA NATIONAL CONVENTION

Section 1. Notifying Regional Group Members of Meeting

A. In accordance with the provisions of Section 12 of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National By-laws, each regional group shall be entitled to elect a delegate from among its members to the National Convention.

B. It should be noted that, in accordance with Section 4 of Article III (Qualifications for Membership, Associate Membership and Honorary Membership) of the BVA National Bylaws, Associate Members shall have all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of Members. They may vote on National issues and hold and vote for National office and for the position of District Director. They may serve as a delegate or alternate from the regional group to the National Convention, and may vote for, and instruct, said delegate(s). They shall be eligible to hold any office in their regional group.

C. All regional groups must inform their Members and Associate Members of the date of the regional group meeting at which time balloting will take place for the purpose of electing their delegate(s) to the National Convention.

1. The meeting notice must be sent out no later than forty (40) days prior to the National Convention, nor no later than ten (10) days prior to the regional group meeting.

2. A copy of the notice of the meeting to elect and instruct delegates must be sent to BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director), and respective District Director at the same time it is mailed to the Members and Associate Members.

Section 2. Instructing Regional Group Delegate

A. Section 12a of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws also provides that at the meeting to elect the delegate(s) to represent the Regional Group at the National Convention, such delegate(s) will be instructed as to voting for or against any given subject or subjects, or for or against any particular candidate or candidates for office.

B. Instructions to the delegate must be in writing, signed by the regional group President, and authenticated by the regional group Secretary. This is done on the Official BVA Credentials Form which is discussed in Section 3 below.

C. Regional Groups sending their delegates instructed to the National Convention should do so after contacting their District Director and/or BVA headquarters and obtaining the latest copies of Resolutions, BVA National By-laws amendments, and the bio's/resumes from candidates running for office. This ensures instructions derive from factual information, and not assumptions.

D. It is the responsibility of the RG Board of Directors on National Convention issues that arise after a membership meeting in which a Delegate has been instructed or non-instructed such as a proposed Bylaw amendment, Resolution, etc., and if they feel this issue that has not been afforded the opportunity of review by the RG membership then they should act, on the behalf of the membership, to instruct the Delegate to vote as they see would most benefit the RG.

Section 3. Submitting Regional Group Credentials

A. Section 12c of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws requires that credential forms certifying the election of the regional group delegate, and instructions to him/her shall be written in triplicate and signed by the regional group President and authenticated by the regional group secretary.

1. Such credentials forms are usually mailed out to the regional groups in April of each year to facilitate those regional groups which hold an early meeting to elect and instruct their delegate to the National Convention.

2. These forms are sent out in triplicate, with one set sent to each regional group officer (President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer (or Secretary/Treasurer). The Credentials Forms are printed on different colored paper each year for ease of identification.

B. The BVA National Headquarters is responsible for producing and distributing the Official BVA Credentials Forms to be used for the BVA National Convention to the regional group in a timely manner.

1. One copy of such credentials and instructions is required to be delivered to the delegate by the Regional Group.

2. One copy of such credentials and instructions is required to be forwarded to the BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director) no later than twenty-one days (21) days prior to the National Convention.

3. One copy of such credentials and instructions is required to be retained in the Regional Group files.

Section 4. Responsibilities of the Delegate

A. Section 12d of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws also requires that when a Regional Group delegate to the BVA National Convention has been instructed, the delegate must vote in accordance with his/her instructions.

B. If the delegate refuses to do so, then the National Secretary will be required to cast a ballot for the recalcitrant delegate in the name of the regional group issuing such instructions.

CHAPTER V - CONDUCTING REGIONAL GROUP MEETINGS

Section 1. Annual Meeting Plan

A. Section 13a of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws states that "in order to be recognized by the Blinded Veterans Association as a regional group in good standing, a regional group shall meet at least once during each Fiscal Year (July 1 - June 30), and submit copies of its minutes to National

Headquarters within two (2) months of such meetings, with copy to the respective District director.

B. Regional group meetings serve multiple purposes. They serve as a forum for the conduct of regional group business. Additionally, they provide members with the opportunity to interact with each other and discuss matters of mutual interest concerning blindness/visual impairment. They also serve as the basis for a support group for the members of the regional group. Accordingly, the number of meetings a regional group holds during the year is directly proportionate to the benefits to be derived by the members as enunciated above.

C. Each BVA regional group, beyond an Annual meeting to elect Officers, Delegates and set the annual business agenda, should make a concerted effort to hold a minimum of two meetings a year, and more if possible. Some regional groups hold monthly meetings. For those regional groups whose territorial boundaries encompass a state or several states, it is recommended that three or more meetings be held during the year, with each meeting to be held in a different city or geographical location. These additional meetings can provide important feedback to both officers and members alike.

Section 2. Selecting the Meeting Site

A. Meeting sites for BVA regional group meetings should be selected taking into consideration several factors as follows:

1. Proximity of site to largest concentration of members. The meeting site should, in most circumstances, be as close as possible to the largest concentration of the membership. By so doing, the chances of a large turnout for the meeting will increase.
2. Lodging accommodations: There should be adequate lodging accommodations within close proximity of the meeting site to accommodate those members who choose to stay overnight.
3. Size of the territorial boundaries of the regional group.
 - 3a. For those regional groups whose territorial boundaries encompass an entire state or several states, a site should be chosen which is as closely as possible equidistant to all the members of the regional group.
 - 3b. Choosing such a site will even out the distance the members will have to travel.

4. Use of other veteran organization facilities or military facilities. Regional groups are strongly encouraged to coordinate with other veterans service organizations in their respective geographical areas such as the VFW, American Legion, DAV, etc., and use their facilities, where feasible, to hold regional group meetings. Even many Military and Veteran friendly food establishments, like Golden Corral, have allowed Regional Groups to use their meeting spaces at no cost to Regional Groups. Keep in mind that public places offer the Regional Group to present themselves to a wider public audience.

Section 3. Notifying Members of Meetings

A. Each regional group member should be notified of each regional group meeting in a timely manner. Such notification should be in the form of a letter or flyer, or may be published in the regional group minutes. If the date of the meeting is known well enough in advance, such information may be published in the respective District Director's newsletter. Such notification should be sent out to each member a minimum of 10 days prior to the meeting date, and should include the date, place and purpose of the meeting. **Address labels from BVA National Headquarters must be used for all such notification mailings.**

B. Upon request, the BVA National Headquarters (Membership) will provide labels for the mailout, to each regional group member, of the meeting notice. A written or telephonic request will suffice. Subordinate chapters of regional groups desiring labels for mailouts must go through their respective regional group to obtain such labels; or the regional group must forward a letter to National (Attn: Membership Manager) designating a chapter officer who is authorized to request labels directly from National.

Section 4. Assuring a Quorum for Meetings

A. During its annual meeting held during the period August 8 - 10, 1993 in Tucson, Arizona in conjunction with the 48th BVA National Convention, the BVA National Board of Directors established the policy that the minimum number of members required for a quorum for regional group meetings is five (5) members.

B. In order to ensure a quorum at regional group meetings, the regional group leadership should attempt to contact its members by phone prior to each meeting to encourage them to attend. Coordination among the leadership should provide a fairly accurate estimate of the number of members who have provided positive intentions to attend the meeting.

Section 5. Keeping Minutes of the Meeting

A. Keeping minutes of the regional group meeting is the responsibility of the regional group Secretary (Secretary/Treasurer).

B. In order to ensure an accurate and concise transcript of the meeting, it is strongly recommended that the regional group secretary utilize a Recording device to record the proceedings of the regional group meeting as well as take personal notes. By utilizing a recording device, the secretary will have an accurate record of the meeting which he/she can utilize to supplement his/her personal notes and ensure that a complete and accurate transcript of the meeting is produced.

C. An example of Regional Group Meeting Minutes can be obtained by request from the BVA Administrative Director.

Section 6. Submitting Minutes to BVA National Office and District Director

A. Section 13a(2) of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws requires all BVA regional groups to submit copies of the minutes of each meeting held to the BVA National Headquarters within two (2) months of such meetings, with copy to the respective District director.

B. Submission of the minutes of each regional group meeting to the BVA National Headquarters in a timely manner is the responsibility of the regional group Secretary (Secretary/Treasurer).

C. The minutes of each regional group meeting should be typed or prepared on a computer/word processor, should be legible, should be in English, and should be signed by the regional group Secretary (Secretary/Treasurer) and or the regional group President.

D. It is strongly recommended that the minutes of each regional group meeting be prepared in 14-point type or larger print which will qualify the minutes to be mailed FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND in accordance with U.S. Postal regulations (Domestic Mail Manual, Section 135.7).

E. A copy of the minutes of each regional group meeting should be submitted by e-mail and or regular mail to the respective District Director(s) who has (have) cognizance over the Regional Group at the same time as the minutes are submitted to the BVA National Headquarters.

Section 7. Suggested Format for Regional Group Meeting

A. Each regional group should adopt a standard format for the conduct of its meetings, and such format should be adhered to by the regional group leadership.

Note the section till B below was added 7/8/12 CH Resources for Roberts Rules of Order

Webpage: <http://www.rulesonline.com/rror--00.htm>

FAQs: <http://robertsrules.com/faq.html>

RR on BARD: [DB53865](#)

Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised Robert, Henry M. Read by Lou Harpenau.
Reading time 29 hours 29 minutes.
Government and the Law

First published in 1876, this tenth edition of the manual of parliamentary procedure still serves as the recognized guide to running and participating effectively in meetings. Includes information on using technology for such electronic meetings as teleconferences, videoconferences, and e-mail. 2000.

[Download Robert's Rules of Order: Newly Revised, DB53865](#)

B. The following is a suggested standard format for the conduct of regional group meetings. It should be emphasized that this is a suggested format only, and regional groups are at liberty to add, delete or modify this format as they may see fit.

C. The suggested standard format is as follows:

I. INVOCATION

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. INTRODUCTIONS/ROLL CALL

IV. READING OF MINUTES

V. TREASURER'S REPORT

VI. COMMITTEE REPORTS

VII. OLD BUSINESS

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

IX. CLOSING/BENEDICTION

CHAPTER VI - REGIONAL GROUP FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Section 1. Opening a Bank Account

A. Each regional group must open a bank account into which funds that are accrued by the regional group shall be deposited. As outlined in the chapter regarding membership and dues:

1. Each regional group in good standing shall receive, on an annual basis, an apportionment from the Life Membership Fund determined available for apportionment in any given year based on the number of life members residing in the geographic boundaries of the regional group.
2. The formula for calculating the apportionment for each regional group is set forth in the BVA Life Membership Fund By-laws. Such annual apportionment is usually made in the Fall (October/November).

B. Any funds that may be raised during regional group fund-raising activities approved by the BVA National Board of Directors should be deposited in the regional group bank account.

C. Each regional group should open at least a checking account, preferably interest bearing, so that for any business conducted by the regional group requiring funds checks can be written. The checking account should have at least two signatories on the account to protect against any one member engaging in unauthorized expenditures of the regional group funds. Generally, the signatories are the President of the regional group and the Secretary\Treasurer or the Treasurer if the group has both a Secretary and Treasurer. The regional group may also establish a savings account at its own discretion or invest its funds in IRA's or other investments agreed upon by the membership of the regional group.

D. Although most regional groups do not have large sums in their account, the group should consider having signatories on the regional group accounts bonded to protect the regional group against any losses due to misappropriation of regional group resources.

Section 2. Annual Financial Report to BVA National Headquarters

A. Article XIV, Section 13a(3) of the BVA National By-Laws requires each regional group to submit annually to BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director) a report on its financial status. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in the regional group being placed in a "Not-In-Good-Standing" category with respect to National BVA and will result in the withholding of the Life Membership Fund and annual dues apportionments. A copy of this report will be sent to the respective District Director at the same time as it is sent to BVA HQ.

B. The BVA National Board of Directors takes its financial responsibilities very seriously and consequently expects each regional group to do the same. Therefore, regional groups should carefully consider these responsibilities when electing their officers, and should elect a Treasurer (Secretary/Treasurer) whom they believe will accept the responsibility of preparing and submitting the necessary financial reports to BVA National in a timely fashion.

Section 3. Appropriate Use of Regional Group Funds

A. How regional groups choose to utilize the funds they have available to them is generally left to the discretion of each regional group. BVA National does not dictate how each group should allocate these funds, but does expect regional groups to exercise good judgment and keep clearly in mind the purpose and mission of the organization.

B. BVA was organized as an organization of blinded veterans to provide assistance to other blinded veterans. If funds available to the regional group are utilized to achieve this end, there should be no problems.

C. BVA encourages regional groups to establish BVA Volunteer Regional Group Offices in VA facilities to facilitate delivery assistance to other blinded veterans. Purchasing of supplies, assisting with travel expenses for the volunteers, and staffing these offices is most appropriate. Establishing service programs for its membership in whatever form that may take is also worthy of regional group funding support. Some regional groups, either at regular business meetings or special meetings such as Christmas parties, pay to subsidize--in whole or in part--the expenses for individual members. Some regional groups subsidize the expenses of their elected Delegates to the BVA National Convention. Other groups establish funds from which get-well cards, flowers, etc., are purchased for their members.

D. Clearly, the regional group's uses of its funds should be limited to supporting programs and services for its members. How that is accomplished is up to each Regional Group. The BVA Board of Directors feels it is contrary to the organization's mission for regional group funds to be utilized solely for the entertainment of a few members. Awards in the form of Certificates of Appreciation or plaques for service rendered to blinded veterans is another appropriate use of regional group funds.

CHAPTER VII - BVA MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Membership Categories

A. In accordance with Section 1 of Article III (Qualifications for Membership, Associate Membership and Honorary Membership) of the BVA National Bylaws, any person having been, or being, in the Armed Forces of the United States shall be eligible for Membership if he\she has service-connected blindness or has incurred blindness during or after military service.

1. Life Member (LM);
2. Any Member whose sight improves to such an extent that he\she is no longer eligible for Membership (LM) will be retained as an Associate Member if he\she so requests.

B. Any person having been, or being, in the Armed Forces of the United States shall be eligible for Associate Membership if he\she has incurred blindness but the blindness incurred was not in the line of duty.

1. Associate Life Member (ALM);

C. Any person who was a member but did not renew their membership shall fall into one of the following two categories:

1. Former Member (FM);
2. Former Associate Member (FAM).

D. Any person having been, or being, in the Armed Forces of the United States and who has incurred blindness, whether in the line of duty or not shall fall into one of the following two categories:

1. Service- Connected Veteran, Never Member of BVA (NM);

2. Non-Service-Connected Veteran, Never Member of BVA (NAM).

Section 2. Dues Structure

A. Life Membership dues for veterans meeting the requirements of Article III, Section 1 of the BVA National Bylaws shall be \$25.00

B. Associate Life Membership dues for veterans meeting the requirements of Article III, Section 4 of the BVA National Bylaws shall be \$25.00.

C. Any Life or Associate Life Member who has died shall have his/her membership continued in memorial unto perpetuity.

1. A roster of perpetual Life and Associate Life Members shall be maintained at the National Headquarters.

Section 3. Apportionment of Dues

A. Should an application for Membership or Associate Membership be rejected, dues or application fees paid by the applicant shall be refunded and his/her application shall not be entertained again for one year.

B. All dues collected by the National Headquarters from Members and Associate Members within the jurisdiction of any regional group and at-large shall be divided between the Life Membership Fund (LMF) and the National Association General Fund (GF); 90% to the LMF and 10% to the GF.

Section 4. Life Membership Apportionment

A. Life and Associate Life Membership dues 90% shall be paid to the National Association and shall be placed in a Life Membership Fund and of income earned in dividends and interest from the Life Membership Fund shall be apportioned among the various Regional Groups in good standing.

B. The Life Membership Fund shall be administered by a Board of Trustees, consisting of six individuals appointed by the National President with the advice and consent of the National Board of Directors.

1. At least one trustee shall be on the Administrative Staff of the National Headquarters, and not less than one-half (1\2) of the trustees shall be Members or Associate Members of the Blinded Veterans Association with at least one being on the National Board of Directors.

2. The terms of office shall be three years, with two trustees appointed three years each year.

3. The National President shall designate one of the trustees as Chairperson.

4. The Life Membership Fund Board of Trustees shall elect such other officers it may deem necessary and shall adopt rules of procedure governing the investment of funds, such rules of procedure to be subject to approval by the National Board of Directors.

5. The Board of Trustees shall have the power to buy and sell securities. In so doing, the Board of Trustees shall have the power to engage a Corporate Investment Manager and to give such Manager discretionary authority to buy and sell securities for the Investment Account of the Life Membership Fund.

C. Payment of dues for membership in the National Association automatically enrolls a Life Member, or Associate Life Member into the regional group having jurisdiction over the area of his/her residence without payment of additional dues to that regional group.

D. A regional group shall not levy any additional assessment upon its Members,, Associate Members, Life Members, or Associate Life Members as a requirement for Membership or Associate Membership.

Section 5. National Membership Program

A. The backbone and substance of any organization is its membership. To be strong and effective, an organization must have a dynamic and energetic membership dedicated to the goals of the organization. The phrase "there is strength in numbers" is especially true with Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs). The founding members of the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA) envisioned an organization of blinded veterans providing assistance to other blinded veterans, a principle which has been guiding BVA since 1945. In order to be true to this founding and guiding principle, it is imperative that BVA have a solid active membership program that will serve to increase the organizations membership and by so doing strengthen its capacity to fulfill its goals and objectives of providing services to blinded veterans and their families.

B. The BVA membership program is carried out on multiple levels simultaneously. These include the National level through the Field Services Program, the Board of Directors, and committee actions. The second level is Regional Group activities that support visually impaired Veterans within their

communities. The final level stems from nationwide Special Interests Groups that shares information amongst BVA members focused on specific topics like Service Animals, Technology, or Sports and Recreation.

C. The National membership program consists of three membership mailings per year targeted at dues renewal for the coming year and soliciting former members to rejoin or entice veterans who have never been members to join. The first mailing of the year is the dues notification which is mailed to arrive at the member's home around October 1st of the year which precedes the actual membership year, e.g. October 1, 1999 for 2000 dues year. This mailing goes to all membership categories for members within those categories who have annual memberships.

D. The second mailing reaches Former Members (FM), Former Associate Members (FAM), Non-Members (NM) and Non-Associate Members (NAM) approximately December 1st preceding the new dues year. These letters are tailored to encourage blinded veterans to either rejoin or join for the first time. Benefits of membership are explained in hopes of attracting these blinded vets.

E. The next mailing reaches FM's, FAM's, NM's and NAM's February 1st of the dues year, again soliciting FM's, FAM's NM's and NAM's to join. Letters are also sent to members and Associate Members whose dues have lapsed, reminding them to renew their memberships.

F. The National Office also sends out separate mailings to those blind vets who are paying to Life or Associate Life Memberships. This notification reminds them of their outstanding dues to complete payment. Other mailings may be initiated from time to time to maximize growth and retention.

G. Since its inception, BVA has sent the BVA Bulletin to all blinded veterans for whom we have an address regardless of membership status. This has caused some confusion in that blinded veterans believe that because they are receiving the Bulletin, they are members in good standing. To overcome this problem, a special notice is included in the large-print version of the Bulletin sent to FM's, FAM's, NM's and NAM's advising them they are not members of BVA but are receiving the Bulletin as a courtesy.

Section 6. Regional Group Membership Program

A. If the National Membership Program is to be effective and regional groups are to experience membership growth and retention, each regional group must engage in its own membership program. Recruiting and retaining members is one of the

most time consuming and difficult tasks a regional group has to face each year. Success in this important area requires organization and tireless effort. Appointing a membership committee is generally the desired approach to meeting membership goals. This committee can be as active as possible.

B. BVA National recommends that the minimum regional group membership program consist of doing follow-up mailings to the National Program. Membership letter mailings should be arranged to arrive during the months following the National mailing, and the letters should be tailored to the regional group activities and the benefits of membership. Letters are by no means the only way to recruit new members or to get old members to renew.

C. BVA National believes one of the most effective methods--one utilized by a number of regional groups--is to undertake a telephone contact. Personal contact with prospective members seems to be extremely effective. These calls are most effective when timed to follow closely behind letters sent either by the National or the regional group.

D. Other methods that have produced results are to include non-members on the regional group mailing list, ensuring that these individuals receive notices of regional group activities and also any newsletters produced by the regional group. With the assistance of BVA National, the regional group might also consider having Public Service Announcements (PSAs) made that can be played on local radio stations letting blinded veterans in the area know about BVA and how to contact the regional group.

Section 7. How to Order Labels and Printouts

A. The BVA Membership Manager should be contacted at least ten working days prior to the date a regional group wishes to receive its labels and printouts. Please specify the number of sets desired, keeping in mind that BVA National's policy is not to send more than two sets due to the constant updating of the BVA database. It should be noted that changes of address and notifications of death are received by BVA National on a daily basis.

1. Please specify how you wish the labels and printouts to be sorted, i.e., zip code or alphabetical.
2. Identify the exact mailing address to which the labels and printouts are to be sent if someone other than a regional officer is receiving the package.

B. If a regional group has established Chapters or Districts that may wish to conduct separate mailings to their members, the regional group President must designate to BVA Headquarters the individual within the Chapter or District who is authorized to receive labels. Additionally, the request for labels should be by zip code in order to provide the specific membership labels required.

C. If the BVA National Headquarters 800 toll-free number is utilized, be sure to leave all the above information. Your request will be processed immediately if the above procedures are followed. Should you have any questions, please contact the BVA Membership Manager.

**Administrative notes:*

1. The BVA National Headquarters does three membership renewal mailings per year. If a regional group is planning to do a renewal reminder, check with the National Office (Membership Manager) first. This will avoid duplicate mailings.
2. Only regional group officers or designated individuals receive labels\printouts. Any unusual label\printout requests must be approved by the Executive Director. Field Staff should contact the Administrative Assistant to the National Field Service Director for regional printouts following the same procedure.

CHAPTER VIII - REGIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

Section 1. Regional Group Newsletter

A. One of the most effective means of communicating with the members of the regional group is to regularly produce a newsletter. The newsletter need not be long or too involved, but can provide useful information to your membership on upcoming activities, VA benefits information or updates on legislative activities on both state and national levels.

B. The BVA National Office Staff is always available to assist in providing information or ideas for such newsletters and mailing labels can be obtained from National Headquarters. Be sure to always include a membership application with these newsletters as they can serve as valuable membership recruiting tools.

Section 2. Public Relations

A. Want to get something for nothing? Of course you do. We all do. It's human nature to take advantage of something that's offered to you, FREE. It also makes a lot of common sense. So if getting something for nothing appeals to you, kick your feet back and dive into this section of the Regional Group Manual. In the next few pages, we're going to discuss the one FREE opportunity available to all Regional Groups.

B. In the process, we'll lay the ground work for the biggest, most lucrative grassroots effort in the history of the Blinded Veterans Association. Have we peaked your curiosity? Read on...

C. You're probably asking yourself, "What is this tremendous opportunity?" At least, we hope your asking that. Well the opportunity, in a nutshell, is your Regional Group's public relations campaign. That's right, public relations. It's quick. It's free. And, it's easy. As a matter of fact, it's so easy that after your Regional Group does it once, you'll never really have to work at it again.

D. Let's start with just a quick overview of public relations. What is it? Public relations is the way your regional group interacts with your local community. For the most part, that will take place through a relationship with your local media outlets. Just to name a few, that includes newspapers, magazines, television (commercial and cable access), radio stations (AM & FM) and radio reading services. Those outlets are your FREE link to communicating within your regional group, publicizing your efforts within your community and, most importantly, reaching the blinded veterans who don't know about BVA or the benefits they've earned.

E. It all boils down to a concept called "name recognition." That's how you measure your success. The Association's public relations goal is to have the initials "BVA" just as recognizable as "VA", "VFW" or "IRS." That's your regional group goal as well. We know that's pretty ambitious. Just remember each and every time you have information recorded, announced or printed about your regional group, you've moved us one small step closer to our goal. And, you're potentially reaching the men and women who need our help.

F. How do you get started? Here's your first step. Look around your regional group for a volunteer with a public relations background or someone who's interested in doing the job. That's important. You have to like what your doing to stick with it

and do it professionally. Once you find that person, your biggest obstacle is behind you.

G. Now, it's time to build a list of media contacts. Open the phone book and start calling media outlets within the boundary of your regional group. Ask them if they are interested in your press releases and public service announcements. If so, ask who you should mail them to. Keep a very detailed list. Make certain you note the name and position of your contact. Your chance of having a press release or public service announcement used greatly increases when you can address it to an actual person as opposed to a section or department.

H. If you have problems building your list of media contacts, you can always go to the public library. They have yearly listings of print and broadcast outlets throughout the United States .

I. If you still need help, get in touch with another area Veterans Service Organization (VSO) and ask for a copy of their media mailing list. Or, call BVA National Headquarters and talk to the Communications Coordinator.

J. Now that you have a person to handle the job and a list of contacts to mail your release to, you're ready to publicize your regional group. But, what events are actually big enough for the media to use? There is no real answer to this question. What's important to you may not be important to the editor of a local newspaper. Or even if it is important enough to print, there may not be room for it. The same holds for radio and television. The general rule of thumb is to write and mail anything you feel is important. Then, you at least present your information and have a chance to get it published. You definitely won't find your information in print or on-the-air if you neglect to write or mail it.

K. As a general rule of thumb, make sure you write about the following: 1) Regional Group meetings; 2) regional group activities and accomplishments; 3) achievements of regional group members; and 4) periodically the goals and mission of the Blinded Veterans Association.

L. The writing of your press release might just be the easiest part of your task. It's basically formula writing. Find a format your comfortable with and stick with it. Just change the information that's different from the last release. But, don't worry about retooling and rewriting it. You'll just be making more work for yourself in the long run. Believe me, your media contact doesn't mind at all. He or she just wants your information.

M. Feel free to use the following as examples for your public service announcements and press releases. Remember to follow the format shown here and keep it simple. You want to make sure that your message is clearly understood by the reader (audience) and by your media contact.

N. Remember, these are just examples. If you'll notice the last release we included is in a different format than the other five. I did that on purpose. We know the equipment you have varies from regional group to regional group. But as long as you have a typewriter and a piece of paper (hopefully letterhead), you have all the supplies you need to start writing press releases and public service announcements.

O. Here's a little tip about the format for press releases. Always double space the body of the release. And, always give the name and phone number of a local point of contact for the press release. You never know when an editor or producer might want additional information about your regional group.

P. This brief introduction has skipped many details of a public relations program. It's merely a broad overview meant to wet your appetite and get you started down the right path. If at any time you'd like to discuss your regional group's public relations program, give the Communications Coordinator a call at BVA National Headquarters.

Q. A couple of parting thoughts that might help. Take advantage of every opportunity you have to push your regional group and your regional group activities. If a school invites you to guest speak about blindness, go. If you can set up an exhibit at the county or state fair, do it. Wherever there's a chance to get involved in your community, do it and let the media know you're doing it. If someone asks you to march in a local parade, buy a BVA flag, practice drill and ceremony, just do it. And last but not least, share ideas between the individual regional groups. San Diego work with Northern California. New York share your ideas with Pennsylvania. Mid-Atlantic. find out what Washington is doing and vice versa. Any positive press we get can be duplicated in other regional group areas. That type of communication, commitment and effort will definitely help us on our way to name recognition.

R. And last but not least, keep the BVA National Communications Coordinator up to date on your regional group's public relations activities. Send in your ideas. Let him/her know about your successes and your failures. Let's work together to spread all the news generated by the Blinded Veterans Association and our regional groups.

Section 3. Fund-raising

A. Introduction

1. This section provides guidelines for regional group fund-raising, supplementing instructions contained in Article XIV, Sections E and F of the BVA National By-Laws. Materials in this section reflect National Board of Directors and National Headquarters policy, rules and experience in considering and approving regional group fund-raising projects.

2. Regional groups are encouraged to undertake fund-raising projects with a specific purpose or need in mind. For example, raising money to help defray extraordinary regional group expenditures, or raising money to collect funds to host a BVA National Convention, or raising funds to assist blinded veterans, VIST Coordinators, etc. are all sound reasons for fund-raising.

3. However, projects to be conducted for the primary purpose of raising funds to build up a regional group's bank account, particularly when a surplus already exists, or to make investments, or for a purpose not associated with the overall mission of BVA or the regional group will not be approved.

B. Restrictions

1. Regional groups must obtain approval for all fund-raising projects as described in BVA National By-Laws (Article XIV, Section 13e).

2. In carrying out any fund-raising project, regional group officers are responsible for protecting the good name of the Blinded Veterans Association from wrongful use or misrepresentation.

3. Regional groups may NOT engage in any direct-mail fund-raising projects, i.e., mailing solicitations or appeal letters to the public at large. A nation-wide direct-mail fund-raising program is conducted by BVA National Headquarters.

4. Regional groups are asked not to solicit bequests from members or individuals. Regional groups may accept such gifts as they occur.

5. Regional groups may apply for grants from local organizations to meet specific needs. BVA National Headquarters should be provided a copy of the grant application. Depending on the type of grant Grants often require a Regional Group to be a §501(C)(3), possess an administrative staff to handle reporting duties, and

partnering with other organizations with various professionals, like Social Workers and Rehab Specialists, to execute the grant.

Administrative note: Please mail or email a copy of to the Executive Director. National organizations such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot and other major chains often authorize their regional affiliates to support state and local organizations. If you have examples or organizations please contact the BVA Administrative Director and we will compile a list of such entities and attempt to determine the procedure for requesting their support.

C. Some Good Reasons for Fund-Raising

1. Strengthening the Regional Group

1a. Increasingly, BVA regional groups are using funds to increase attendance at meetings and to support efforts to make the regional group an effective, viable organization. Regional groups are using funds to help pay travel costs of regional group members, such as renting vans and hiring drivers, and to make sure that blinded veterans can get to meetings. Transportation problems are often the main reason for poor attendance.

1b. Purchasing equipment for regional group volunteer offices is another good reason for fund-raising. For many regional groups, volunteer offices at VA Medical Centers are becoming the focal point of regional group activity where day-to-day work is done on regional group programs, and contact is maintained with members.

1c. Using funds to pay for editing and publication of a regional group newsletter is certainly appropriate, and also an appropriate reason for fund-raising. A quality, timely newsletter can do much to strengthen the regional group, as well as to bring in new members.

2. Helping Blinded Veterans

2a. More and more, regional groups are using funds to directly assist needy blinded veterans. At times, a blinded veteran may approach the regional group for help, or the group may learn of a blinded veteran in a desperate situation. For example, some regional groups have paid cab fares so blinded veterans could get to doctors' offices or VA Medical Centers. Some blinded veterans have been helped with emergency rent and food assistance, and others with clothing needed when attending Blind Rehabilitation. Many regional groups also buy canteen coupons to

distribute to hospitalized blinded veterans. Projects to raise funds for these purposes find broad appeal and support among members and the public.

2b. Some regional groups are hosting Christmas parties and other events at Blind Rehabilitation Centers. Local companies and community groups often are willing to contribute to these projects.

3. Supporting the VIST Coordinator

3a. Many regional groups are now making direct grants to VIST Coordinators. This is an excellent use of regional group funds, since VIST coordinators are constantly approached by non-prosthetics-eligible blinded veterans needing help.

3b. The VIST Coordinator can provide small, relatively inexpensive items and equipment such as white canes, talking watches, and insulin measuring devices, if money for this purpose is available in the VIST Post Fund. Projects to raise money for this purpose also have broad appeal.

4. Supporting National Programs

4a. Regional groups may also raise funds to help support specific National Programs, or to provide special equipment to facilitate National Office operations. For example, the BVA National Office is often asked to help pay costs of blinded veterans desiring to attend blind sports clinics such as skiing or bowling. Funds for these purposes are often not immediately available at the National Office.

4b. Regional groups may also help other regional groups hosting BVA National Conventions. This is a worthwhile fund-raising purpose in that smaller, newer regional groups may lack the resources and/or experience to conduct a fully adequate convention fund-raising campaign.

D. Some Suggested Fund-Raising Projects

1. Regional groups are urged to develop fund raising projects that are creative, yet practical, that is, easily accomplished and involve few or no parties other than the regional group itself. Regional groups should ask other regional groups for ideas on what types of fund-raising projects have been most successful.

2. Note too, the types of fund-raising projects that have worked well for other veterans' organizations and community groups, and adopt and tailor good points to the regional group's capabilities. The following are some fund-raising ideas that have worked well for BVA regional groups:

- 2a. Selling raffle tickets at regional group meetings for items donated by members or Auxiliary members.
- 2b. Auctions of items donated by regional group members.
- 2c. Soliciting the regional group membership for cash and equipment donations to support regional group activities.
- 2d. Arranging dances or special holiday celebrations for members and charging admission.
- 2e. Conducting talent shows or contests featuring blinded veterans.
- 2f. Selling tickets to regional group picnics with food donated by members.
- 2g. Yard sales or garage sales of donated items.
- 2h. Operating concession stands or tents at fairs and selling food and soft drinks.
- 2i. Hosting a special dinner or banquet with special invited guests or celebrities.
- 2j. Arranging or sponsoring a local sports event for blind and other disabled individuals, and soliciting community and public support.

E. Obtaining Approval For Fund-Raising Projects

1. The BVA National Office needs to be advised of ALL fund-raising projects undertaken by the regional group.
2. Fund-raising projects conducted within the regional group, involving no outside group or organization need only the approval of the BVA Executive Director or Administrative Director. This approval may be obtained by submitting a letter by email or regular mail.
3. More complex fund-raising projects where the regional group is participating or working jointly with another organization such as a veterans' organization or a local community organization must have prior approval by the BVA National Board of Directors. Section 13f of Article XIV of the BVA By-Laws requires that regional groups obtain National Board of Directors' approval for fund-raising projects not falling within the fund-raising project type described above.

4. A question often arises concerning the public--is the public a party other than the regional group? For example, if a regional group conducts a yard sale, and the public at large is welcome to stop by and purchase items, does this sort of fund-raising project need formal Board of Directors' approval? In most cases, it would be required. Regional group officers should discuss the matter with the BVA Executive Director or the BVA Administrative Director for a final determination.

5. The regional group should seek the advice and assistance of the BVA Executive Director or Administrative Director in considering any fund-raising project, as well as in preparing a letter to obtain formal Board of Directors' approval when needed.

6. Obtaining approval for a fund-raising project is not difficult. The Regional Group President should send an email or letter to the BVA National President, c/o BVA National Headquarters at least 60 days in advance of the beginning of the proposed project.

7. The fund-raising project should be described in detail--why the funds are being raised, how the regional group will conduct the project, what resources the regional group is committing, who other than the regional group is involved and what is their role, who is controlling the funds and who is accounting for the funds being raised.

8. BVA National Board of Directors' approval of the project will be provided by letter. Regional group officers planning fund-raising events should also refer to Article XIV, Sections 12e and f of the BVA By-Laws.

Section 4. Regional Group Support of BVA Legislative Program

A. One of the most effective ways BVA can provide assistance to blinded veterans is through an active advocacy program. Like other major national Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), BVA has been designated by Congressional Charter as the organizational advocate for all blinded veterans before Congress and the Executive Branch of government. BVA regularly advocates for blinded veterans on Capitol Hill and before the Department of Veterans Affairs. BVA's advocacy program is based on the concerns and legislative priorities established by the membership in convention assembled each year. Resolutions introduced each year at the National Convention by regional groups serve as the frame work for BVA's advocacy efforts.

B. The BVA Governmental Relations Office may periodically send out legislative alerts to all regional groups informing them of pending legislation of importance to

blinded veterans and the need for the BVA membership to contact their elected representatives encouraging their support for certain legislation.

C. In the Appendix of this Manual are lists of key Congressional Committees and the Congressional Delegation for the state in which the regional group is located. All elected representatives have offices in their districts as well as in Washington. This is important because phone calls to the local district offices can be as effective as those to the Washington office. It is extremely important to note that elected officials are more responsive to those who actually vote for them. Effective grassroots efforts supporting the BVA national efforts have the greatest impact because they represent votes to these officials.

D. In addition to the national program, the regional group can and should have their own legislative activities with respect to benefits and services for the blind and veterans in their state. The name and address of the State Director of Veterans Affairs is included in the Appendix as well as a list of benefits available in the state for the veterans. These should be reviewed. Notification of your membership through your newsletter is another way of keeping your membership informed regarding services and benefits available within the state.

E. Establishing a legislative committee within the regional group can be useful to monitor legislative issues both at a state and national level. Over the years regional groups have been very effective in influencing state legislation which directly impacts the lives of the blind and veterans.

Section 5. Other Suggested Regional Group Programs and Organizational Activities

A. The number and source of regional group activities is only limited by the members themselves. The regional group should be responsive to the needs and wishes of the membership and strive to identify those interests each year. Those regional groups that have active programs (both social and informational) and work hard to keep the membership well informed seem to be the most successful when it comes to steady growth.

B. In addition to public relations and legislative efforts some groups have engaged in numerous public service activities ranging from visiting public or private schools to educating children about blindness. Some have established speaker bureaus for this purpose. Some have actively supported other charities. One group holds an annual turkey shoot, and others dinner dances sponsored by other organizations such as the Elks. A state convention is another means of providing

informational seminars and social activities. Periodic attendance at professional ball games and concerts interests many group members. Maybe the most basic activity is conducting regular regional group meetings, monthly or quarterly.

C. The most successful meetings seem to have a meal function such as dinner or lunch associated with them, as well as an active program with a guest speaker. This combination of social interaction plus solid useful information works best.

D. Sponsoring a regional group volunteer office (mentioned elsewhere in this Manual) is an excellent regional group activity. Regular hospital visitation or involvement with the VA Voluntary Services is another way of being active in a constructive manner. Providing financial and moral support for blinded veterans who are ill or having other problems can be an important activity. Basically there is no end to what a regional group can do, and the members only need to put their heads together and determine what would best meet their needs.

CHAPTER IX - REGIONAL GROUP VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Section 1. Change in Volunteer Terminology

*Administrative note: The term Regional Group Volunteer Service Officer and the abbreviation RGVSO will no longer be used. The term "Service Officer" implies VA accreditation and the authorization to perform special functions which carry the potential for liability if not properly performed.

A. Accordingly, the term "Service Officer" will apply only to VA accredited volunteers. Accredited BVA volunteers are called Volunteer National Service Officers or VNSOs.

B. Non-accredited volunteers associated with a BVA Regional Group Volunteer Office will be called Regional Group Volunteers or RGVs. Duties and responsibilities of volunteers are described further in this Manual.

Section 2. Establishing Volunteer Offices

A. Regional group officers are urged to work closely with BVA Field Service Representatives in setting up Regional Group Volunteer Offices at VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics.

B. BVA Field Service Representatives and regional group officers should contact and meet with Directors of VA medical facilities, describe the BVA Volunteer Service Program, and request office space for the volunteers. Official requests for space will be prepared at BVA National Headquarters as needed.

C. VA makes office space available to the Blinded Veterans Association on the basis of its Congressional Charter. Signs on Volunteer Office doors must read Blinded Veterans Association.

D. Regional group members should be kept informed as volunteer offices are established and urged to serve as volunteers. Regional group members should also be asked to donate unneeded equipment, such as tape recorders, CCTVs, and braille writers, that could be used at the volunteer offices.

E. Regional groups are asked to provide financial support, as needed, to help defray volunteer transportation costs and other costs involved in operating the volunteer office. The BVA National Office will make a one-time grant of \$250 for the initial start up of a volunteer office.

Section 3. Selecting, Training and Assigning Volunteers

A. Regional Group Volunteers (RGVs)

1. Selection. Regional group volunteers must be BVA members or BVA Auxiliary members. No other specific qualifications have been established to be eligible to be a volunteer other than a commitment to the principles of the Blinded Veterans Association, and a desire to help other blinded veterans.

2. Recommendation. Regional group Presidents should recommend volunteer candidates to the BVA Field Service Representative or the National Field Service Director.

3. Training. Volunteers will be provided a home-study training course by BVA National Headquarters. Upon completion of training, and with the recommendation of the BVA Field Service Representative, the volunteer will be awarded a Certificate of Training.

4. Assignment. Regional group volunteers will be formally assigned to a Regional Group Volunteer Office as offices are established. Volunteers may be assigned to a Volunteer Office while completing the required training program.

B. Volunteer National Service Officers (VNSOs)

1. Selection. Regional group volunteers who have demonstrated the ability and interest to assist blinded veterans in the VA claims process, and to work closely with the BVA Field Service Representative, may be considered for further training and assignment as Volunteer National Service Officers and subsequently recommended for VA accreditation.

1a. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) rules allow only accredited volunteers to accept a veteran's power of attorney, review claims folders and medical records, and officially represent blinded veterans at VA hearings.

1b. VA rules also require that an accredited volunteer be willing to commit 1,000 hours per year to the volunteer activity. This time requirement is significant and should be kept in mind by volunteers requesting VA accreditation. VNSOs who cannot fulfill the greater part of this volunteer time requirement may be asked to withdraw as accredited volunteers.

2. Recommendation. The Regional group President, as well as the designated manager of the volunteer office should recommend VNSO candidates to the BVA Field Service Representative.

3. Training. The VNSO candidate will be required to take additional training on VA benefits and the VA claims process, and receive on-the-job training under the supervision of the BVA Field Service Representative.

4. Assignment. It is the policy of BVA that VNSOs be assigned to a Regional Group Volunteer Office located at a VA Medical facility or at a VA Regional Office. Exceptions to this rule may be made only by the National Field Service Director.

C. Other BVA Volunteers

1. The BVA Volunteer Service Program envisions a volunteer role for any BVA member or BVA Auxiliary member who wants to help. Accordingly, while the concept of the trained and certified regional group volunteer remains the focus of the Program, BVA regional groups should encourage members, including Auxiliary members, to become active as volunteers at VA medical facilities even though a BVA Volunteer Office is yet to be established.

2. For many years, blinded veterans have been volunteering at VA Medical Centers and Outpatient Clinics. This valuable service has often gone unrecognized by BVA and the regional groups. We point this out to emphasize that volunteer service should be encouraged whether or not the individual elects to participate in the

formal Regional Group Volunteer training and certification process described above.

3. Blinded veterans serving as volunteers at VA facilities and not associated with a Regional Group Volunteer Office should be registered with VA Voluntary Services at the VA facility where they work.

D. Supervising Volunteers

1. Regional Group Volunteer Offices should be supervised by a designated Volunteer Manager appointed by the regional group President with the concurrence of the Field Service Representative. The designated manager may be a regional group volunteer or a Volunteer National Service Officer.

2. The designated manager is responsible for scheduling volunteers, maintaining volunteer attendance records, overseeing the work of the office, insuring that a log of daily activities and contacts is maintained, and maintaining contacts with officials of the VA facility. The designated manager should also seek appointment to the VA Voluntary Service Committee and attend committee meetings.

3. Regional group officers are urged to make periodic visits to volunteer offices as well as report on volunteer office activities at regional group meetings. Field Service Representatives will also make periodic visits to volunteer offices.

**Administrative note: BVA Field Service Representatives are responsible for supervising the work of Volunteer National Service Officers with respect to activities involving the processing of claims for VA benefits and services.*

4. It is extremely important that the BVA Field Service Representative be kept fully informed of all VNSO claims activities in process. This may be accomplished by monthly reports.

5. Questions and problems arising in preparing claims for VA benefits and services, as well as difficulties in working with a particular blinded veteran or problems with VA personnel, should be raised immediately with the Field Service Representative or with the National Field Service Director.

Section 4. Volunteer Duties and Responsibilities

A. Regional Group Volunteers (RGVs) may perform the following duties:

1. Advise blinded veterans and family members on services and benefits available from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other organizations and agencies serving the blind and visually-impaired.
2. Refer blinded veterans to VA service locations, the VA VIST Coordinator, and to community agencies and organizations.
3. Assist the VA VIST Coordinator as appropriate. Provide assistance in identifying, contacting and referring blinded veterans to the VIST Coordinator. Assist the VIST Coordinator, as needed, in arranging blinded veteran support group meetings. Contact blinded veterans and encourage them to attend support group meetings.
4. Counsel blinded veterans and family members on ways of coping with blindness. Work to motivate blinded veterans to attend a VA Blind Rehabilitation Program and to take other steps to cope with blindness.
5. Attend and participate in blinded veteran counseling and support groups, both VIST and BVA-sponsored. Explain BVA programs and services.
6. Attend VA and other meetings, appear on radio and TV programs, and represent the Blinded Veterans Association. Discuss BVA programs and services available to blinded veterans.
7. Encourage blinded veterans to join the Blinded Veterans Association, become active in the regional group, and become volunteers.
8. Perform other volunteer duties as required in support of the regional group.

B. Volunteer National Service Officers (VNSOs) may perform the following duties:

1. Advise blinded veterans and family members on services and benefits available from the Department of Veterans Affairs and other organizations and agencies serving the blind and visually-impaired.
2. Refer blinded veterans to VA service locations, the VA VIST Coordinator, and to community agencies and organizations.
3. Assist blinded veterans in applying for VA services and benefits; accept and register blinded veterans' power-of-attorney, and advise and assist veterans in

gathering materials and medical evidence in support of claims for VA benefits or services.

4. Request and review VA claim folders, medical records, military records, and other materials and records needed to assist blinded veterans in presenting a claim for services or benefits.

5. Represent BVA and the blinded veteran at VA review boards and appeals hearings.

6. Assist the VA VIST Coordinator as appropriate. Offer "Service Officer" assistance to VIST for veterans filing claims for VA benefits and services. Provide assistance in identifying, contacting, and referring blinded veterans to the VIST Coordinator.

7. Assist the VIST Coordinator in arranging blinded veteran support group meetings. Contact blinded veterans and encourage them to attend support group meetings.

8. Visit blinded veterans in their homes if necessary. Coordinate home visits with the BROS.

9. Counsel blinded veterans and family members on ways of coping with blindness. Work to motivate blinded veterans to attend VA Blind Rehabilitation Programs and take other steps to cope with blindness.

10. Attend and participate in blinded veteran counseling and support groups, both VIST and BVA-sponsored. Explain BVA programs and services to meeting participants.

11. Attend VA and other meetings, appear on radio and TV programs, and represent the Blinded Veterans Association. Discuss BVA programs and services available to blinded veterans.

12. Encourage blinded veterans to join the Blinded Veterans Association, become active in the Regional Group, and become volunteers.

13. Perform other volunteer duties as required in support of the Regional Group.

C. Reporting Volunteer Activities

1. The designated manager of the Volunteer Office is responsible for keeping a daily log of activities and submitting a monthly report to the Field Service Representative as enunciated below:

1a. Daily Log: The daily log should contain the names of volunteers on duty each day, the names and telephone numbers of blinded veterans calling or coming into the office each day, and an indication of the nature or reason for the contact. The daily log may be kept on computer, tape, or in print. It should be maintained as a permanent record.

1b. Monthly Report: The monthly report should indicate the number of hours each volunteer has worked, both at the Volunteer Office and at other locations. The report should include the names and telephone numbers of all blinded veterans assisted, and the nature of the assistance provided. In addition, VNSOs should provide a brief account of all claims and representation activities undertaken during the month. The monthly report should also list meetings attended and other volunteer activities of note. The monthly report may be submitted by telephone or on a report form.

1b(1) A sample Volunteer Office Monthly Report Form is included in the Appendix to this Manual.

D. Volunteer Expenses

1. Regional groups are urged to support volunteer offices to the fullest extent possible and to make support of volunteer offices a primary regional group activity. Regional groups are urged to provide funds for volunteer transportation, and to purchase Volunteer Office supplies and equipment. There are no BVA National Office restrictions, other than common sense, on how a regional group may use its funds to support volunteer office activities.

2. The BVA National Office has budgeted limited funds to support Regional Group Volunteer Offices. The BVA National Office will pay for business cards for VNSOs only. VNSOs needing business cards should contact the National Field Service Director.

E. Liability Concerns

1. The issue of liability which may be incurred by BVA due to the actions of a volunteer is a major concern. A veteran may allege damage or loss should a claim for services or benefits not be handled properly. Lack of timely or professional

action by a BVA volunteer who has presented himself as a "Service Officer" can have serious consequences.

2. Of equal concern would be violations of Federal rules of confidentiality and privacy by discussing a veteran's case outside of the office, or with a non-involved third party.

3. All Regional Group officers and all volunteer personnel are reminded that only a VA accredited volunteer may accept a veteran's power-of-attorney and thereby commit the BVA to further action in support of the veteran's claim.

4. Questions on issues covered in this chapter may be directed to the BVA Field Service Representative or the National Field Service Director.

Section 5. Volunteer Awards

A. Volunteer recognition and appreciation are important elements of the BVA Volunteer Service Program. Accordingly, the BVA National Board of Directors has established the David L. Schnair Volunteer Service Award.

B. David L. Schnair was one of the early members of the Blinded Veterans Association and served as a BVA volunteer for 47 years. Mr. Schnair also served in the BVA National Office and Regional Group Officer positions and was BVA's Director of District for many years. Mr. Schnair died in 1993, and in view of his total commitment to BVA and to helping blinded veterans, a volunteer award bearing his name is certainly fitting.

C. The award may be given to any BVA member or Auxiliary member who has provided at least one year of consistent and outstanding service as a BVA volunteer. Regional Group Presidents should submit a letter to the BVA Field Service Representative and the National Field Service Director, by letter or email, of volunteers recommended for the award.

D. Award certificates will be prepared at the BVA National Office, signed by the BVA National President, The Awards are issued at the BVA National Convention.

CHAPTER X - REGIONAL GROUP AUXILIARY.

A Regional Group Auxiliary may be formed by family members and friends of the members of the regional group. The purpose of these Auxiliaries is to aid the Blinded Veterans Association in whatever fashion possible, to develop a deeper

interest in the Blinded Veterans Association by family members and friends, to preserve and to strengthen a spirit of fellowship among Auxiliary members so that they may give mutual aid and assistance to one another, and to support the National Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary programs and projects. Below is an example of BVA Auxiliary Bylaws.

Section 1. Membership

A. Membership shall consist of families and friends of blinded veterans over 18 years of age.

B. All membership lists will be restricted to the use of the National Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary and the specific Regional Group Auxiliary from which it came and will not be released to any outside agency or organization.

Section 2. Meetings

A. At least one, preferably more, meeting(s) should be held during the year. One of these meetings should be designated as the Annual Meeting, and shall be held to conduct business, elect and install officers and present special interest programs.

B. Additional meetings may be held, as required, and called for by the Regional Group Auxiliary President.

Section 3. Officers and Elections

A. The officers of each Auxiliary Regional Group shall be a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and any other officer necessary for the operation of the auxiliary Regional Group.

B. Officers shall be nominated from the floor.

C. If a vacancy occurs, such vacancy shall be filled by appointment by the President. An exception shall be in the case of a vacancy in the Presidency, then the Vice-President shall automatically move into the Presidency. The office of Vice-President shall then be filled by an appointment by the President.

Section 4. Duties of the Officers

A. The Regional Auxiliary President shall be chief executive officer of the Auxiliary and shall coordinate all activities of the Auxiliary, preside at all meetings of the Auxiliary, serve as ex-officio member of all committees and have the

authority to appoint Standing Committee Chairmen and other Committee chairmen as deemed necessary to conduct the work of the Regional Auxiliary.

B. The Regional Auxiliary Vice-President shall perform such duties as may be assigned by the Regional Auxiliary President and perform the duties of the Regional Auxiliary President in the President's absence or disability.

C. The Regional Auxiliary Group Secretary shall keep the minutes of all membership and special meetings, shall handle all correspondence of the Regional Auxiliary, and submit copies of minutes of all meetings to the National Auxiliary President.

D. The Regional Auxiliary Treasurer shall maintain records, shall maintain true and complete books of account, reflecting all of the income and expenditures of the Regional Auxiliary, shall report regularly to the Regional President and prepare a detailed Treasurer's report for the Annual Regional Meeting. The books and records shall be available "on demand" at all special meetings.

1. All Regional Auxiliary funds shall be deposited in banking institutions approved by the Regional Auxiliary Officers. The accounts shall be in the name decided upon for the Regional Auxiliary Group.

2. Funds of the Regional Auxiliary Group shall be dispensed only by checks drawn by the Treasurer and co-signed by the Treasurer and the President. The Regional Auxiliary Group Officers shall maintain the proper records of their offices, consistent with the responsibilities of those offices, and, upon termination of their terms, transfer said records to the succeeding officers.

Section 5. Dues

A. Any person residing in a Regional Group's geographic area and who is a member of the National Blinded Veterans Auxiliary shall automatically be a member of the area's Regional Group Auxiliary. Payment of dues to the National Auxiliary of \$10.00 per year shall constitute area specific Regional Group Auxiliary membership. (Individual Regional Groups may charge dues.)

B. Each Regional Auxiliary member must remain a member in good standing of the National Blinded Veterans Association Auxiliary. Delinquent members shall have no right to vote, but will be reinstated upon payment of their dues.

Section 6. Finances

A. The Regional Group President, Vice-President, Secretary and the Immediate Past President, shall inspect the books, records, and funds of the Treasurer, and report to the membership at the Annual Meeting.

B. Regional Group Auxiliaries can do absolutely no fund-raising of any kind without prior approval from the Board of Directors of the BVA National Auxiliary and BVA National. (Refer to National Auxiliary Bylaws)

C. Each Regional Group Auxiliary may endeavor to establish a treasury through individual member donations.

CHAPTER XI - THE BVA NATIONAL CONVENTION

Section 1. Introduction

A. There shall be held annually a meeting for the Members and Associate Members, to be known as the National Convention.

B. A BVA National Convention is more than just a time for old friends to gather for some socializing. Of course, getting together is definitely a big part of a convention, but a National Convention is essential to the continued existence of the Association. The National Bylaws call for an annual meeting of the membership to approve actions of the National Board of Directors and to discuss and adopt resolutions to further ensure that all blinded veterans continue to receive the best medical care, rehabilitative training, the necessary prosthetic aids through the Department of Veteran Affairs and other benefits to which they may be entitled.

Section 2. The Call For A National Convention.

A. The National Board of Directors will select the time and place of the next succeeding Convention, and the National Board of Directors shall not change the time and place of holding the Convention except for good cause shown. Good cause is hereby defined as a catastrophe making it impractical to hold the Convention in the recommended city; the inability of the city to provide adequate housing at reasonable rates; or such other emergencies as the National Board of Directors may deem adequate.

B. The National Convention letter shall be considered the Official Notice of the National BVA Convention, and shall be mailed to each Member and Associate Member in good standing.

C. Every Member and Associate Member of the Blinded Veterans Association in good standing shall be eligible to attend and participate in all meetings of the Convention and shall be entitled to one (1) vote when present at meetings or by proxy when absent. If not present or voting by proxy, the vote of the Member or Associate Member will be cast by his/her elected delegate, if any; the proxy must be a Member or Associate Member of the Blinded Veterans Association in good standing.

Section 3. Proxy.

A. A member wishing to exercise his/her right to vote by proxy at the National Convention pursuant to the provisions of Section 2 of Article IX of the BVA National Bylaws may do so by writing or calling the National Headquarters (Attn: Administrative Director) not later than 45 days before the start of the National Convention and requesting an Official BVA Headquarters Proxy Form, and then carrying out the provisions of the Section 2c of Article IX of the National Bylaws.

Section 4. Quorum.

A. At the National Convention, 50% of those Members and Associate Members registering for the Convention and present in person and representing at least three (3) Director Districts shall constitute a quorum.

Section 5. Delegate.

A. Every regional group shall elect a Member or Associate Member in good standing from its group as its official delegate to the Convention; and such official delegate shall be entitled to cast one (1) vote for each Member and Associate Member in good standing of his/her own regional group, not including Members and Associate Members of his/her own group present and voting or voting by proxy.

Section 6. Hosting.

A. With the approval of the National Board of Directors a Regional Group may request to Host the National Convention, working with National HQ.

B. In accordance with Article IX Section 9.b.(4). Of the BVA National Bylaws If, after all Convention expenses have been met, a balance remains in the Convention

Fund, the first three thousand dollars (\$3,000) of such funds may be distributed to the host regional group, at the discretion of the National Board of Directors.

CHAPTER XII - AWARDS

Section 1.General

A. Awards are presented by the Blinded Veterans Association from time to time to recognize individuals and/or organizations/agencies who have provided outstanding services or contributed to the welfare of blinded veterans in a noteworthy manner.

B. Such awards are designed to recognize the contributions/services the individual or agency has provided, and to enhance the image of the Blinded Veterans Association.

Section 2. BVA Three-Tiered System

A. The BVA currently has a three-tiered award system. The three tiers are awards presented by the BVA Regional Groups, National-level gavel awards presented to BVA Regional Groups, and awards presented on the National level.

B. The awards which may be presented in these three respective tiers are as follows:

1. Regional Group Awards

1a. Regional groups of the BVA may present certificates of appreciation, plaques or other appropriate awards to individuals and/or organizations who have been instrumental in helping the regional group or its members.

1b. Such awards should be approved by a majority vote of the regional group membership. It is the responsibility of the regional group to have such awards produced on the local level.

2. National-level Gavel Awards

2a. The BVA National organization annually presents three Gavel awards to BVA regional groups as incentives for increasing the regional group membership. These three awards, which are rotating awards, are presented at the Awards Banquet of the BVA National Convention. In accordance with the policy adopted by the BVA

National Board of Directors the Gavel awards may not be presented to the same regional group in the same years.

b. The three National-level Gavel awards are as follows:

2a(1). Gold Gavel Award. The Gold Gavel Award is presented to the Regional Group which achieves the largest numerical increase in membership during the past year. The award consists of a large wooden gavel with a gold band inscribed appropriately.

2a(2) Silver Gavel Award. The Silver Gavel Award is presented to the Regional Group which achieves the largest percentage increase in membership during the past year. The award consists of a large wooden gavel with a silver band inscribed appropriately.

2a(3) Bronze Gavel Award. The Bronze Gavel Award is presented to the regional group that gets the largest percentage of non-members and non-associate members to change their membership status to active members.

3. National Awards

3a. The National organization of the BVA has several awards which it presents, either annually, or on an as-required basis, to deserving individuals and/or organizations which have been instrumental in assisting the Association. These awards, and the criteria for presenting them, are listed in the order of precedence as follows:

3a(1) Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award. The Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award is the most prestigious award which the BVA presents. This award is presented annually at the Awards Banquet of the BVA National Convention to the veteran, with service-connected blindness, who has proven himself/herself outstanding in his/her field of employment and in his/her adjustment to daily living.

3a(1)(a) The Maas Award was initiated by the late Bayard H. Kendrick, the famous mystery writer and author of Lights Out, the story of a World War II blinded veteran. This award is named in honor of the well-known U.S. Marine General who was an early president of the Blinded Veterans Association and was Chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped at the time of his death.

3a(1)(b) From the beginning, presentation of the Maas Award has contributed to the enhancement of a positive image of blind people and to the elimination of the perception of helplessness.

3a(1)(c) During the January/February time period of each year, the BVA National Headquarters sends out letters soliciting nominations for the Maas Award, such nominations to be submitted usually by not later than mid-April. These letters are sent to:

3a(1)(c)1. Chiefs, Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling Sections, Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Offices;

3a(1)(c)2 Coordinators, Visual Impairment Services Teams, Department of Veterans Affairs Hospitals and Outpatient Clinics;

3a(1)(c)3 Directors, State Agencies for the Blind;

3a(1)(c)4 Presidents and Secretaries of BVA Regional Groups;

3a(1)(c)5 Members of the BVA National Board of Directors.

3a(1)(c) (d) The winner of the annual Maas Award is chosen by a panel of three judges who are not affiliated with the BVA in any way, and who volunteer their services to do the judging. Every effort is made by the BVA National Headquarters to get judges who are involved in some way with disabilities.

3a(1)(c) (e) A blinded veteran may win the Maas Award only once. BVA employees are not eligible for this award.

3a(1)(c) (f) The Maas Award consists of a framed, calligraphied scroll and a \$500.00 stipend.

3a(2) Irving Diener Award. The Irving Diener Award is the second most prestigious award which the BVA presents. Like the Maas Award, this award is also presented at the annual Awards Banquet of the BVA National Convention. It is presented each year to the Member or Associate Member who has made an outstanding contribution to the growth and development of his or her regional group.

3a(2)(a) The award, established in 1962, takes its name from the late Irving Diener, a former member of the BVA National Advisory Committee, who demonstrated a keen interest in the BVA over the years.

3a(2)(b) The Diener Award differs significantly from the Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award in that the former is awarded to the veteran who contributes in an outstanding way to the BVA AS AN ORGANIZATION rather than for personal achievement in rehabilitation and in the field of employment. The award consists of a framed, calligraphied scroll and a \$50.00 stipend. For the past several years, the \$50.00 stipend has been donated by Mrs. Eleanor Diener Metz, the daughter of the late Irving Diener, who resides in Bryans Road, Maryland.

3a(2)(c) During the January/February time period of each year, the BVA National Headquarters solicits nominations from the regional groups and members of the BVA National Board of Directors for this award. Nominations are due at the National Headquarters usually by not later than mid-April. Judging is traditionally done by the three most recent Immediate Past National Presidents of BVA.

3a(2)(d) Like the Maas Award, a veteran may win the Diener Award only once. BVA employees are not eligible for this award.

(4) BVA Certificates of Appreciation. Each year, the National organization of the BVA awards Certificates of Appreciation to those individuals, groups, employers, etc., who have provided outstanding services to blinded veterans and/or to the BVA at the National level. Outstanding services mean those positive services extended to individual blinded veterans, groups of blinded veterans, or the National BVA which creates awareness of blinded veterans, their abilities and their achievements.

(a) National-level BVA Certificates of Appreciation are normally presented at the BVA National Convention's Father Carroll Memorial Luncheon which is generally held on the Friday of the Convention week.

(b) During the January/February time period of each year, the BVA National Headquarters solicits nominations for BVA Certificates of Appreciation from the following agencies. Nominations are due at BVA National Headquarters usually by not later than mid-April.

1. Individual members of the Board of Directors;
2. Executive Director;
3. Director of Governmental Relations;
4. National Field Service Director;
5. Assistant National Field Service Director;
6. Field Service Representatives;
7. Regional Groups in good standing.

(c) BVA National-level Certificates of Appreciation consist of a written citation printed on special paper and a calligraphied scroll, both of which are placed in a custom folding document binder with the BVA emblem silhouetted on the front.

(d) The Executive Committee of the BVA National Board of Directors makes the final selections of the recipients of BVA Certificates of Appreciation based on recommendations from National Headquarters.

(e) BVA members and their family members are not eligible for BVA National-level Certificates of Appreciation. No individual may receive more than one BVA National-level Certificate of Appreciation in their lifetime.

5. BVA Outstanding Service Award. The BVA Outstanding Service Award is presented by the BVA National Board of Directors, on an as-required basis, to individuals who have proved themselves outstanding during the course of their careers in helping the cause of blindness, in helping blinded persons generally, and/or in helping the cause of the Blinded Veterans Association. The award consists of a framed, calligraphed scroll.

4. Volunteer Awards (see Section 5 of Chapter IX--Regional Group Volunteer Program).

Section 3. Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship Program and Thomas H Miller Scholarship

A. General

1. Since 1983, the Blinded Veterans Association has had a scholarship program for the purpose of assisting the educational goals of dependent children and spouses of blinded veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. Beginning in FY 2012 BVA Established the Thomas H Miller Scholarship

2. The program, known as the Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship Program, is named after Ms. Kathern F. Gruber, a long-time advisor to the Association and its National Board of Directors who passed away on January 1, 1998. The scholarships are to be used to defray a student's cost of expenses payable directly to the school, to include tuition, books, and other academic fees.

3. The program known as the Thomas H Miller Scholarship was created in commemoration of his retirement following many years of dedicated work and leadership on behalf of the organization and his commitment in the support of service for the Blind.

B. Number and Amount of Scholarships

1. The number of scholarships and the amount of money allocated for the BVA Scholarship Funds for the coming year is established each year by the BVA National Board of Directors at its meeting held in conjunction with the annual BVA National Convention.

2. Currently, six Kathern F. Gruber scholarships, each for \$2,000 and one Thomas H Miller Scholarship for \$1,000. Each are awarded by the BVA National Board of Directors.

Currently, six scholarships--eight two thousand dollar (\$2,000) scholarships and eight one thousand dollar (\$1,000) scholarships--are being awarded by the BVA National Board of Directors.

C. Eligibility

1. The scholarships are open to the dependent children, and grandchildren and spouses of blinded veterans to include active duty blinded service members who served in the Armed Forces of the United States.

2. The veteran's blindness may be either service-connected or non-service-connected. The veteran is not required to be a member of the BVA.

D. Application Procedures

1. Applications which have been developed by the BVA Scholarship Committee are available through the BVA National Headquarters (Attn: Kathern F. Gruber and Thomas h. Miller Scholarship Programs).

2. Applications are normally due at the BVA National Headquarters by not later than mid-April of each year.

3. A Scholarship Committee consisting of three volunteers not normally associated with BVA reviews the scholarship applications and selects the winners on a "most-highly-qualified" basis utilizing the following criteria:

3a. Answers to the questions on the application form;

3b. Transcripts of high school and/or college records (and any other achievements of the applicant);

3c. Three letters of reference; and

3d. A three-hundred word essay on the applicant's post-education, lifetime, career goals and aspirations.

4. Kathern F. Gruber scholarships are awarded for one year only. In accordance with the BVA National Board of Directors' policy, the number of scholarships a recipient may receive under the Kathern F. Gruber Scholarship Program will be limited to four.

CHAPTER XIII - POLICIES ADOPTED BY BVA NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS PERTAINING TO REGIONAL GROUPS

Section 1. General.

During the course of the past several years, the BVA National Board of Directors has, from time to time, adopted policies that pertain, either directly or indirectly, to BVA regional groups. Regrettably, such policies have not always been readily available to regional groups. This inaccessibility has sometimes caused confusion and misunderstandings on the part of regional groups, their officers and members. Accordingly, in an effort to make such policies more directly accessible to regional groups and to eliminate the aforementioned confusion and potential misunderstandings, the BVA National Board of Directors has elected to publish such policies as a part of this Manual.

Section 2. Past Policies (from 1965 to present)

A. The following are policies which have been adopted by the BVA National Board of Directors from 1965 to the present which pertain, either directly or indirectly, to BVA regional groups:

1. Policy: That, all current BVA Regional Group Volunteer Service Officers be accredited nationally with the Veterans Administration (DVA).

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, New York, New York, July 14, 1970.

2. Policy: That, a person can receive the Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award only once during their lifetime.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 6, 1978.

3. Policy: That, a person can receive the Irving Diener Award only once during their lifetime.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, August 6, 1978.

4. Policy: That, BVA regional groups be informed that in accordance with an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) ruling, they do not have federal tax-exemption by reason of being part of the National Association. The National Association will not obtain Federal tax-exemption for the regional groups based on the aforementioned IRS ruling. However, the regional groups may obtain such Federal tax-exemption separately, if they so desire.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Los Angeles, California, August 5, 1979.

5. Policy: That, effective for 1982 and future years, the Irving Diener Award will be awarded to the Member or Associate Member who is judged to have made the greatest contribution to his/her regional group, and that BVA employees are ineligible for this award. Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, August 9, 1981.

6. Policy: That, service-connected blinded veteran BVA employees and members of the BVA National Board of Directors are eligible for the Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award. Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, August 5, 1981.

7. Policy: That, the policy concerning members campaigning for District Director elections shall be as follows:

7a. An individual running for office who desires to send out campaign literature/materials will first prepare a copy of his/her proposed campaign literature/material and forward same to BVA National Headquarters for screening and approval. **This includes incumbent District Directors.**

7b. At such time as the proposed campaign literature/material has been screened and approved by the BVA National Headquarters, the candidate will then prepare an appropriate quantity of such literature/material in a timely manner, place it in envelopes and mail same to the BVA National Headquarters where it will be screened for accuracy, labels affixed to the envelopes, and then mailed to members in the appropriate area (District).

7b(1) Campaign literature/material in 14-point type will have the envelopes stamped/printed FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND; campaign literature/material in smaller than 14-point type will contain sufficient postage for mailing.

7b(2) One copy of the proposed campaign literature/materials, with envelope flap unsealed, will be provided for the BVA National Headquarters files.

7c. These guidelines will be distributed to all candidates who are nominated for the appropriate District Director office.

7d. These guidelines will be placed in a Policy Manual for future use. Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, February 24, 1984.

Amended/Reconfirmed: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 21 - 23, 1994.

8. **Policy.** That, the paying of membership dues by regional groups utilizing Treasury funds is strictly prohibited. Individuals themselves can contribute to membership dues but not using funds from the regional group's Treasury. Membership is not a benefit that would fulfill our purpose or mission.

9. **Policy:** That, BVA regional groups, and not the BVA, pay for the travel of the BVA Executive Director to attend regional group meetings.

Adopted: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, November 10, 1985.

10. **Policy:** That, the policy pertaining to members wishing to establish communications with officers and/or members of regional groups other than the group of which they are members is as follows:

10a. The initial communication will be sent to the BVA National Office prepared for mailing (with such postage as may be required), together with the name/designation of the person to whom it is to be sent.

10b. The National Office will address the envelope to the person designated by the originator and then mail it.

10c. Thereafter, it will be the decision of the addressee whether or not to establish direct communication with the originator.

Reaffirmed: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Arlington, Virginia, May 25, 1986 (policy has been in effect for many years).

11. Policy: That, the instructions pertaining to the nomination and election of delegates and alternates to the BVA National Convention, contained on the Official BVA Credentials Form, be amended to reflect that if alternate delegates are chosen, they must be elected and specifically named on the form.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 17 - 19, 1990.

12. Policy: That, at future BVA National Conventions, the presentation of awards will be limited to BVA National-level awards. Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Providence, Rhode Island, August 11, 1990.

13. Policy: That, with respect to the procurement of BVA regional group flags, the BVA National Headquarters will provide the specifications, but that the regional group is responsible for having the flag made as well as the cost. : "Only the Parent (BVA) shall display the singular name of the "Blinded Veterans Association", regional groups will additionally display their affiliate group's name."

Adopted/Reaffirmed: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 9 - 10, 1990.

14. Policy: That, in the future, citations of those recipients of BVA Certificates of Appreciation who are unable to attend the BVA National Convention will not be read during the Father Carroll Memorial Breakfast (Luncheon).

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., February 28 - March 2, 1991.

Amended: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Reno, Nevada, August 17 - 19, 1997 to permit the reading of a citation for a COA recipient who is unable to attend the Convention to receive his/her award, but for which a designated representative will be present to receive the award on behalf of the recipient.

15. Policy: That, BVA members having access to BVA National stationary cannot use same for personal use, and that such persons are to be informed of subject policy by the BVA National Office.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Nashville, Tennessee, August 15, 1992.

16. Policy: That, henceforth, the Gold and Silver Gavel awards will not be given to the same regional group in the same years.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C.,
February 25 - 27, 1993.

17. Policy: That, henceforth, a label printout for a particular BVA regional group will include a label for the respective District Director.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C.,
February 25 - 27, 1993.

18. Policy: That, henceforth, biographical sketches of candidates competing in District Director elections will be published unedited.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C.,
February 25 - 27, 1993.

19. Policy: That, henceforth, under the provisions of Section 1 of Article XIV (Regional Groups) of the BVA National Bylaws, the minimum number of members required for a quorum for regional groups will be five (5) members.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Tucson, Arizona, August 8 - 10, 1993.

20. Policy: That, henceforth, no announcements of BVA regional group meetings will be made in the BVA BULLETIN.

Adopted: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 12, 1993.

21. Policy: That, because of their positions and the nature of their work, BVA National Office and Field Service staff who are also BVA members are cautioned and required to observe the following guidelines governing their roles and responsibilities in the Association's internal political campaigns, elections, and other political activities.

21a. Employees who are BVA members must be nonpartisan and must not participate actively in any election campaign and/or electoral activities for District Directors.

21b. BVA National Office and Field Service staff who are BVA members will not use their position to:

21b(1) Obtain address labels and/or printouts of the membership for use by any candidate running for District Director.

21b(2) Telephone individual BVA members to encourage or ask them to vote for a specific candidate in a District Director election.

21b(3) Speak on behalf of any candidate in a District Director election before members at a regional group meeting or any other gathering of BVA members outside the BVA National Convention.

21c. All employees, who are Members or Associate Members, are encouraged to exercise their right to vote, when eligible, in District Director and National Officer elections.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 30 - April 1, 1995.

22. Policy: That, henceforth, all BVA regional groups are prohibited from selling any type of merchandise at any future BVA National Convention without prior Board approval.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 30 - April 1, 1995.

23. Policy: That, commencing with the 50th BVA National Convention, BVA will pay the expenses (travel; two night's lodging) of the Irving Diener Award winner to attend the BVA National Convention for the purpose of receiving subject award. Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., August 19 - 21, 1995.

24. Policy: That, commencing with the 50th BVA National Convention, BVA will pay the expenses (travel; two night's lodging) of the Major General Melvin J. Maas Achievement Award winner to attend the BVA National Convention for the purpose of receiving subject award.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., August 19 - 21, 1995.

25. Policy: That, henceforth, the BVA Administrative Director may approve regional group bylaws provided that such bylaws are in consonance with the standard (sample) BVA regional group bylaws.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., August 19 - 21, 1995.

26. Policy Modification: Modified the BVA policy concerning the limitation on the number of scholarships available to a recipient under the Kathern F. Gruber

Scholarship Program so that commencing with the 1996 - 1997 academic year, the number of scholarships a recipient may receive will be limited to four.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Action, November 15, 1995.

27. Policy: That, henceforth, the minutes of future BVA National Conventions will be limited by eliminating committee reports and minutes of LMF meetings and Investment Fund meetings (such reports/minutes will be retained on file at BVA National Headquarters, and any members in good standing obtain copies by writing to the National Headquarters, Attn: Administrative Director). LMF and Investment Fund end-of-the-fiscal-year reports will be included in the Convention Minutes.

Adopted: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 10, 1996.

28. Policy Modification: Approved a modification of paragraph 3b of the Guidelines for BVA Certificates of Appreciation (COA) to:

28a. Permit the reading of a citation for a COA recipient who is unable to attend the Convention to receive his/her award, but for which a designated representative will be present to receive the award on behalf of the recipient.

28b. Establish the written policy that BVA will provide each recipient of a BVA COA a complimentary convention registration, but that such COA recipients will be responsible for their own travel and hotel expenses associated with accepting their respective COA awards at the BVA National Convention.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Reno, Nevada, August 17 - 19, 1997.

29. Policy: That, BVA send congratulatory letters to those BVA members reaching their 100th birthday where the blinded veteran member can be identified in a timely manner.

Adopted: BVA Executive Committee Meeting, Washington, D.C., November 10, 1997.

30. Policy: That, BVA National Headquarters establish set per diem rate for each BVA travel site, and that the Board and staff be required to submit receipts for actual expenses up to the set per diem ceiling rate for both travel and lodging.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 4 - 6, 1999.

31. Policy: That, members of the BVA National Board of Directors be reimbursed at the same rate as the BVA National Headquarters staff when attending BVA National Conventions and Board meetings.

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 4 - 6, 1999.

32. Policy: That, those regional groups which have either established affiliate chapter(s), or are planning to do so in the future, should amend their bylaws to include guidelines for the control and administrative support of such chapter(s).

Adopted: BVA National Board of Directors' Meeting, Washington, D.C., March 4 - 6, 1999.

33. Policy: Authorizing Regional Group Officers to request proof of legal blindness if they suspect either a member or applicant for membership does not meet the definition of legal blindness.

Adopted: August 8, 2004.

34. Policy: Henceforth, any BVA member requesting to transfer his/her membership from one BVA regional group to another BVA regional group will adhere to following guidelines:

Adopted: August 19, 2006.

- The member requesting the transfer must be in a good standing status with both his/her parent regional group and the National Headquarters. The request for transfer must be in writing through the District Director for that region and after review the District Director will forward the request to Headquarters with a recommendation.

35. All regional groups will be required to obtain their own "EIN" number from IRS. Several regional groups have used National's EIN number to open bank accounts, which needs to be changed. Adopted: Board of Directors, March 6-8, 2008.

36. Policy: District Directors will mail in their written reports no later than February 1st for Mid-winter Board meeting and August 1st for summer meeting each year.

Adopted: Board of Directors, August 22-24, 2010.

37. Policy: BVA's Vision Statement: Our vision is a world where blinded veterans can participate and contribute fully in society and enjoy quality of life.

Adopted: Board of Directors, March 16, 2011.

38. Policy: BVA's Mission Statement: Our mission is to promote access to services and benefits that blinded veterans need in order to overcome the limitations of their blindness.

Adopted: Board of Directors, March 16, 2011.

39. Policy: The name, phone number and district of each District Director will be listed on BVA's web site.

Adopted: Board of Directors, March 16-18, 2011.

40. Policy: To amplify the decision made at its mid-winter meeting in March 2011, the following policy was established unanimously at its meeting on May 24, 2012:

- It is the policy of the Blinded Veterans Association National Board of Directors that BVA Auxiliary Regional Groups will have the same boundaries as the Regional Group in which they are located. A request to form a BVA Auxiliary Regional Group which takes parts of existing BVA Regional Groups to form the new BVA Auxiliary Regional Group will not be approved.

41. Policy: Have regional group gavels made at Blind Centers or wood shops in order for regional groups to keep instead of returning to Headquarters the following year in preparation of annual convention. Being able to keep the gavel gives the group a sense of accomplishment. The gavel will have the regional group's name and year won inscribed on it.

Adopted: August 23, 2012.

42. Policy: Starting in year 2020:

A Bronze gavel will be issued to the regional group that gets the largest percentage of non-members and non-associate members to change their membership status to active members.

Adopted or reaffirmed: National Board of directors, Tulsa, OK, August 11, 2019

43. Policy: All WWII Veterans that are certified as such will become Honorary Members of BVA for life.

Adopted: Board of Directors, August 18-19, 2013.

44. Policy: Copy of Regional Group Financial Reports shall be sent to the respective District Director at the same time they are sent to BVA National HQ.

Adopted or reaffirmed: National Board of directors, Tulsa, OK, August 11, 2019.