

Junior Vice Commander



Handbook

A Guide for Camp Junior Vice Commanders

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on election to the office of Camp Junior Vice Commander!

Upon assuming office, a newly elected Junior Vice Commander may naturally have questions about the responsibilities of the office.

The purpose of this guide is to provide a better understanding of those responsibilities and to offer practical guidance for carrying them out effectively.

The office of Junior Vice Commander plays an important role in the strength and growth of the Camp. In many respects, the Junior Vice Commander plays a central role in bringing new Brothers into the Order and helping to keep existing Brothers engaged. Effective performance of these duties can have a direct impact on the strength, vitality, and future of the Camp.

RESPONSIBILITIES FOR JUNIOR VICE COMMANDERS

In accordance with the Constitution and Regulations of the Order, the Junior Vice Commander shall assist the Commander and perform the duties pertaining to the office. The activities of the Camp Junior Vice Commander should include the following:

(A.) Contacting prospective Brothers whose names are supplied to the Camp by the Department Junior Vice Commander.

The Junior Vice Commander may be the **first personal contact a prospective member has with the Camp**. The manner in which that first contact is handled can determine whether a prospective member becomes an enthusiastic new Brother or loses interest in the Order.

One particularly effective approach is to ask the prospective member about his Union ancestor. Most descendants take pride in their ancestor's service and discussing that service provides a natural and meaningful way to begin a conversation.

If the applicant is joining as an Associate find out their interests pertaining to the Civil War.

The most important thing is to make a potential applicant feel welcomed!

Some prospective members will naturally be more comfortable speaking with someone new than others. The objective of the initial contact should not be to overwhelm a prospective member with information about the SUVCW. Rather, the objective should be to make the prospective member feel welcome, learn about his interest in the Order, and begin establishing a relationship with the Camp.

(B.) Supplying prospective Brothers with membership materials, including two membership applications, a copy of an SUVCW organizational descriptive leaflet, and an invitation to the next Camp meeting.

Prompt follow-up is extremely important. Once someone expresses an interest in joining, the inquiry should receive immediate attention. A prospective member's enthusiasm may diminish if weeks pass without further communication. As the old expression advises, **“Strike while the iron is hot!”**

When an application is sent, whether by mail or electronically, assistance should always be offered in case the applicant has questions or encounters difficulty completing the application.

Prospective members should also be kept informed about upcoming Camp activities. A Camp may have a ceremony, monument dedication, historical program, social gathering, or other activity before its next regular meeting. Inviting a prospective member to such an event provides an opportunity to meet the Brothers in a relaxed setting and begin developing a sense of belonging within the Camp.

(C.) Keeping track of applicants' progress in completing membership applications.

This responsibility is straightforward but can easily be overlooked.

Sending an application does not necessarily mean that it will automatically be completed and returned. Periodic follow-up is appropriate to determine whether the applicant has questions or requires assistance.

When questions arise concerning genealogy, eligibility, documentation, or other matters beyond the Junior Vice Commander's expertise, the applicant should be referred to a Brother who can provide appropriate assistance.

The objective is not to pressure an individual into joining. Rather, it is to ensure that an interested applicant does not become discouraged or forgotten because of a question or obstacle that could easily have been resolved.

(D.) Encouraging delinquent Brothers to remain in the Order.

Retention can be one of the most challenging responsibilities of the Junior Vice Commander. Brothers may become inactive or consider leaving the Order for many reasons. Loss of interest may be one factor, but financial hardship, transportation difficulties, health concerns, family responsibilities, or other personal circumstances may also be involved.

The most important response is simple: **reach out and determine the reason.**

For example, a Brother experiencing financial hardship may believe that resignation or nonpayment of dues is the only available option. A Camp may consider establishing a voluntary **Benevolent Fund** through which Brothers can quietly assist members who temporarily need help paying their dues.

Such a program can accomplish more than simply retaining membership. Brothers who receive assistance during difficult circumstances may later choose to contribute to the fund themselves, allowing one act of Fraternity to assist future Brothers facing similar hardships.

Transportation can also become an issue, particularly for elderly Brothers. A Brother who can no longer drive may gradually stop attending meetings and eventually begin to feel disconnected from the Camp. Arranging transportation through another Brother may provide a simple solution and preserve that Brother's active connection to the Camp.

Technology can also help. Camps may wish to consider hybrid meetings in which Brothers gather in person while also providing access through Zoom or another videoconferencing platform. Brothers who are homebound because of illness, disability, distance, or transportation difficulties can thereby continue participating in the life of the Camp.

Every reasonable effort should be made to ensure that each Brother continues to feel valued and connected to the Camp.

(E.) Presiding at Camp meetings in the absence of both the Camp Commander and Senior Vice Commander.

The Junior Vice Commander is part of the Camp's leadership succession and should therefore be familiar with the Ritual and Ceremonies, the Order's governing documents, the Camp bylaws, and the proper conduct of a Camp meeting.

Circumstances may require the Junior Vice Commander to preside over a meeting with little advance notice. Familiarity with the procedures and responsibilities of the Commander will ensure that the Camp's business can continue properly and efficiently.

(F.) Carrying out other responsibilities delegated to the office by the Camp bylaws, the Camp, or the Camp Commander.

Every Camp operates somewhat differently. Camp bylaws may assign additional responsibilities to the Junior Vice Commander, and the Camp or Camp Commander may delegate particular assignments to the office.

The Junior Vice Commander should not be regarded merely as an officer waiting to advance to the next position. **It is an active office with important responsibilities for recruitment, membership, retention, and the overall health of the Camp.**

PROCESSING A MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Once an application has been received, additional procedures must be followed.

Article II, Section 1, concerning membership, provides:

“Each application for membership shall be recommended by a Brother of the Camp who shall vouch for the applicant's eligibility and moral character. It shall be then referred to a committee of three (of which the Brother recommending shall not be one) for investigation and report. The Committee shall make a careful investigation of the facts set forth in the application and shall recommend the election or rejection of the applicant.”

The requirement that an application be referred to an investigating committee is sometimes overlooked. It is, however, an important part of the membership process and should be followed.

The investigating committee consists of three Brothers. The Brother recommending the applicant may not serve on the committee. The Camp Junior Vice Commander and Camp Secretary may be appropriate members of the committee because of their involvement in the membership process, provided neither is the recommending Brother and their service is otherwise consistent with the Order's governing documents.

The investigating committee should make a reasonable and careful effort to verify the information contained in the application and satisfy itself regarding the applicant's eligibility and character. The purpose of the investigation is not to create unnecessary obstacles to membership, but to ensure that the requirements of the Order have been properly satisfied.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What should be done with genealogical research and proof of military service submitted with an application?

Once the applicant's lineage and the ancestor's qualifying service have been satisfactorily established, supporting genealogical documentation should ordinarily be returned to the applicant unless retention is required by the Order's current procedures.

The Camp should retain and forward only those records required by current Department and National procedures. The Camp Secretary should ensure that the appropriate applications, reports, dues, and fees are transmitted to the Department Secretary in accordance with those requirements.

There is generally no need for a Camp to accumulate copies of an applicant's personal genealogical documentation after eligibility has been established and the documentation is no longer required.

What if the Camp does not meet for three or four months? How can action be taken on an applicant?

An application that has completed the investigation process should not be allowed to remain unnecessarily pending for several months simply because another regular Camp meeting is not scheduled.

Once the investigating committee has completed its work and recommended the applicant, the appropriate procedure under the Order's governing documents and Camp bylaws should be determined.

When permitted, the Camp Commander may consider calling a special meeting for the purpose of acting upon the application rather than requiring the applicant to wait several months for the next regular meeting.

Once elected, the new Brother should be welcomed into the Camp, and arrangements should be made for the Oath of Obligation and appropriate initiation ceremony at the earliest suitable opportunity.

RECRUITING IDEAS

Recruitment is most effective when the public has opportunities to see the SUVCW actively carrying out its mission. Camp activities, historical programs, commemorative events, community partnerships, and public presentations can all provide opportunities to introduce prospective members to the Order. These are only suggestions and Camps and Departments should feel free to explore their own ideas.

Living History Programs and Public Presentations

Many Camps conduct outstanding living history programs that interpret the experiences of Union soldiers, sailors, and marines. These programs can be highly effective in generating public interest in Civil War history and the mission of the SUVCW.

Care should be taken to ensure that the public does not mistake the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War for a reenacting organization. Although living history can be an effective means of historical interpretation, the SUVCW is a hereditary, patriotic, historical, educational, and commemorative organization dedicated to perpetuating the memory of the Grand Army of the Republic and the men who preserved the Union.

One way to reinforce this distinction is to have some Brothers participate in period uniforms while others represent the organization in modern attire. Camp shirts or

other appropriate organizational apparel can provide a professional and recognizable appearance while helping identify participating Brothers as members of the SUVCW.

Camps considering the creation of shirts or other merchandise bearing SUVCW names, emblems, or insignia should ensure compliance with the Order's current merchandise licensing requirements, including submission of the appropriate Merchandise License Request Form when required.

Public presentations should not be limited to Camp-sponsored events. Many community organizations actively seek speakers and historical programs. Opportunities may exist with historical societies, libraries, schools, veteran's organizations, Scout organizations, Masonic Lodges, churches, civic associations, museums, and other community groups.

If using a Public Library one idea might be to hold "Find your Civil War Ancestor." This way the public could come in, and Brothers could assist them in finding information about their ancestor and help identify service. When doing an event like this, Brothers might wish to display Civil War and GAR artifacts.

When setting up recruiting tables at events you should include SUVCW pamphlets, wooden nickels and contact information about your Camp. Camps and Departments may wish to invest in a vinyl Camp Parade Banner. This creates a high visibility and many assist in drawing prospective members over.

There are Camps that have events such as cleaning debris in cemeteries, cleaning gravestones, setting new gravestones and placing flags especially on Memorial Day. This is also a high visibility event and care should be taken when doing these events especially with the use of any power tools, cleaning products and especially if Junior members are involved.

Every public program provides an opportunity to educate the community about the SUVCW, promote its mission, and potentially reach individuals who may be eligible and interested in membership.

Recruiting Materials

The National Quartermaster provides a variety of materials that can assist Camps with recruitment and public awareness.

SUVCW promotional pamphlets are particularly useful at public events and presentations. Camps can add local contact information so that an interested individual knows how to obtain additional information or begin the membership process.

Wooden nickels and similar promotional items can also serve as useful conversation starters. They are inexpensive, easy to distribute, and provide an opportunity to introduce members of the public to the SUVCW and its mission.

Recruiting materials are most effective when accompanied by personal interaction. A pamphlet may introduce the organization, but a welcoming conversation with a Brother can create the personal connection that encourages someone to learn more.

Whenever possible, Camps should have membership information readily available at ceremonies, historical programs, monument dedications, parades, living history events, community presentations, and other public activities.

Recruitment Is More Than Finding New Members

Successful recruitment does not end when an application is submitted.

The complete process includes:

Generating interest → Making personal contact → Assisting with the application → Welcoming the applicant → Completing the membership process → Conducting the initiation → Encouraging participation → Retaining the Brother

Each step is important.

A new Brother who is elected but never personally welcomed, initiated, introduced to other Brothers, or encouraged to participate may quickly lose interest. Recruitment and retention should therefore be viewed as parts of the same continuing process.

The objective is not simply to increase membership numbers. The objective is to develop **active, engaged Brothers who understand the mission of the Order and want to participate in carrying it forward.**

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The responsibilities of the Junior Vice Commander extend beyond recruiting and processing applications. Familiarity with the Constitution and Regulations, Ritual and Ceremonies, Camp bylaws, membership procedures, and the programs and resources of the Order will make the office more effective.

Memorial University provides educational resources designed to increase knowledge of the SUVCW, its history, organization, procedures, and mission. Junior Vice Commanders are encouraged to take advantage of these resources as part of their preparation for leadership within the Order.

Questions should also be directed to experienced Camp and Department officers whenever clarification or assistance is needed. No officer is expected to assume office already knowing every procedure. Effective leadership includes knowing where to obtain accurate information and being willing to seek guidance when necessary.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Serving as Camp Junior Vice Commander can be one of the most rewarding positions in the Camp. The office provides an opportunity to introduce descendants of Union veterans to the SUVCW, welcome new Brothers into the fraternity, strengthen the participation of existing Brothers, and help build the future of the Order.

The most successful Junior Vice Commanders will make the office their own while remaining guided by the Constitution and Regulations, Ritual and Ceremonies, Camp bylaws, and the principles of **Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty.**

Every new Brother represents another opportunity to preserve the memory of the men who fought to save the Union.

Every Brother who remains active strengthens the Camp.

Every Camp that grows stronger helps ensure the continued strength of the Order.

Membership is the responsibility of every Brother, but the Junior Vice Commander holds a particularly important responsibility for turning interest into membership, membership into involvement, and involvement into lasting commitment to the Order.

The work of the Junior Vice Commander is therefore not simply about recruiting members. It is about building the next generation of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.