



THE AMERICAN LEGION

DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK

DATE: January 12, 2026

TO: All American Legion Accredited Representatives and District Veterans Services Committee Chairmen and all Legionnaires

FROM: Eilene Fisher, Department Veterans Services Committee Chairman

SUBJECT: The American Legion, Department of N.Y.
Service Officer of The Year Award (S.O.O.T.Y.)

Please find below the application and the procedures for the "***2026 Service Officer of the Year Award.***" Also enclosed is a sample resume to use as a reference. Please pay particular attention to the ***pre-requisites and criteria*** sections of the guidelines when completing the application. Nominations must be emailed to myself at fishervavs@outlook.com. Nominations for *Service Officer of the Year* can be submitted by anyone including the Nominee. **District Veterans Services Committee Chairs** are requested **to assist** with identifying potential candidates and with the submission of applications for nominees from their respective counties. Nominations will only be considered for the year for which they are submitted. To be considered for a subsequent year, nominations must be submitted (or resubmitted with appropriate up-dating) for that subsequent year. Nomination format required is attached and must be in Times New Roman, font size 12.

The application can either be emailed to fishervavs@outlook.com or snail mailed to Department of NY HQ's, ATTN: SOOTY, 1304 Park Blvd, Troy, NY 12180. They must be received by **March 31, 2026**, and meet the **required guidelines**.

Thank you for your support and cooperation. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me and I will be glad to assist you.

APPLICATION
FOR
THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF NEW YORK
SERVICE OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARD

NOMINEE'S NAME: _____

VETERAN SERVICE AGENCY: _____

NOMINATED BY: _____

NOMINATION CRITERIA: (Please refer to the criteria section (A-I) on page 3 of the guidelines. Use additional sheets if needed)

The American Legion, Department of New York

Veterans Services Committee

Service Officer of the Year Award

Purpose: To recognize and encourage extraordinary dedication and technical expertise of professional service officers in executing advocacy services for military personnel, veterans, and their dependents.

Personnel: The Sub-Committee members shall be appointed annually by the Department Veterans Services Committee Chairman-or a designee of the Chairman and shall be comprised of an odd number of members including The Department Service Officers from the Buffalo and the New York City DVA Regional Offices, and such other members as may be deemed appropriate by the appointing authority. The Department Veterans Services Committee Chairman shall be an ex-officio member of the Sub-Committee.

Procedures:

- a) The Sub-Committee shall be appointed no later than three months prior to Mid-Winter Conference.
- b) Solicitations for nominees shall be mailed by the two Department Service Officer Sub-Committee members to the counties under their respective jurisdictions no later than two months prior to Mid-Winter Conference, and said nominations shall be presented in a standardized format, which shall be devised-and, modified from time to time - by those Department Service Officers.
- c) The criteria for the selection of the award recipient shall be established - and modified as necessary - by the Sub-Committee members, and approved by the Department Veterans Services Committee.
- d) The Sub-Committee shall meet in conjunction with the Mid-Winter Conference, and shall select the award recipient by majority vote.
- e) The name of the selected recipient shall be revealed only to the Department Adjutant, and through the Adjutant to those charged with preparing the award. The information needed to prepare the award shall be provided to the Department Adjutant by the Sub-Committee Chairman.
- f) The Sub-Committee Chairman shall make such contacts as may be needed to insure the recipient's attendance at the award presentation.
- g) The Department Adjutant shall secure for the selected award recipient a high-quality plaque and a regulation American Legion cap embroidered with the words **Service Officer of the Year** and the year of the award.

Service Officer of the Year Award (continued)

- h)** The recipient shall be recognized by presentation of the engraved plaque and the specially embroidered American Legion cap.
- i)** Only one **Service Officer of the Year Award** shall be presented annually, and such presentation shall occur before the delegates to the Department Convention convened immediately following the selection process.

Publicity:

- a)** A letter of commendation on official Department letterhead to the recipient's appointing authority shall be prepared by the Chairman of the Sub-Committee for the signature of the Department Commander who shall preside over the Department Convention immediately following the selection process. The letter shall be mailed the day of the award presentation.
- b)** News releases shall be prepared by the Sub-Committee chairman in advance of the award presentation, and transmitted on the day of the presentation by the fastest method to the print and electronic media in the receipt's area of jurisdiction.

Pre-Requisites:

- a)** The recipient must be an active member of The American Legion and accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as an American Legion Accredited Representative.
- b)** The recipient **shall not** receive the **Service Officer of the Year Award** more than one time.
- c)** A nominee shall be considered a candidate only for the year for which the nomination is submitted. *(To be considered for a subsequent year, a nomination must be submitted- or re-submitted with appropriate up dating for that subsequent year.)*
- d)** The recipient may receive the award posthumously.

Funding:

- a)** The Department of New York shall cover the cost of an engraved plaque, a specially embroidered American Legion cap, and mailing expenses.
- b)** The Department of New York shall provide travel expenses and one day diem expenses for the recipient of the award, as may be required, to attend the Department Convention to receive the award.
- c)** The Department of New York shall cover the cost of such additional incidental expenses as may be authorized by the Department Adjutant.

Service Officer of the Year Award (continued)

Criteria:

- A)** Quality of the development of claims.
- B)** Volume of claims submitted (in proportion to population served).
- C)** Difficulty or complexity of claims.
- D)** Innovative programs or procedures
- E)** Cooperation or involvement with the other agencies, committees' groups such as: Dept. of Corrections, Dept. of Labor, Social Services, National Coalition for the Homeless, American Legion Veterans Services Committee, National Association of Dept. Service Officers, County Veterans' Service Officers Association, VA Management Assistance Council, etc;
- F)** Participation in civic or community associations, such as: Little League, scouting, patriotic observances, other volunteer work; etc.
- G)** Enhancement of the American Legion's image.
- H)** Length of service to veterans, military personnel, and their dependents.
- I)** Other significant achievements.

Nomination format required is Times New Roman, font size 12.

**SAMPLE RESUME DERIVED FROM PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED
NOMINATIONS
CRITERIA: A to I**

A. Quality of Development of Claims:

The quality of the development of claims has become a top priority for this agency. Its participation in various training sessions enables it to be well informed concerning the reorganization of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and the Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA). The U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) has heightened the degree of difficulty in correctly applying the decision in an advantageous manner. XXXXXX, as an Accredited Representative, truly takes part in the team effort with the Department Service Officers in the development of quality claims.

B. Volume of Claims Submitted in Proportion to the Population Served:

The XXXX County Veterans Service Agency, under XXXXX's direction, has been the leading county agency in regard to the volume of claims submitted in proportion to the population served. XXXX County has also submitted the most Power of Attorneys using The American Legion as its Service Organization.

C. Difficulty of Claims Pursued:

The knowledge of information resources for appeals has also been a high priority for this agency. The number of difficult claims that are pursued through the appeals process is numerous. The claims that XXXXX submits are very complicated and require medical knowledge which includes a very thorough familiarity with diagnostic criteria and the use of reference material to include Dorland's Medical Dictionary, the Physicians' Desk Reference, The Merck Manual, Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary and the DSM IV Manual of Mental Disorders. 38 U.S. Code and 38 Code of Federal Regulations are also frequently used in claim development.

D. Innovative Programs and/or Procedures:

XXXX has created a Veterans Agency Outreach Program. The Veterans Service Agency travels to the rural areas of the county, utilizing American Legion Posts to meet with veterans and dependents to assist them in applying for benefits. He/she has also planned a county American Legion Benefits Awareness Training Session for local Post Service Officers to become familiarized with current VA benefits and State benefits.

E. Inter-Agency Cooperation and/or Involvement:

XXXX has created a pilot program with the Department of Labor and the Department of Social Services. This program provides an on-site DVOP officer to be available for Social Services referrals who are veterans that are out of work. This

program has been extremely successful and other Counties Department of Social Services are now looking at implementing the same program within their County Veterans Service Agency.

F. Participation with Associations, Committees, and Professional Groups:

1. American Legion County Service Officer
2. Active member of County Veterans Service Officers Association and the National Veterans Service Officer Association
3. New York State Council of Veterans Organizations, Legislative Representative on behalf of N.Y.S. Service Officers Association
4. Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. Co-Chair of incarcerated Veterans; National Level.
5. Joint Veterans Advisory Council XXXXX County
6. American Legion PUFL member Post XXX
7. Member of Vietnam Veterans Chapter XX
8. Member of Knights of Columbus, XXXXX Council XXX
9. DAV Life Member, Post XX
- IO.VFW member, Post XXX

G. Enhancement of The American Legion's Image:

XXXXX participates in countywide memorial services and parades. He/she serves as an oratorical judge. He/she attends political functions for labor/Homeless in XXXXX, as well as the county fair with American Legion Posts.

H. Longevity of Service:

XXXXX has been employed as a County Service Officer for the past five years and also has three years' experience in the Department of Corrections as a veterans' service officer.

I. Other Significant Achievements:

XXXXX is participating in the Vocational Rehabilitation Bachelor's Degree program at XXXXX College. He/she has also earned an Associate's degree from XXXXX College. Worked on behalf of his/her veterans through the VAMC to establish a VA Primary Care Medical Health Clinic in the county.