



Public Relations Toolkit

Produced by the Media & Communications Division
of The American Legion



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Section One / Introduction

Engagement in the 2020s

This morning's newspaper is already old news. The same may be said for an American Legion post newsletter emailed to members as a PDF attachment yesterday. To a member of Gen Z, Facebook is for their parents and grandparents.

Yet all these forms of media can play an important role in any American Legion public relations program. They just don't always have the starring role.

The American Legion is proud to have members of every generation dating back to World War II. Additionally, the American Legion Family includes children too young to have served in the military. Each group has preferred methods of communication, along with differing expectations of the organization's activities and programs.

Membership, which is the lifeblood of The American Legion, is not the only group to consider when delivering our message. A successful PR program will consider, but not be limited to, all of the following:

- Members
- Media
- Local, state and national elected officials
- Community leaders
- Other organizations
- The public
- Youth, educators and parents
- Business community
- Potential members and donors

Public relations isn't complicated. It's right there in the name: the relationship shared by The American Legion with the public. In most cases, this relationship is a positive one, thanks to the Legion's reputation – built on over a century of community service and advocacy.

Positive public relations isn't a one-time task either; it has to be continuous, cultivated and nurtured. One misstep can cause long-term damage to the relationship (see **Crisis Management & Prevention, Section Six**).

This toolkit will help you enhance the image of The American Legion through positive communication and messaging.

Another purpose of this manual is to provide assistance for all levels of PR practitioners, from novices to experienced professionals. Because The American Legion is a community-based organization of volunteers, it's not unusual for a PR chairperson to have little or no experience in that field. Some posts may also have experienced media producers among their members or on staff.

While there isn't one right way to run an effective PR program, there are many ways to conduct poor public relations. Knowing what to avoid is a big part of the formula.

The American Legion *Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies* does not include a charge of responsibilities for the installation of a public relations chair. If it did, it might go something like this:

You will promote, produce and attract positive publicity about the positions and programs of The American Legion and our four founding pillars of a strong national defense, veterans affairs, patriotic youth programs and Americanism. You will spread the message that The American Legion practices its motto of Veterans Strengthening America.

You will remind the public that veterans, the military and their families in (name of community) have no better advocate than American Legion Post ____.

This is your charge.

Rarely does a soldier take a hill alone. Usually it takes a team. Moreover, the public and the media are not your enemies. Instead, they are necessary allies in the mission to share our messages.

Use the tools offered in these pages to fill your PR toolbox. Take advantage of the talents offered by American Legion Family members at your post. Most important, have fun telling The American Legion's story. Forward march!



Communicate with your members

Internal media is often knocked as “preaching to the choir.” While it’s true your intended audience already belongs to the American Legion Family, communicating with these members is essential to keeping them. Moreover, their participation and advocacy are only possible if they’re informed.

Useful as social media, websites and podcasts are, post newsletters and department newspapers, which date back to the earliest days of The American Legion, remain effective and essential.

An informative and entertaining internal publication can be an incentive to join and remain a member of the American Legion Family. Keep in mind, though, that it will likely be seen by people outside the organization; never use your publication as a forum for political agendas, gossip or subjects best discussed in executive sessions. Military leadership schools often stress the need to praise in public and counsel in private. Like the word from which it is derived, a publication is by nature public. Newsletters are a great way to recognize award winners, outstanding volunteers and new members. They can also issue calls to action on legislation, remind members of upcoming meetings and announce new additions to the post menu.

LEGIONTOWN U.S.A.

An easy and free way to share the stories of your post, district or department is the Legiontown website, legiontown.org. All content at Legiontown is user generated. It’s a great place to celebrate the great work of your local American Legion Family with a national audience.

After registering, you can submit content, which undergoes a brief editing and legal review process before posting.

Editors of the *The American Legion Magazine* and national website often search the Legiontown site for article ideas and possible follow-up.

The American Legion Magazine doesn’t have room to publish every story about an outstanding post, unit or squadron, but Legiontown is your opportunity to spotlight what they do.

Though many of the same guidelines for producing a paper newsletter apply to e-newsletters, the convenience of email makes the latter a hybrid of internal and external media. An email message sent to the post membership is considered internal media, though a larger post might benefit more from an actual newsletter that aims to reach a broader audience.

Many web tutorials explain how to produce quality newsletters. Templates are easily accessible through Google and other search engines.

Common ingredients for award-winning internal publications include:

1. **Relevant content** – The best way to determine readers’ interests is to survey them. Even if it’s an informal poll of people at your post, ask what they most want to read about in their newsletter.
2. **Compelling headlines** – Read the story and sum it up in a few punchy words. Use action verbs. Grab the reader.
3. **Style** – Grammar has some universal rules, but a consistent style helps the reader as much as the editor. Know your audience, too. Most veterans know what an NCO is, but those who never served in the military are less familiar. *The Associated Press Stylebook* is published annually and used by newspapers, magazines and PR offices across the country. The American Legion also has its own in-house style guide at legion.org/publications. Servicemember or service member? Boys’ State or Boys State? *The American Legion Publication Style Guide* answers these questions and more.
4. **Consistent intervals** – Publish regularly. Be sure the material is current.
5. **Attractive art and graphics** – See Sections Twelve and Thirteen.
6. **Proofreading** – Check for accuracy, style, grammar and spelling. It’s strongly recommended to have another set of eyes review the material before it’s published.
7. **Legal review** – If your post has a judge advocate or an attorney among the membership, it’s wise to get a legal opinion of the material. A copyright violation or libel lawsuit can jeopardize the financial solvency of any American Legion post.



Section Three / External Media

The real ‘X factor’

Your American Legion post’s success in getting coverage from external media outlets comes down to this question: Does the editor or producer want to?

There is no fairness mandate requiring your local newspaper or TV station to cover American Legion activities. Editorial page editors are free to publish or reject any submission they receive. TV and radio stations exercise discretion every day in what they choose to cover.

That’s why a positive relationship with local media is so important. Without it, they might ignore your post’s positive accomplishments and service to the community, or even harm The American Legion’s reputation with negative coverage, fairly or unfairly.

We’ll further explore ways to strengthen relationships with the media in Sections Six and Seven. But know that media outlets have standards that prohibit them from covering events with no news value or were so poorly pitched that they failed to see the value.

For now, let’s focus on external media products, including news releases, media advisories, opinion-editorials (op-eds) and letters to the editor.

News releases

Also known as press releases or statements, these products resemble news articles but are rarely printed verbatim. Craft a release as if you were reading it through the eyes of a nonmember. This will help you determine what is most important to the reader.

Write the news release on letterhead, with the post, district or department information on top.

Sometimes it is better to write the headline last. By then, the writer has a better idea of which words summarize the overall message.

The first paragraph is called the lead. It should capture the audience’s attention and include as many of the who, what, when, where, why and how elements as possible. The most important element will not always be the same. For instance, did the governor just accept an invitation to be the keynote speaker at your post’s

Memorial Day observance? If so, that’s your lead. If the point of the news release is to announce that the location of the observance has changed, that’s your lead.

Next comes the body. If it’s a multilayered series of announcements or a highly detailed release about complex legislation, use transitions to prepare the reader for what follows, heading off the question, “Why am I reading this?”

A news release should be one or two pages, no more. Editors like brevity. If a release doesn’t get to the point quickly, it will likely be ignored or discarded. Conclude with the name, number and email address of a knowledgeable point of contact.

Annex A includes examples of news releases that can serve as templates for your American Legion post or department. By frequently visiting legion.org and monitoring the latest news releases from National Headquarters, you can “localize” the statement. For instance, if a National Headquarters release is critical of cuts to the Department of Veterans Affairs budget, your release can quote the post commander about how those budget measures would affect the local VA hospital. If the national commander is promoting veterans outreach through the Buddy Check program, talk about Buddy Check efforts going on at your post. Local editors and media outlets want to know what is happening in *your* community.

Media advisories

Again, news releases are rarely published in their entirety. A media advisory is even less likely to be published “as is.” That’s OK. The intended target is not the media audience, but the assignment editor of an external media outlet. See the release as a quick and efficient tool to alert news directors and editors of your upcoming event and invite their teams to cover it, using a media advisory.

Because assignment editors are often overwhelmed with message traffic, follow the Joe Friday rule: “Just the facts!”



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Revitalizing American Legion Post (###) (City or town) veterans wanted

(CITY) (Month date, year) – Veterans of the (city, state) American Legion are looking to expand their services to the community. The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, is inviting all veterans in the area to help revitalize **American Legion (post name & number)**.

Officers and staff members of the Indianapolis-based American Legion National Headquarters and Washington, D.C., office will be in town (day, date) through (day, date).

A "welcome home" ceremony for all veterans and current military members will be held at **(address, day, date, time from/to)**. Membership and veterans' benefit experts will be available at that location on (day, date, time). **Veterans with questions may call (name, number)**.

In keeping with the organization's stated "devotion to mutual helpfulness," the revitalized American Legion post in (city or town) will focus on local community service and assistance to veterans. The scope and nature of the post's community service will be determined by its members and input from civic and community officials.

"Our American Legion post has served veterans in the area for 35 years," Post (###) Commander Jane Smith said. "We are using this opportunity to remind veterans who may be new to this town about all of the great programs, opportunities to serve and assistance we provide. Veterans of all eras enjoy a strong bond, and that camaraderie is extremely important to us. The American Legion is a major voice in Washington, and by re-energizing our efforts here at home, we can have a major impact in our community and state."

Any military member currently serving or veteran who has honorably served at any time since Dec. 7, 1941, is eligible for membership in The American Legion. Service officers in The American Legion will assist veterans and their family members with obtaining their benefits free of charge, regardless of membership in the organization.

About The American Legion

The American Legion is the largest U.S. veterans organization with nearly 2 million members in more than 12,000 posts across the nation and in foreign countries. Chartered by Congress in 1919, The American Legion is dedicated to the motto of "Veterans Strengthening America." Legionnaires accomplish this through the organization's four founding pillars of mentoring youth and sponsoring wholesome community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security, and continued devotion to servicemembers and veterans.

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Media contact: Name, title, cell phone number, e-mail address



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

MEDIA ADVISORY

American Legion state commander visiting (town name, post) to discuss proposed legislation

Who	Department (state) American Legion Commander John Doe
What	Will meet with American Legion members to discuss the governor's proposal to exempt military retirement pay from state income tax and other legislation affecting veterans under consideration by state lawmakers. Members of the media can call Post xxx Vice Commander Mary Smith at (555) 555-5555 or email her at msmith@email.com to arrange an exclusive interview with Department Commander Doe.
When	Date and time
Where	American Legion Post ###, street address
Why	Delegates at American Legion Department of (state) convention strongly endorsed the governor's proposal to exempt military pensions from state income tax and passed a resolution of support. Military retirees earned their benefits by serving their nation at home and overseas, sometimes risking their lives in war zones. The proposed tax exemptions would send a message of appreciation to these veterans and encourage other military retirees to consider relocating to this military-friendly state.
Media contacts	Name, title, cell phone, email address

Find more examples of media advisories in Annex B.

Make it a practice to send a media advisory two weeks prior to an event, with a follow-up reminder to the assignment editors a day or two out. Remember, newsrooms receive hundreds of messages and thousands of spam emails. After sending your advisory by email or fax, drop by the newsroom if possible. At a minimum, follow up with a phone call and ask the editor if he or she has seen your advisory. If not, send it again. In the news business, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. But be sure that the squeaks are polite and grateful for the interest, instead of overbearing and threatening. The editor may have a good reason for not being able to cover your event. Don't hurt your chances of getting coverage for the next one.

Op-eds

You want your op-ed or commentary published close to its original wording, unlike news releases and media advisories. That doesn't mean that you should resist copy-editing or suggestions from editors, only that you should submit a high-quality piece that can be published without major rewriting or revisions. It's a great way to bring attention to your American Legion post or department.

A good op-ed should be about 500 to 700 words. If writing as a representative of The American Legion, do not include personal opinion. The piece's position should be supported by the American Legion Constitution or by post, department or national resolutions. Absolutely avoid partisan, political and personal attacks.

Increase the chances of publication by pitching the idea to the opinion-page editor prior to writing. Timing matters. For instance, if you want to write about Veterans Day and members of the community who served, call the opinion editor in October and suggest it for the following month. The editor may offer ideas on what direction the piece should take. This also lets the editorial department know it's coming and that space should be held.

Do your own fact-checking before submitting an op-ed. Misspelling names of local war heroes is not just hurtful to their families but embarrassing to The American Legion. Editors hate to run corrections, and if put

in that position, are less likely to publish your future submissions.

Newspapers and magazines often require "exclusivity" in op-eds and letters to the editor. This means you should not offer the same material to other outlets and avoid posting it online or in your newsletter. Many editors will not object to you republishing it in your own media, but check with them first, and always credit the original outlet when mentioning that it is a reprint.

Most op-eds include a one-sentence biography about the writer. And if the post has a website, include it. An example would be, *Jeff Jenkins is a Gulf War veteran and commander of American Legion Post 123 in Anytown. www.alpost123.org*

Letters to the editor

Generally, letters to the editor are 200 words or shorter. Letters most likely to be published address hot topics or respond to items published in a recent issue.

Positive messaging about The American Legion is synonymous with good public relations.

Rather than decry a problem or object to a recent article, start the letter on a positive note. If the nature of the topic or original article is negative, the subsequent letter should offer a proposed solution.

In response to a piece about The American Legion that was published in *Harris Farmer's Almanac*, then-National Commander Denise H. Rohan sent such a letter to editor Nancy Tappan. (see page 11)

Not only was The American Legion fortunate to receive positive publicity in the articles praised by Past National Commander Rohan, but she was able to add to it with her letter – one that oozed positivity and strengthened the warm feelings that the almanac's editorial staff already had toward The American Legion.

Department and post officers can get the same results with local media outlets in their areas. Letters to the editor are free and usually require less time to prepare than op-eds and news releases. They are also an opportunity to mention programs and upcoming events at your American Legion post.



★ NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS ★ PO BOX 1055 ★ INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46206-1055 ★
(317) 630-1200 ★ FAX (317) 630-1223 ★ WEBSITE www.legion.org ★



August 2, 2018

Dear Ms. Tappan,

I thoroughly enjoyed the articles “A Salute to The American Legion” by Veda Boyd Jones and “The Poppy Lady” by Diana West. The American Legion, like the rest of society, has changed a lot over the last century, but what remains the same are our values and love for this great country. It is fitting that you chose the 2019 edition of the *Farmer’s Almanac* to tell our story – one that began exactly 100 years earlier in Paris, France.

With more than 3 million members, the American Legion Family continues to serve communities from coast to coast and even overseas. And if anyone asks if we are feeling old, I’ll just point out that *Farmer’s Almanac* has been publishing great material since 1692!

Thank you for not only sharing these great stories, but for 326 years of features, forecasts and facts.

Sincerely,

Denise H. Rohan
National Commander
The American Legion



Planning produces professional PR

Public events don't just happen. They're created and planned. Successful public events aren't always measured by attendance alone. Some call for participation and audience engagement.

A campaign can include an actual event, but it usually requires a call to action. Whether it's a one-hour event, a multi-day festival or an awareness campaign, planning begins with a mission statement.

To ensure the mission statement has the full support of those tasked with implementing it, it's a good idea to make it the first item on the organizers' agenda.

An event can be divided into three phases: planning, execution, and lessons learned. Each phase has multiple steps. First, let's outline what needs done to make the event successful.

1. Planning

- a. Idea. Joe Legionnaire thinks "Wouldn't it be neat if our post ...?"
- b. Joe discusses his idea with Post Commander Sallie, who concurs. They recruit active volunteers to serve on a team to make the event happen.
- c. The event team crafts a mission statement that is intended to keep everyone focused throughout the process.
- d. An outline or written plan is developed. It should include the five Ws and one H. Also include an inclement weather plan, especially if the intended site is outdoors.
- e. Contact other organizations, public officials, leaders, schools and others you'd like to see participate. If there is a military tie-in, contact local recruiters, base officials, and reserve and Guard members.
- f. Develop a written agenda and script for the event. Consider staples such as advancement of colors, national anthem, invocation, speaker line-up, proclamations, benediction, retirement of colors and closing.
- g. Seek sponsors. This could certainly enlarge your budget. Approaching them with your

plan is vital if you seek their financial support. The business or corporation should be assured of positive PR value in exchange for their support.

- h. Launch a media blitz. Use news releases, media advisories, commentaries and letters to the editor to inform the public of your upcoming event. Announce on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other social media accounts. Include internal media tools. Consider paid advertising if budget allows. Pitch public service announcements to media outlets.
- i. Rehearse. Be sure to check the sound and equipment. Do you have back-ups in case speakers cancel at the last minute?
- j. Call your media contacts again the day prior or even the morning of the event as a friendly reminder.

2. Execution

- a. Ensure sufficient volunteers and staff are on site. Some events should include security.
- b. Greet media. Answer questions and thank reporters and producers for covering the event.
- c. Enjoy the event. Even after meticulous planning, it's important to be flexible. Last-second changes can sometimes improve an event and are often not even noticed by those who attend.

3. Lessons learned

- a. A good after-action report (AAR) includes dates and times of meetings, decisions made, the rationale behind those decisions, and details of how and when tasks were accomplished. The author of the report should specify his or her role in the operation.

Each topic addressed in the AAR should be broken down into 1) observations (What was supposed to happen? What actually happened?), 2) the impact each decision had on the mission, and 3) conclusion. Should we do this again? How can we make it better?

- b. Make it accessible. An AAR is useless if it is shelved and gathers dust. It shouldn't be a "blame document," and you should expect it to be read. Ensure future leadership teams and volunteers know of the AAR so they can apply some of the lessons learned and repeat past successes. Many one-time events are so successful they evolve into annual extravaganzas.

Campaigns

While events are usually single occurrences, a campaign is a series of operations with a goal in mind. Public awareness and fundraising can be goals of both a campaign and an event.

Like an event, campaigns require planning.

The first task undertaken by the campaign committee should be the crafting of a mission statement. It needs to answer two questions: 1) What is the purpose of this campaign? 2). What do we want to accomplish?

When planning a campaign, remember to "start SMART." A SMART campaign objective is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

An example would be, *Support veterans and their families by increasing District 4 donations to the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation by 20% over this calendar year.*

The *specific* change in behavior that this objective addresses is an increase in District 4 donations to the Veterans & Children Foundation by 20% this year. It includes the 5 Ws: who, what, when, where and why.

The *measurable* aspect is the 20% objective. The final district fundraising results should be compared with the previous year to see if the objective was met.

Achievable objectives are important. Goals should be ambitious but realistic. It is unlikely that any district could raise \$1 billion, but a 20% donation increase over the previous year is certainly achievable through awareness, hard work and the generosity of the community.

Increasing donations to the Veterans & Children Foundation is also *relevant*, because it supports veterans and their families – a founding pillar of The American Legion.

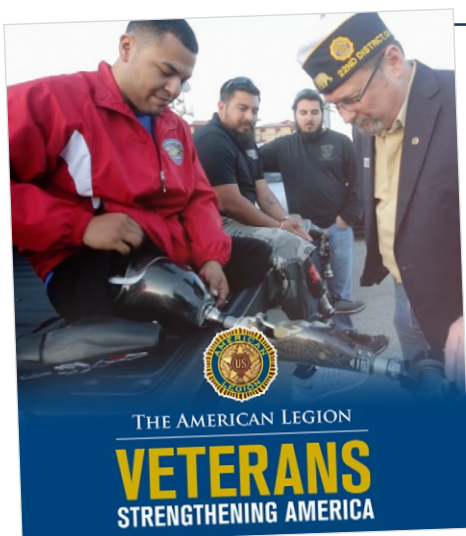
Finally, the campaign is *time-bound*, with a start point and end point – this calendar year.

Much like event-planning, a media blitz can make the difference for a campaign's success. The public has to know about a program to donate to it. The media can greatly multiply your ability to deliver the message. News releases, social media, op-eds and letters to the editor will all have an effect, along with posters placed on bulletin boards and in restaurants, businesses and other high-traffic areas.

Many campaigns include events. Media advisories can highlight an event or offer a spokesperson to give interviews on the topic.

The American Legion National Headquarters has a wealth of different brochures, booklets, guides, posters, ads, suggested speeches and other materials that can serve as models or templates as you customize your message. Find them, along with this downloadable toolkit, at legion.org/publications.

Lastly, repeat campaign successes and avoid earlier mistakes with a detailed and accessible after-action report. It will be much appreciated by the next campaign team.



Veterans Strengthening America materials available

The American Legion National Executive Committee adopted an official motto for the organization in 2020, to go along with a statement of mission, vision and values.

To support that initiative, The American Legion Media & Communications Division has developed – and will continue to grow – a portfolio of promotional materials available for download and use at the department, district and local levels.

Among the items are social media graphics, posters, a video and a fundamental statement of what Veterans Strengthening America means and why it fits The American Legion's identity.

legion.org/vsa



100 Miles for Hope: a campaign that made a difference

The American Legion was forced to suspend many activities and events in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One program, however, was born at a time when American Legion Family members were forced to stay at home, maintain social distance and still find a way to fulfill their obligations to assist veterans and families.

That program was 100 Miles for Hope.

In the first year of the campaign, participants were asked to commit to 100 miles of walking, running, swimming, riding, kayaking or activating in some way in the 100 days between Aug. 3 and Nov. 11, 2020. Their registration fees and donations would benefit the American Legion's Veterans & Children Foundation, which was the national commander's chosen program to support.

100 Miles for Hope had many of the most important elements of a successful campaign, including:

- A clear cause, the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation. The foundation provides cash grants via the Temporary Financial Assistance program to military and veteran families facing unexpected financial hardships, as well as training for American Legion service officers
- A specific and well-defined time frame
- A well-executed multi-media approach to promotion and continued enthusiasm building throughout the campaign
- Excellent opportunity for social media sharing and message advancement
- Well-branded and highly visible American Legion Family apparel

- The opportunity to show The American Legion Family in a healthy, active light
- Attractive to outside media coverage
- A certificate of completion to recognize successful participants
- Measurable performance reportable after action
- Survey of participants to determine ways to improve subsequent editions

To pull 100 Miles for Hope off, advance planning was essential. A logo for the shirts and other promotional items needed to be designed and approved.

Communications to members had to be scheduled, as well as a route for members to tell their stories through social media and the Legiontown site.

A week after the campaign's launch, nearly 2,000 had registered to take part.

By Veterans Day, that number more than doubled. Roughly \$150,000 was raised for the American Legion Veterans & Children Foundation.

In the second year of 100 Miles for Hope, national staff responded to participant desires to have a mobile app available to record their miles and activities, a broader range of promotional attire – such as hoodies, hats and a medal – and more.

The campaign's second year easily doubled the fundraising amount compared to the first year; achieved a national sponsor, Tri-West; attracted a corporate participant, Morgan Stanley Financial; and inspired generations of veterans and their families to embrace physical fitness and wellness.



Take control of the message

Few factors influence how a news story is perceived as much as the interview. Confidence, knowledge and compassion work. Defensiveness, shiftiness and appearing overwhelmed do not.

As a representative of The American Legion, your goal should be to control the interview. Share your enthusiasm about your post and the entire American Legion Family with the news reporter or broadcaster. Research the subject matter well in advance.

Perhaps someone else in the post is more knowledgeable or experienced with the topic and would be a better spokesperson. For example, if the topic is the local VA hospital's treatment of female veterans, an American Legion spokeswoman who uses that VA facility might be the best person for the interview. If the story is the backlog of disability claims, your American Legion service officer might make a good interviewee. Regardless, whoever grants the interview should do so only after researching the topic and preparing the message he or she wishes to deliver.

A simple “no comment” is a poor response. What the audience hears is “I have something to hide.” Sometimes not answering the question or declining an interview is the correct call. In those cases, explain why. Acceptable responses may be, “We don’t comment on pending litigation,” “It is our policy not to comment on personnel matters,” or “Since your question seems to be about another veterans organization, I recommend that you reach out to it.”

Interviews are conducted in a variety of ways. Most print interviews are conducted on the phone or by email. Interviews for longer features are usually conducted in-person, as are television on-camera interviews. Teleconference interviews are also common. Each format has advantages and disadvantages, which will be discussed later in this section.

Preparation

If a reporter or producer contacted you, there is a good chance the media outlet or interviewer already has an idea about your position. They frequently research potential sources and view past statements.

In turn, do the same. Use a search engine to view the history and past work of both the media outlet and the interviewer. Ensure you are not blindly entering

a “gotcha” interview with a shock jock or opinion commentator. It’s all right to give interviews to people with strong opinions, but know what to expect. Also, remember that many commentators enthusiastically support The American Legion and can be of great help in advancing your message.

Ask the reporter about his or her deadline. Will the interview be taped or broadcast live? Do your best to get the reporter the requested information before the deadline. A delayed response on your part could mean a lost opportunity for The American Legion if the reporter seeks another source.

The subject matter expert (SME) or interviewee should prepare or review a briefing card prior to the scheduled interview. Include background information about the topic, as well as facts you may not wish to discuss publicly and concerns about the media outlet and interviewer. Safeguard this information, especially if it includes items that you would not like to see published or broadcast. If the interview is conducted in person, it’s better not to bring the card to a place where the reporter or camera crew can see or have access to it. Ideally, the background section will be 120 words or fewer.

Next on the card should be the “end state” – what you hope to gain by the interview.

Here is an example: “By granting this interview, this post can assure the public that The American Legion is committed to reducing suicides among veterans and we can inform the audience of the resources available to them.”

Then comes the public statement. Have there been previous news releases, media advisories, resolutions or editorials about the topic? Include a brief summary – say, 130 words – about what was previously said. The post or department should avoid sending conflicting messages unless there is a good reason to retract an earlier position. Even so, it should be a conscious decision and not due to poor preparation or confusion.

The briefing card should also include a theme, or the overall image the interviewee would like to project. Limit it to one to three words. If the topic is suicide prevention, the theme could be “compassion and action.”

Message points are the major points you plan to discuss, supported by releasable facts or talking points.



The right setting, with clear American Legion branding, is vital to any press conference. *Photo by Tom Brenner*

M1: American Legion Post 239 is committed to reducing suicide among veterans in this community.

TP1: Upwards of 20 veterans per day take their own lives. We lost more U.S. veterans to suicide than we have in combat over the past several years.

TP2: This American Legion post has formed a Buddy Check team to call area veterans and let them know that we care about them all. We offer our friendship and support.

M2: Suicide is an act of permanent consequence, but it is preventable.

TP1: Most veterans who take their own lives had not been treated by the Department of Veterans Affairs. VA treatment is effective for many who have depression or suicidal thoughts.

TP2: American Legion Post 239 will assist any veteran who is having suicidal thoughts in getting the help at VA or from other trained professionals.

M3: Immediate assistance is available for people struggling with suicidal thoughts. The National Crisis Line is 1-800-273-8255.

TP1: Veterans calling the crisis line should press 1. They can also text 838255 or engage in a confidential chat at veteranscrisisline.net.

TP2: The American Legion will continue to advocate for a fully funded, fully functional veterans crisis line.

After preparing your messaging, ask a colleague at the post to put you through a drill. It should include hostile questions you hope not to get. Deflecting questions that you don't wish to answer is an art, and the feedback you receive from your colleague during the drill can serve you well when the actual interview occurs. Don't lose your cool, even if the interviewer becomes hostile or aggressive.

If you are a guest on a radio call-in show, engage with the host rather than directly address a hostile caller. The same strategy can be employed if you are paired against another guest with an opposing view.

Optics

With rare exceptions, using a post home's lounge as a setting for an interview is not a good look. It perpetuates unfortunate stereotypes about the organization and detracts from the advocacy and programs of The American Legion.

It's far better to conduct on-camera interviews in a well-lit meeting space. If the weather permits, try outdoors by a flagpole, memorial or in front of the post home. Be aware that camera crews are often looking for supporting "B-roll," and if given unfettered access might use footage of clanging beer bottles and patrons at the post bar.

A good public relations officer controls the setting without being overbearing. Lead the media crew to the places you want them to see, unless the interview is in their studio or newsroom. Provide pre-recorded B-roll of the post engaging with the community or operating its programs.

Dress professionally for the interview. An American Legion uniform, including cap, sets you apart from members of other organizations. It is great branding. If the event doesn't lend itself to coat and tie, an American Legion polo shirt is another way to remind people of the organization you represent.

For telephone interviews, put your message points on index cards and spread them across your desk prior to answering questions. Consider using a speaker phone so you can discretely reference material on your computer if necessary.

The advantages to an email interview are numerous. Unlike live television, in-person or radio interviews, you have the opportunity to thoroughly review and fact check your answers before hitting "send." For best results, share your answers with other SMEs before sending them to the interviewer.

Techniques

Sometimes, despite hard work and preparation, the questions you hope for aren't asked. Worse, none of your message points are used in the piece.

Still, there are effective ways to transmit your messaging: bridging and flagging.

First, let's discuss bridging. As school students, we were taught to answer teachers' questions. Conversations often went like this:

Teacher: Who was the first president?

Student: George Washington.

Teacher: Where was he from?

Student: Virginia.

Teacher: When was he first elected president?

Student: 1789.

A diagram of this classroom "interview" would look like this: Q.A.Q.A.Q.A. But what if the student wanted to discuss why Washington was her favorite president?

If she had read this toolkit, she would try bridging. The conversation might then go like this:

Teacher: Who was the first president?

Student: George Washington. He is best remembered as the father of our country and a hero of the American Revolution. His intelligence and integrity provided a model for other presidents to follow.

Notice how the student changed the diagram of the conversation to Q.A.A.A.A.

This is bridging. The student answered the teacher's question and also included the points she wished to make. She did so without droning on about why Washington is her favorite president. She was succinct enough that the teacher could ask follow-up questions and allow the student to say more.

This is exactly how you can control a media interview. Answer the reporter's question and then include the message you wish to convey.

Bridging tools include popular phrases such as "The real issue here ..." "It's important to know ..." and "This is just one of the ways"

Flagging is the reiteration of your most important talking points. It might be a small detail for you but essential information to the audience. For instance, spokespersons at American Legion National Headquarters often flag **legion.org** as a source for the audience to obtain more information.

An interview may go something like this:

CNN anchor: Why does your national commander want higher pay for U.S. troops?

The American Legion spokesperson: The American Legion's national commander retired from the military. He understands the sacrifices America's fighting men and women make on our behalf every day. He knows about their hard work. You can read about his recent congressional testimony on this issue at **legion.org**. That's **legion.org**.

CNN Anchor: We have a few seconds left. Is there anything you'd like to add?

The American Legion spokesperson: Yes. The American Legion was founded on a strong national defense, care for our veterans, patriotism and the well-being of young people. Again, go to **legion.org** and learn about how The American Legion lives by its motto, "Veterans Strengthening America."

The American Legion spokesperson flags the organization's website URL three times because most TV viewers are not watching with pen in hand, waiting to jot down information. Dates, times, phone numbers and other key message points are worth repeating.

Indeed, the points flagged are often the primary reason for giving the interview. Common flagging phrases are “most important is ...” “in a nutshell ...” and “it all boils down to”

Flag positive message points and avoid repeating negative premises that might be in the interviewer’s question. If membership is up in your post, flag it! If your American Legion has lost members three years in a row, acknowledge the truth if asked but bridge to something more positive, such as your post’s plan to attract new members.

Most of all, never lie to the media. If caught in a lie, your credibility will be lost, and the coverage is guaranteed to point out the dishonesty.

“Off the record” conversations with the media are not recommended. Many sources have been burned by reporters they thought were friends. A good rule of thumb is to assume all microphones are “hot,” and if you don’t want a statement published or broadcast, don’t say it.

Conclusion & tips

The prospect of a media interview can be terrifying to someone who has never done one. Even experienced professionals can feel jittery knowing they are about to speak to the masses. Remember, you’re not on trial. The American Legion is a great product to sell to the public. Most media members already have a positive view of the nation’s largest veterans service organization. View the interview as an opportunity and follow the tips already discussed.

Know your story. Use message points and talking points, and have a friend conduct a practice drill with tough questions. Anticipate what could be asked.

Be respectful of the interviewer’s stated deadline.

Plan to use three to five main points during the interview. Put them on index cards and practice in advance. Have these cards with you when giving a telephone interview.

Google the media outlet and reporter. Know the journalist’s style and likely slant. It’s OK to reject an

interview request if you think the journalist is unfair or not trustworthy.

Repetition is good.

Use accurate statistics that bolster your case.

Think in advance about quotable language and sound bites. Rephrase and repeat questions for easy video or audio editing. Do not repeat negative questions without rephrasing positively.

Educate the reporter (respectfully).

Take control. Show your knowledge and enthusiasm.

You do not have to accept the premise of every question. Politely correct the reporter if asked a question with serious or damaging misinformation.

Turn negatives into positives.

Don’t use jargon or acronyms. Keep it simple.

Avoid “negatives.”

Always stay “on the record.” Even when the camera isn’t rolling, your words can still be reported.

Look at the interviewer, not the camera.

If the interview is recorded, ask permission to repeat your answer in a more clear manner.

Bridge.

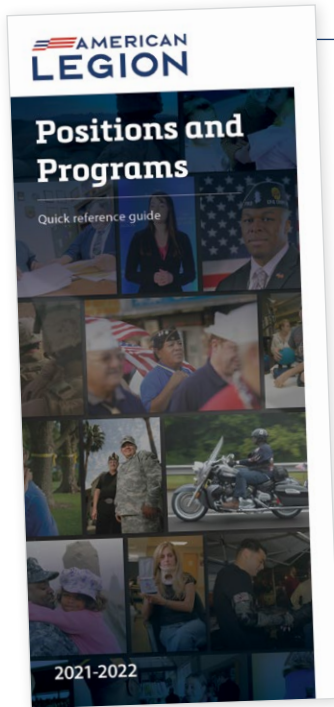
Flag.

Dress appropriately and wear your American Legion or Sons of The American Legion cap, name badge and flag lapel pin. For some interviews, an American Legion polo may be more appropriate rather than business attire.

Avoid giving interviews at bars or lounges and remove drinks from the environment. Meeting rooms and flagpoles are better alternatives.

Never pass on an opportunity when asked, “Is there anything else you want to add?” Plug The American Legion’s website, and repeat phone numbers and addresses of events. Repeat your main message point if the interview is issue-oriented.

After the interview concludes, ask the interviewer to send you the article or a clip of the broadcast. Critique your performance and do even better next time.



Positions and Programs booklet provides message points

Each year, The American Legion produces a booklet that comes in handy when a reporter wants to know what the organization is doing about such issues as veteran homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder or U.S. flag respect.

The booklet, “Positions and Programs” is a reference guide that provides brief American Legion message points on national security, veterans benefits and health care, employment, the GI Bill, Operation Comfort Warriors, membership, the National Emergency Fund and many other topics.

The booklets are built to localize and add personal anecdotes. They were originally developed to provide any Legionnaire a ready-made set of points if called suddenly and unexpectedly to speak at an event, or to respond to media question.

The downloadable booklets can be found at **legion.org/publications** under the Media & Communications heading.



It's always the cover-up

Sometimes things go wrong. People make mistakes. Tragedies happen. Even an ethical and honorable family such as The American Legion, the largest veterans organization in the country, can occasionally include a few bad actors.

A negative news story does not, in itself, constitute a crisis. Bad management of the story, however, can quickly develop into one. Public Relations crises are prolonged. They usually involve a negative story and follow-ups from multiple media outlets.

There are many ways to manage a PR crisis.

The best method is to prevent it from happening.

Prevention

In what should have been a unifying occasion, an Ohio Memorial Day observance in 2021 turned into a major controversy, due to the actions of two American Legion Family office holders.

The keynote speaker at the public observance paid homage to freed Black slaves who gave proper burials to fallen Union soldiers that died at a Confederate prisoner of war camp during the Civil War. Unfortunately, the local American Legion post adjutant and American Legion Auxiliary unit president did not approve of that particular passage of the speaker's remarks and arranged for the sound system to be lowered as he delivered that portion of his speech.

Observers and members of the media were horrified at the selective censorship. Video of the incident was quickly posted online. The immediate coverage and public reaction was overwhelmingly negative.

But The American Legion Department of Ohio acted quickly and decisively, suspending the charter of the post. Both the national commander and American Legion Auxiliary national president condemned the actions of the post adjutant and unit president. A department investigation ensued, and the department commander issued a release stating, "The American Legion Department of Ohio does not hold space for members, veterans or families of veterans who believe that censoring Black history is acceptable behavior."

The post adjutant and unit president resigned from their respective positions at the request of department leadership. The speaker's entire remarks were posted

on The American Legion national website. He was also invited to deliver the speech again at the Department of Ohio convention, and he ultimately did.

In an organization as large as The American Legion Family, mistakes and malevolent actions will occur. The Department of Ohio's strong leadership and intolerance for racially insensitive behavior turned what could have been a public relations crisis into a strong message of inclusiveness.

The American public is very forgiving. They understand that terrible things sometimes happen. It's how the organization responds to the negative event that will determine how the group is viewed in the future. Perhaps no case better illustrates this point better than the Tylenol murders of 1982.

After an investigation revealed that seven Chicago-area deaths occurred because the victims consumed cyanide-laced Tylenols, a nationwide panic ensued. Bottles of the popular over-the-counter pain reliever had been tampered with. Customers feared that the product was unsafe.

Many predicted that the brand was dead. But the company's manufacturer, Johnson & Johnson, took quick action. It immediately recalled 31 million bottles from stores. The company offered to exchange safer tablets to any consumer returning capsules that had been previously purchased. The company purchased large newspaper advertisements, opened a consumer hotline and sent warning messages to doctors' offices and pharmacies. Instead of dodging responsibility, Tylenol's corporate leadership sent a strong message of commitment to consumer safety.

When news of the crisis first surfaced, Tylenol's share of its consumer market fell from 37% to 7%. Six months later it had risen back up to 30%. The crisis-management steps that Tylenol executives practiced in 1982 have become a case study in public relations courses throughout the world.

"What Johnson & Johnson executives have done is communicate the message that the company is candid, contrite, and compassionate, committed to solving the problem and protecting the public," the *Washington Post* reported.

It's worth noting that Johnson & Johnson CEO James E. Burke was fully engaged throughout the crisis. If

your American Legion post faces a crisis, the support of the executive leadership can help determine how the post is perceived by the public for years or even decades to come.

Crisis Action

A sure way to make a crisis worse is to add chaos. Once it becomes clear that your post is facing a potentially damaging issue that is of extraordinary interest to the public and stakeholders, a crisis-management team should be quickly formed.

The leader could be the post commander or another stakeholder who is fully informed, capable and available. It is up to the leader to work out an overall strategy with a crisis-action team.

The team should include advice from the judge advocate or other legal counsel. If a crisis includes alleged criminal activity or potential civil liability, certain public statements could jeopardize an investigation. Moreover, judges sometimes forbid public statements that occur by potential witnesses in a trial.

A hurricane heading to a community would certainly constitute a crisis, though not one caused by The American Legion. The principles of messaging would still apply, especially if your post wants the community to be aware of services and response measures that you are prepared to offer.

The crisis management team should look to mission partners in the community for support and input. Engagement with first responders, community leaders and stakeholders is critical.

Continue the best practices that are mentioned throughout this toolkit regarding media and community relations. Be transparent and honest. If criminal or civil liabilities prevent full disclosure, explain that you cannot comment due to the pending investigation or litigation. Once again, legal counsel and communication with law-enforcement

investigators are important when determining what should or should not be disclosed. By being professional and as forthright as possible, you can convince the public that you are not engaging in a cover-up or simply denying an embarrassing fact. A spokesperson should be designated to quickly respond to media queries and to train others on the appropriate messaging.

Information that is released should be vetted by the crisis team. Normal media channels such as social media posts, newsletters, the website and email should be utilized.

Finally, if your team has formed a substantive message and the occasion merits, call a press conference. The leader or post commander should act as the chief spokesperson at the conference.

He or she should be well-prepared and properly drilled by practicing answers to any hostile questions that are anticipated. Most of all, be pro-active about your positive messaging. The spokesperson should begin the press conference with an opening statement, which will ensure that the appropriate message is transmitted. Questions should be answered honestly and as completely as possible without violating legal or privacy considerations. There is nothing wrong with stating that you do not know the answer to a particular question but would get that information to the reporter as soon as possible. And then do it. The credibility of the spokesperson is essential to the organization's ability to manage the crisis.

Be sure to document every step in the plan and include "lessons learned" statements, along with recommendations in your after-action report.

Above all, include a solution or prevention plan in your message. We've already established that the American public is a forgiving one. It's the steps taken to prevent a reoccurrence that can turn crisis into opportunity.



All about who you know

How is your American Legion post perceived in your neighborhood? Reputation is the fuel that energizes community relations. If your reputation is poor, it can be turned around with positive outreach. Every interaction matters.

Community relations are the force multipliers for everything we do in The American Legion. Media relations is a subset of this much larger group. The dominant activity in a strong “ComRel” program is personal contact. Also known as networking, it complements and reinforces our internal and external messaging as we tell The American Legion’s story.

The more people learn about The American Legion Family, the more likely they are to join or support us. Those who aren’t eligible for membership can still spread positive views about the organization to their friends and acquaintances. Good community relations also leads to donations, sponsorships and participation in our charitable programs.

Humans are social. They are reluctant to join alliances with people or groups that they do not like. A respected and well-liked American Legion post can effectively influence proposed legislation and policies that will benefit veterans, young people, servicemembers and families.

Understand community needs

Community relations vary from place to place. Each community or geographic area has its own character, offering different structures, personalities, programs and organizations. Community relations consist of local activities that should be tailored to fit local needs. Whatever the message from The American Legion’s national, department or district offices, posts have an opportunity to adapt that message so the local population might be more receptive.

Whether it’s through a welcome-home event for a military unit returning from deployment or a 9/11 remembrance ceremony, you have an opportunity to influence the public’s perception of The American Legion in your area.

You don’t need the services of a marketing company or PR firm to get to know your community. Do your own research by monitoring the local news, searching the

Internet for items important to your community and views expressed about your American Legion post.

You can also select a random group of citizens in your area and ask its views and impressions of your American Legion post. If you conduct a focus-group session, emphasize your desire for honest answers. For best results, conduct the session in a neutral setting so participants don’t feel obligated to give only positive feedback because you bought them lunch in the post home. Surveys that attempt to sway or solicit certain answers are of no value.

Some questions you can explore through a focus group or survey include:

- What are the needs of veterans in the community? Are they being met? Does the community even know or have opinions on those needs?
- What is and who is in the community’s power structure?
- What is the community’s attitude toward, and knowledge of, The American Legion? Your American Legion post?
- What are the attitudes of the community toward other local organizations and clubs? What are the missions of these other groups?
- What is the historical relationship between your American Legion post and the surrounding community?

Once these questions are answered, your American Legion post or entity can determine which programs and services will most benefit your community.

Who’s who

Different social groups in any given community are referred to as publics. Internal groups include members of your post, The American Legion Family and other veterans organizations. External groups include community organizations dedicated to civic, trade, industrial, youth, ethnic heritage, gender, religious or educational advocacy. Other external entities are local, state and federal government bodies, along with mainstream and nontraditional media outlets.

Common publics that your post should include in its community relations efforts include:

- **The chamber of commerce** – The purpose of the chamber is to provide assistance in promoting, starting, managing, growing and advocating for businesses within its community. Chamber members are often veteran-friendly. Your post might be able to recognize or award businesses that have a strong record of hiring veterans or employers who pay workers that are deployed for military service. Many chambers will allow American Legion posts to join. Other opportunities might exist for The American Legion to provide speakers at chamber luncheons, publish articles in chamber newsletters, and be seen as a team player and resourceful asset to area businesses.
- **Military units** – Active-duty, National Guard and reserve units provide a variety of opportunities for promoting The American Legion through personal contact. While recruiting for private organizations is forbidden on government installations, you can talk about The American Legion's advocacy for troops and military families. Many American Legion posts have adopted units and conducted Operation Comfort Warriors events to benefit wounded, ill or injured servicemembers. Include military recruiting offices in your post's community relations efforts.
- **Public service organizations** – Law enforcement agencies, fire departments and utility companies tend to have a higher number of veterans than other occupational groups. Foster a relationship and familiarize these essential workers with The American Legion by putting them on your list for speaking engagements and mailing them your post newsletter.
- **Places of worship** – The Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion begins with "For God and Country." Members of churches, synagogues and mosques often share American Legion values. Church bulletins are sometimes willing to publish American Legion announcements or messages, especially during patriotic holidays.
- **Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)** – NGOs exist for a variety of reasons, often to advance a social cause. The American Legion was founded on the four pillars of a strong national defense, patriotic youth programs, veterans and Americanism. Many NGOs share common goals and interests with The American Legion. Search The American Legion's national resolution database

at legion.org/resolutions to learn about the organization's official national positions. When reaching out to NGOs, focus on areas and topics on which the two organizations agree rather than emphasize differences. A civil discussion about differing viewpoints, however, can also foster positive community relations.

- **Schools and universities** – Educational institutions from preschool through college offer opportunities to convey your post's support for veterans. Flag etiquette and the significance of Veterans Day are common presentations conducted by Legionnaires in their communities. Your local American Legion service officer might explain GI Bill benefits to student veterans. A working relationship with high school guidance counselors and principals can lead to higher participation in youth programs, such as Junior Shooting Sports, Oratorical contests, American Legion Baseball, American Legion Boys State and American Legion Auxiliary Girls State.

Activities

Although programs and needs vary from one community to another, the approach is usually the same. Legionnaires can incorporate the programs of The American Legion into three main activities: special events, community partnerships and information venues.

Special events

A special event is characterized by multilateral communications and coordination between The American Legion and a variety of community agencies. The goal of a special event is of common interest of the community. In fact, community endorsement of the special event is manifested through participation of Legionnaires and non-Legionnaires alike. National holidays, troop support and recognition activities are some of the events that warrant American Legion and community interest.

Some special-event activities that American Legion posts find very successful include Blue Star Salutes on Armed Forces Day, 9/11 remembrance ceremonies, Veterans Day banquets and Memorial Day observances. When celebrating The American Legion's birthday, include representatives who are not members of the organization but could benefit from learning about the services your post performs in the community.

National Headquarters offers recommended speeches for Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day and other



Colorado college student cooking in Legion polo.

Photo by Chet Strange

significant holidays. Download them at **legion.org/publications**.

Members of Congress, state government officials, county commissioners, mayors and city councilors should be invited. The same goes for local military commanders and VA administrators. Draft a proclamation for the governor, city council or mayor to declare “American Legion Day.” Much like the invitation list, the occasions for a special event are endless.

Community partnerships

By approaching various community entities such as the chamber or NGOs, you can find opportunities for mutual programs of support. These range from participating in or sponsoring a local parade to revitalizing an American Legion post.

An NGO that advocates for seniors may be interested in a joint fundraiser to benefit a state veterans home. Businesses often plan charitable contributions as part of their budgets. A strong pitch from your American

Legion post could help generate a substantial contribution to your program or adopted cause.

Not all contributions are financial. A restaurant might offer free catering. An office-supply store might provide chairs for event attendees. Whatever the donation, be sure to publicly voice your appreciation.

Information venues

If crime is a community concern, invite the police chief to your post and host a “prevention night” for the public. Your American Legion department service officer could serve as keynote speaker during a “know-your-benefits” meeting for veterans.

The American Legion is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates for public office. However, your post can host a town hall or debate, provided that all candidates are invited and given equal opportunity to speak.

What distinguishes an information venue from a special event is the education component. A special event often has an important purpose, while the goal of an information venue is to offer discussion and expertise about a particular topic or issue.

Feed often

Like all relationships, a ComRel program is not a one-time task. It should be nurtured. Memories fade with time. Residents move from a community and new neighbors take their place. Public officials change and businesses experience turnover.

If nothing else, your American Legion post should keep an extensive holiday card list. The annual greeting is just a minimum. Find out birthdays and other details that might merit regular acknowledgments. Remember not just the police chief, but the chief’s spouse as well.

If the only goal of your community relations program is to enlist others to help your American Legion post, it will fail. Relationships are a two-way street. If you want your community to support your American Legion, your American Legion must support your community.



The good, the bad, the ugly

Today's social media titan can easily become tomorrow's nostalgic footnote. Nobody knows this better than the former executives of MySpace. From 2005 to 2006, it was the largest social networking site in the world. In 2006, it had even surpassed Yahoo! and Google as the most visited website in the United States. A couple of years later, Facebook's popularity soared, and MySpace plummeted. Dramatically.

While MySpace was focused on the entertainment and music industries, many believe that Facebook's emphasis on user-engagement enabled it to win the social media war.

A larger lesson can be taken from this. Communication should be user-friendly and welcoming of input.

Because of the low cost (often free) associated with creating and maintaining a social media account, nearly all businesses and most American Legion posts have them. When social media sites first gained popularity in the early 2000s, most were uncontroversial. However, misinformation and vitriolic feedback on many sites have caused many organizations to struggle with, and sometimes reevaluate, their social media policies.

Though different social media sites have different content-posting policies, it is clear that in many ways it is still the wild west regarding who truly controls the messaging. Because of the massive visitor traffic generated on social media, it is vitally important that your American Legion post maintain a presence on at least one or two sites if it wishes to be heard within its community. If you want your messaging seen, it's good to begin on some of the more established and popular social media sites.

Top Social Media Sites

There are far too many social media sites for your American Legion post to be present on all of them. As you build up a loyal following on some of the bigger sites, your message is likely to be seen by the audience that you are targeting. It is not unusual for social media messages to be picked up by traditional media. Hopefully, when this occurs, it is for the right reason and not because of an inappropriate posting.

Top social media sites in the 2020s include:

- **Facebook** – The world's largest social media network, Facebook had 2.8 billion monthly users by

the end of 2020. The site is easy to use and helpful at building brand awareness. An excellent tool for an American Legion post to keep the public informed, reach new audiences or solicit support for a worthy cause.

- **Twitter** – A great site for brief messages. Twitter posts, or "Tweets," are limited to 280 characters, though many are still accustomed to using the previous 140-character limit. Through the use of hashtags, you can ensure your Tweets are categorized and targeted to specific Twitter users. For instance #SupportWomenVets.
- **Instagram** – Perfect for sharing photos and brief videos about what is happening at your American Legion post. Also encourages hashtags, #RallyAroundtheFlag for example.
- **LinkedIn** – Popular among professionals who enjoy networking. If your post is adept at community relations, this site is for you.
- **YouTube** – Owned by Google, this network allows users to upload, view, rate and share videos. Basic accounts allow for the posting of videos up to 15 minutes in length. In 2019, approximately 1 billion hours of YouTube videos were watched every day.
- **TikTok** – Mostly light-hearted videos featuring music, dance and comedy, though more serious topics are appearing. This site appeals to a younger demographic but it has been banned for use by U.S. military members due to concerns about operational ties to the government of the People's Republic of China.

Social Media Etiquette

Social media discussions can be brutal. The purposes for American Legion social media sites are to be seen and engage. If you wish to opine about controversial issues outside the interests of The American Legion, it is probably better to post those items on your own personal accounts where you can also control the viewer settings.

Remember, your American Legion site could potentially be seen by the world. It would be better to not have an account than to embarrass The American Legion or to post so infrequently that you appear inactive. The

American Legion is far from the only organization concerned with its social media image.

Typical standards by account administrators include deleting or blocking comments that:

- Are racist, sexist, vulgar, obscene or defamatory
- Personally attack others
- Threaten violence or illegal activity
- Violate the privacy of others
- Are partisan, overtly political or totally unrelated to the topic of discussion
- Are provably inaccurate

Frequent social media engagement can be an extremely powerful tool in the public relations program of any American Legion post.

From a simple Tweet such as “Open house @Post10 Saturday 1 pm, all invited” to an emotional Facebook plea to end the tragic suicides of so many veterans, social media has become the quick and inexpensive printing press for Legionnaires of the 21st century.

#HashtagCampaigns

Hashtag campaigns aggregate social media posts into one arena on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. For instance, The American Legion’s Rally Around the Flag call for social media submissions used the hashtag **#RallyAroundtheFlag** to assemble images and messages from across the country and beyond.

Other examples of American Legion hashtags include **#ALBoysNation** and **#OurWWIStory** and **#100MilesForHope**. More general hashtags, such as **#Veterans** and **#PoppyDay** put your message before bigger audiences. From your personal accounts, you can follow hashtags that will appear in your personal news feed.

Tagging

To tag an individual or group with an account on a social media platform, use the @ symbol, followed by their name or handle, such as **@AmericanLegion**. A Twitter handle appears under the name of the account on the profile page.

Retweeting

One of the most effective ways to elevate a message is to get it shared through retweeting. For instance, when

The American Legion national Twitter account shares a link to a story about the U.S. Marine Corps, included is the tag **@USMC** to alert the Marine Corps’ social media team that The American Legion has said something of interest to their audience. When they retweet that post, The American Legion message is delivered to an entirely different audience.

It’s important to share your Twitter handle with others when networking, as one would share a business card, so others will know to tag you or your post.

Social media graphics can deliver, extend reach

An effective way to educate, inform and inspire social media audiences is through social media graphics. They can remind followers of important dates in military history. They can express why The American Legion Family remembers the fallen on Memorial Day. They can serve as a call to action. And they can honor the flag.

Rules to remember when designing sharp social media graphics include:

- Plan ahead and keep a schedule of graphic treatments, such as Suicide Prevention Month, Veterans Day, American Legion Birthday or Flag Day.
- Keep language brief and to the point.
- Consider linking the graphic to a web page that offers further information.
- If using The American Legion emblem or other trademarked logos of the organization, be sure to follow rules of use.
- Encourage sharing of graphics among your followers.



The measurement of social media performance

Social media traction is easily and publicly measured. The number of followers is reported prominently. Facebook also measures and reports trends, such as percentage increase in reach, engagements and page follower numbers.

Some measurable terms to understand include:

- **Reach:** Number of people who saw any of your posts at least once.
- **Reactions:** Number of people who commented, liked, disliked, shared or reacted in some other way to a post
- **Followers:** Number of people who committed to follow your page
- By tracking social media audience performance, you can learn what interests your followers and make changes if needed to the flow of information.

27,475 American Legion post social media accounts recorded in the 2020 Consolidated Post Report, with about 70% of posts reporting

Tips on managing American Legion social media accounts

Operations

Whether it's Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, try to have at least two administrators on the account. This is essential, especially for volunteer organizations, in case one administrator is unavailable. It also avoids the problem of one person handling all social media accounts around the clock.

- On Instagram or Facebook, it is advisable to allow comments on posts (and on Facebook, to allow posts to the page). This creates/encourages engagement, but it does require consistent and continuous monitoring to prevent any individual from posting incorrect information or otherwise violating your terms of usage. On Twitter, similarly, don't protect your tweets or you will limit the reach of the message and likelihood it will gain momentum.
- Post/tweet regularly. People don't return to social media sites that lack frequent new material. For Facebook and Twitter, that means no less than daily. For Instagram, weekly posting is a good start, and as the audience grows, new images can be presented more often.

- Don't be afraid to borrow from other sources. Share to your social media page what National Headquarters is posting, with a note about why it's relevant to your department, district or post. Retweet us, but do it as "retweet with comment" and add something that either localizes it or reiterates the point.
- When you share a link – either via Facebook or Twitter – from a media outlet reporting on your efforts, make sure to tag (Facebook or Twitter handle) the outlet in your post/tweet. The American Legion has been retweeted by Newsweek, CNN, Jake Tapper, FOX News, NBC, CBS and various local network affiliates when tagging. This can deliver a bigger audience and increase likes/follows.

The American Legion cannot support a position unless it is backed by resolution. We don't support or oppose politicians, but we can tackle issues as long as they connect to authorized positions.

Remember key dates and recognize them with a message, image or video. Remember our troops with Christmas and Thanksgiving messages. Be present on social media for Veterans Day and Memorial Day, The American Legion Birthday and Armed Forces Day. Other dates to consider include Gold Star Spouses Day, military branches' birthdays, Vietnam War Veterans Day and others.

American Legion National Facebook terms of usage

This forum encourages the exchange of differing opinions and ideals. However, the use of vulgarity or profanity, or offensive terms will result in posts being deleted. Any personal attacks or allegations against fellow posters or individuals will result in posts being deleted. No name calling. Posts that infringe upon the intellectual property of another will be deleted. Repeated violations will result in a ban.

When responding to a post, think about how you'd want to be addressed, and please post accordingly. Repeated violations of simple courtesy will result in a ban.



Online and on target

Traditional media outlets remain strong, but most people currently serving in the U.S. military do not know of life before the Internet. Young people often learn how to text message before they are taught cursive handwriting. Many base newspapers folded years ago. TV and radio remain popular, but streaming services are gaining troves of subscribers. For the latest news, people pull out their smartphones and visit their favorite websites.

Whether your goal is to recruit new members or to advance a policy position, a vibrant website can be the town square of your communication village. If you don't know how to build a website, that's OK. Some posts have relied on the skills of teenaged children or grandchildren of members. Building a website could be a great project for a student intern or outsourced at a reasonable price.

Web savvy

American Legion post websites exceed the number of post newsletters, according to recent Consolidated Post Reports. The number of posts reporting unique websites was 2,934 in 2020, while traditional newsletters stood at 2,458.

One option popular among American Legion posts, districts and departments is **legionsites.com**. Established in 2004, Legionsites.com has templates that are conducive to American Legion operations. It is affordable, easy to use and professional in appearance.

Other popular website builders are GoDaddy, Wix and Weebly. Your builder can often provide email accounts connected with the domain name. For instance, The American Legion National Headquarters website is **legion.org**. Email addresses at National Headquarters all include the domain name@legion.org.

Names are important. The Uniform Resource Locator (URL) is the website address. When it comes to domains and URLs, go simple. American Legion Post 28 in Millsboro, Del., can be found at **www.alpost28.com**. The website address for the Department of Texas is **txlegion.org**. A URL should not be difficult to remember. It is not the place for complicated terms or language that would not be easily associated with the name of the place one is searching.

Ideally, an American Legion homepage will have easy-to-find tabs to join, renew memberships and donate to

programs. It will include recent news announcements pertaining to the post or veterans community as well as information about recent and upcoming activities.

A good website will also have contact information so visitors can easily communicate with post leaders. It will have compelling photographs and visuals. Remember, an American Legion website can be accessed worldwide. It is about as public as can be. Do not post images or content you would not want reported on page 1 of *The New York Times*. It just may be.

Some information, such as the biography of your post's namesake or the history of its founding, can be unchanging. But most material on your website should be updated frequently.

For many visitors, your post's homepage will be their very first impression of The American Legion. If it includes "announcements" of events that occurred 10 months earlier, the message conveyed is that the post is inactive.

E-versatility

Keep in mind that many visitors will be viewing the website from their smartphones. Too many competing elements on a page will not only aggravate readers but will cause your most important objectives to be lost.

Your website can also be integrated with, and promoted by, an e-newsletter. An e-newsletter has many advantages over a traditional or paper newsletter. Content can be quickly updated and forwarded. If the content is good, the list of subscribers will grow substantially and enhance your ability to magnify your messaging and influence.

The most successful websites not only help a post or American Legion department achieve some of their top objectives, but they can be revenue-generators through online advertising. First, you have to create the traffic. That traffic can be caused by an accident, or it can be the result of providing a destination worth visiting. If you achieve the latter, your American Legion post can reap many rewards.

Use Legion.org

The American Legion national website – **legion.org** – is filled with stories, videos, photos and materials posts are welcome to use on their sites and in social media.



Section Ten / Podcasts

Form a 'Pod Squad'

Legionnaires serve community, state and nation on a daily basis. Those efforts deserve to be broadcast to the public, but posts cannot rely solely on traditional media to get their messages out. Instead of counting on an invitation to a radio show that may never materialize, you can start your own podcast. Equipment for these endeavors is affordable and easy to use.

Every modern smartphone can be a recording studio and distribution mechanism.

Here are some steps to make your post, district or department podcast successful.

Step One: What is your voice?

This question will define what your podcast will be about. You don't need all of the answers to start, but things will be easier if you do.

- Will you have one host or multiple co-hosts?
- Will the podcast be purely informational, or will it have more of a fun-loving vibe?
- Will you talk exclusively about your post? Might you include information about your community?
- How often do you want to put out episodes?
- How long do you want the episodes to be?

Step Two: Tech Time

These recommendations are not an endorsement, but they are free tools that you can use to make your podcast dreams a reality.

- That smartphone in your pocket. It can be Android or iPhone.
- Anchor (www.anchor.fm) – this is a free app, owned by Spotify, where a user can record, assemble and distribute a podcast.
 - » You can record directly into Anchor using your phone or the web interface on a computer. It also allows for easy recording of phone interviews.
 - » You can import other audio files into Anchor (See Dolby ON below)
 - » You can edit in Anchor, which even provides music to use.

» The distribution capabilities are a huge benefit. Right off the bat, you can house your podcast on the Anchor.fm platform and you'll quickly be accessible on Spotify. The other platforms like Google Podcasts, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, etc., will follow after Anchor submits your content to them.

» Perhaps one of the most attractive aspects of Anchor is that all of its features are free.

- Dolby On (<https://www.dolby.com/apps/dolby-on/>) – If you want to record on your phone and add some Dolby enhancements, this is another free app that allows users to enhance their voices and employ noise reduction.

Step Three: Recording

Next is the recording of thoughts, ideas and opinions. By now, the host has decided on his or her voice and what to say. Some may prefer to work from notes or maybe a full script. Others may have the natural talent to wing it and just talk.

The podcaster can record directly into the Anchor app or Dolby On app before importing back into Anchor. If that last sentence seems intimidating, start with recording right into the Anchor app and skipping the added step.

Now it's time to find a comfortable and quiet location to do the recording. Obviously, the less noise, the better, but the talent (that's you) should be comfortable and focused on the task at hand. Have water available.

Remember, not everything must be recorded chronologically. An introductory recording can be used repeatedly. A common format would look something like this:

- Opening statement – introduce the specific topic for the episode.
- Introductory Recording – It could be something like "This podcast, brought to you by Post 1000 in Anytown, covers topics important to veterans and our entire Anytown community. Listen for new episodes every Tuesday. Now let's get on with the show!" Again, this recording can be used repeatedly through many episodes.

- The Show – This is the actual podcast. It can be a monologue, feature guest interviews, or both. You can also break this up into sections. Pro tip: When finishing each section, Anchor will allow the user to give the section a name. This will make it easier to organize.
- Outro – Like the intro, this can be used repeatedly. It can be a simple script to show appreciation and give the audience ways to support the podcast and, by extension, your American Legion post. “Thank you for listening to Pod 1000 by Post 1000. You can find us on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, or directly at Anchor.fm. Don’t forget to subscribe so you don’t miss a single episode, and if you like us, be sure give us a good rating and share with your friends. You can always reach out to us for feedback, topic ideas, or just to say hi. Our email is (insert email address). Until next time ‘as you were,’ patriotic listeners!”

Step Four: Assembly Required

After recording is complete, the podcaster will have sections of content that will need to be put together. Anchor makes this fairly easy, especially after it’s been done a couple of times.

Start with putting the sections in the desired order. After arranging the sections, the podcaster might consider putting some music under the Intro and Outro recorded section. Do not use copyrighted music, lest you risk the wrath of lawyers. Fortunately, apps like Anchor have music options that will work for a lot of people. Royalty-free music can be found on the internet. Just be sure to read the rules and fine print.

Step Five: Distribution

As discussed earlier, Anchor makes it easy to submit the podcast to various platforms. Be prepared to write a summary of each episode.

BONUS STEP - Upgrades

Thus far, everything has been free. If interested in an upgrade, your post podcaster might consider an external microphone that can plug into a phone. One can easily search for “Insert Phone Model” + “External Microphone.” An inexpensive lavalier microphone can upgrade sound quality.

That’s it! You or one of your post’s verbose personalities have just earned the title “podcaster.”

Be patient if listeners don’t tune in right away. These things take time to grow, but a podcast can be an important communication tool for your post American Legion Family members, the department and the community at large.

Tango Alpha Lima

Fifteen months after its April 2020 debut, the American Legion’s national Tango Alpha Lima podcast had been downloaded more than 36,000 times. The podcast – featuring three post-9/11 veteran hosts – addresses current affairs and includes interviews with interesting figures in the military/veteran community.



Episodes are available every Tuesday morning by 9 a.m. Eastern and can easily be shared through social media with members of your American Legion Family.

Different podcasts use different models, but this type of program has proven popular with post 9/11 veterans and can be replicated for any post’s own podcast, if one is so desired.

Fans of the podcast can keep up with the latest Tango Alpha Lima show by subscribing to the podcast’s e-newsletter at legion.org/newsletters.

Tango Alpha Lima: zero to more than 40,000 downloads in 16 months

The American Legion National Headquarters launched Tango Alpha Lima as a weekly podcast in April 2020. Since then, audience numbers have steadily climbed, as measured in the number of times the podcast has been downloaded by listeners.

In August 2021, a record 7,532 downloaded the Tango Alpha Lima podcast, but they did not simply stumble into it. It takes promotion to grow audience. Here are some ways the American Legion Media & Communications Division promotes Tango Alpha Lima:

- Planning ahead and promoting interesting episodes in the national magazine

- Keeping an email list of subscribers and regularly reminding them when new podcasts are posted and what they are about
- Promoting vigorously on social media
- Asking podcast guests to cross-promote with their audiences

Special Episodes

Special episodes can engage and expand podcast audience interest. In August and September 2021, the Tango Alpha Lima podcast launched a series called “20-20-20” – 20 episodes in the 20 days leading up to the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Advance planning and guest coordination were essential to promote and drive excitement to the series. Each episode featured an interview with an individual who had a firsthand account of Sept. 11, 2001, or its aftermath. Guests ranged from former Iraq POW Jessica Lynch to U.S. Paralympian Rob Jones and Marine Corps combat aviator Jennifer Vollbrecht. Special guests with big followings of their own can also boost audience numbers.

The series proved record-breaking in audience growth. More than 7,500 downloaded the podcast in August 2021 alone.



Similarly, a two-part series on race and law enforcement in July 2020 produced a spike in listenership.

Podcasts, especially special episodes, should always be posted on YouTube to gain more audience and archived online so new listeners can go back and play podcasts they missed.



Put American Legion messaging in your own words

If the podcast has a written sibling, it's the "web log" better known as the blog. Sometimes humorous and irreverent, the blog can be used to promote American Legion messaging in an informal or conversational manner.

A good description of a blog would be a newspaper column written primarily for the online world. The blogger is not limited by ink or paper, and the readership can grow exponentially based on distribution, search engine placement and "shares."

As with any communication platform, some basic concepts should be determined before it is launched.

Who is the Target Audience?

This will be important in deciding what to write about. If the typical subject matter is too specific or narrow, future topics will be limited, as will the potential audience. If too broad, the target audience may be lost because only a small amount of the blog entries will be of interest. A perfect balance can be the overall mission of The American Legion. If your American Legion post does not have a clear mission, that's a bigger problem which should be addressed. Perhaps the blog might be the inspiration to assess the mission of the post.

Chock full of potential blog topics are the four pillars of The American Legion. A simple way to remember those pillars is VDAY. That's Veterans, Defense, Americanism and Youth. An American Legion post blog could delve into such areas as post activities, veterans' issues and community happenings. Before launching the initial blog, the creator should decide on the following:

1. **Platform.** Where will it appear and what will it look like? Numerous platforms exist for aspiring and established bloggers. The largest by a significant margin is WordPress. Other platforms include Wix, Squarespace, and Blogger. Many of these options are free, though upgraded versions are also available for a fee. As the blog grows, it would be wise to consider paying for the enhanced features available through upgrades. Growth, after all, should be one of the major goals of the blog.
2. **Voice.** Will the blog have an academic, informational tone, or will it showcase the fun personality of its author? Many bloggers choose a combined approach, though a consistent tone is important to maintain a loyal core audience.
3. **Schedule.** A consistent schedule will do a couple of things. It will give the audience an expectation of when content will normally be available. It will also instill some deadline pressure and accountability for the blogger.

Now let's get to work and use the power of the internet to change the world ... or at least promote your American Legion post or department.

That First Entry

This could be the most important posting in the history of the blog, so no pressure! The task is not that dramatic but this entry will set the tone for future postings. Ideally, it will be sent out to every contact, member and potential member that the blogger can fathom. It can be a welcome or introductory message, explaining what the blogger intends to address not just in the initial entry but future postings as well. The blogger clearly has some goals which inspired all of this work. Share those goals.

Give It that Extra 1,000 Words

There's not a hard and fast rule about how many words a blog post should be, but the blogger should fully address whatever is on his or her mind. Straight text is boring to the eyes. You can add that extra thousand words by including a picture or graphic. All blog platforms will allow for the inclusion of a photo or even a gallery with each posting. Some will have a separate place to insert an image that will be used when the blog post is shared by a reader. Most successful bloggers include at least one photo and often add additional pictures and graphics when updating the posting.

Make It Social

The best marketing for a blog is also free. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are all great ways to increase a blog's readership. As of this writing, Facebook is the

largest and most visited of all of the social media sites. If choosing only one, that is the way to go.

When mentioning articles that also appear online, hyperlink the sources. This allows the readers to see the original material through a click and judge the context themselves.

Sharing is a two-way street. Friends, family, acquaintances should all be encouraged to share blogs they presumably like. The blogger should reciprocate on social media and, occasionally, in the blog itself. The point is to make use of the social in social media. The blogger should leverage the power of his or her personal networks by engaging in the content of others, and invite them to engage in the blogger's work as well. This back-and-forth can benefit all parties.

Writing Doesn't Have to Be Lonely

After a blog is launched and a few entries unleashed upon the web, the blogger might consider asking other members of The American Legion post or public relations team to contribute articles. A network of guest writers can bring refreshing variety and keep the workload from relying entirely on one person. Other writers have different personal networks and are likely to promote their own work. The blog then becomes a hub of information, perspectives, and styles. All of that can come together to give it yet another reason to stand out and become a staple for your target audience.

Keep Writing

Sometimes the building of a blog can take time. Don't be discouraged. Just keep writing and telling the story. There will be times when the effort won't instantly match the metrics. When this happens, just remember the rationale for starting the blog. Hopefully, it is to advance the messaging and good works of the world's greatest veterans' organization!

To host or not to host your post's blog site

When you start a blog with a free blogging service, you don't get your own domain. You get something like **myblog.blogspot.com**, and you don't actually own the blog.

You can host your own blog using WordPress free Blog software. This method offers more flexibility and freedom to do what you want. You will have your own domain name, like **myblog.com**. You can purchase this for as little as \$30 per year. WordPress is excellent free blog software that allows you flexibility and room to grow.

TIP: You can use **blogspot.com** and purchase a URL for little cost from GoDaddy and mask **myblog.blogspot.com** to appear like **myblog.com**.

Heading

Blogs can be great sources of information to share with American Legion social media audiences, but it's important to remember that bloggers are not always accurate, often can be opinionated and do not need to abide by such rules as staying apolitical.

The military and veteran community is rich with blog sites that address everything from employment to mental health and law. A simple web search will produce hundreds of hits, many of which are helpful, but it is advisable to always fact-check those sites and make sure they do not violate any of The American Legion's policies, resolutions or values.

Some blogs are built to advance messages that can be useful to American Legion media producers. These include:

Vantage Point: This Department of Veterans Affairs blog site is filled with news, features, interviews and other information that can be shared with American Legion audiences. **blogs.va.gov/Vantage/**

Inside DOD: An informative and interesting blog site managed by the Department of Defense offers features, history, science, technology and news. **defense.gov/Explore/Inside-DOD**

The Department of Homeland Security: Important announcements, statements, observances and messages from top DHS officials are housed in the department's blog site. **dhs.gov/blog**

Student Veterans of America: SVA, which has a resolution-driven relationship with The American Legion, produces a blog site that generally speaks to the organization's chapters and members. **studentveterans.org/news**



Adobe InDesign 2021

Lay out the message

When designing good to bad design, there are multiple factors to consider. Most are aesthetic – the balance of elements in the eye of every who looks at them. Others are functional – perhaps the use of a page, size, or color. The most important is the message and how it is conveyed. Both are important to good design.

On the aesthetic side, certain rules should be followed as at the very least a good design. These rules help provide focus and clarity to design as well as consistency in the look of products or reports.

Have a clear goal!

When starting the design process, a good designer determines what he or she hopes to achieve through the final product. What is the purpose? To present facts, to persuade, to inform, to entertain? To present facts, to persuade, to inform, to entertain? To present facts, to persuade, to inform, to entertain?

Don't just make it pretty

The design should support the goal. Even the most beautiful design is useless if it does not support the message. If that message is to persuade, the design should be persuasive. If that message is to inform, the design should be informative. If that message is to entertain, the design should be entertaining. A good way of thinking about the design is to think of it as a story. The design should tell the story in a way that is both clear and compelling.

Be consistent

Design should be consistent throughout the book, book or product. For this reason, designers at American Express followed a strict design style. The same style was used in all of their publications. Publications designed by American Express have a similar look and feel. Some designers may get lost in the color and type choices, but the most important consideration is consistency. If there is a weakness in the design, it can detract from the entire message.

Limit of two typefaces, three at most

Typeface should be chosen systematically. One and Two Typefaces should be chosen because it is the default font in all design programs. Choosing something different is a choice that adds to the design. When working on a design, the designer should choose a typeface that is both clear and compelling.

Color has meaning

Color is a powerful tool. It can convey a message and can be used to create a visual hierarchy. A good designer will use color to create a visual hierarchy. A good designer will use color to create a visual hierarchy. A good designer will use color to create a visual hierarchy.

Less is more

A designer's greatest challenge is to create a design that is both clear and compelling. The more elements a design has, the more cluttered it becomes. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message.

White space is golden

A designer's greatest challenge is to create a design that is both clear and compelling. The more elements a design has, the more cluttered it becomes. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message. A good designer will use a simple design to convey a message.

Lay out the message

When determining good vs. bad design, there are multiple facets to consider. Some are aesthetic – the balance of asymmetry, the use of very select typefaces. Others are functional – perhaps the use of a san-serif for small type to maintain the integrity of the letterform and keep the text legible. Both are important to good design.

On the aesthetic side, certain rules should be followed or at the very least acknowledged. These rules help provide focus and clarity to design as well as consistency in the look of products we create.

Have a clear goal

When starting the design process, a good designer contemplates what he or she hopes to achieve through the final product. What is the message? No matter how nice something looks, it is useless if the message is not clear. Write down the primary goal and stick to it.

Don't just make it pretty

The design should support the goal. Form has meaning. No matter how realistic or abstract, images carry meaning. If that meaning doesn't support the concept, it will confuse its design. Puppies make for great pictures, but the designer shouldn't compromise integrity for the sake of cuteness. Every piece of the design should support the intended message.

Be consistent

Designs should be consistent throughout the issue, book or product. For this reason, designers at American Legion National Headquarters use a limited number of typefaces and colors in their publications. Publications on general topics have a similar look and feel. Some programs may get their own colors or type treatments, but that are carefully considered. Examine every part of a design for cohesiveness. If there is a weakness in the design, it can detract from the entire message.

Limit of two typefaces, three at most

Typefaces should be chosen intentionally. Don't use Times New Roman simply because it is the default font in a software program. Choose something because it has values that relate to the message. When working on

a design, use different typefaces for different functions: headlines, body type, informational graphics. A single typeface with a variety of weights and italics can often be enough for a design, although the addition of a second typeface might help add some drama. Too many typefaces can be distracting and even confusing to the viewer, so don't overdo it.

Hierarchy rules

Hierarchy also matters. The level of importance of the information should be conveyed. It is a good idea to attract the attention of the audience with a large shape, a strong image, a bright color or a dynamic headline. The designer can then decrease the level of activity of each level below it. Establishing this hierarchy is essential to the ease of use of the design. Doing so captures the audience's attention, gives information and helps make it memorable.

Color has meaning

Even the colors used should have meaning and purpose. Red is a passion color, and blue inspires loyalty. As a veterans service organization, there is a temptation to always default to red, white and blue. Predictability and overuse, though, can be boring. Patriotism aside, we need variety to keep things interesting. A good way of choosing colors for design is to base them off an image used in the piece. This adds consistency to the design and brings everything together.

Less is more

Another common problem is over-design. The more that is happening on a given page, the harder it is for the viewer to see what is important. The best designs are often the simplest. The logo for ABC TV is a simple circle with basic letterforms – nothing too complicated, but bold and memorable.

White space is golden

Another temptation is to cram as much information as possible onto a single page. This is counterproductive and daunting to the reader. Reserving open space in a design reinforces the importance of the information there. Use white space to enhance the design and keep it interesting.

Symmetry is boring, be dynamic

Symmetrical designs can also be a bore. A good designer will not simply center text and elements but will sometimes achieve an asymmetric look without cramming all the material to one side.

Type is just as important as imagery, sometimes more

Typeface is just as important as the imagery. Many award-winning designs are completely type-based with no photography or illustration. Type is made up of lines, dots and shapes that can be used to create interesting and dynamic layouts.

Design for the target audience

Designs should speak to the intended audience. While the color red may have great meaning to a longtime Legionnaire when referencing National Headquarters programs, a member of the general public might not understand the significance.

Don't use clip art, be creative with your use of imagery

There is nothing like obvious stock or clip art to turn a person away from a design. There are many online resources for finding great photographs. Department of Defense and other government photos are public domain and can be used at no cost, though certain restrictions apply.

Don't chase trends, aim for timeless

Professional designers attend schools and often study their craft for years. When designing a post newsletter or department newspaper, it is easy to imitate the latest design trends. This can sometimes backfire. Less experienced designers should stick with classic looks that are safe and will age well.

Look to others for inspiration

Many websites and bookstores offer plenty of resources and references for graphic designers and editors who are developing their own unique and effective styles. American Legion communicators have a great message. A good design ensures it won't be lost in a muddled mess.



American Legion style

When it comes to designing products for American Legion events and programs, National Headquarters has developed a style guide to help you create designs that match our existing brand and brand mark. This guide walks you through color, font and layout specifications among others. It also will walk you through when to use the emblem versus the brand mark. To access the style guide visit legion.org/brand.

Proper use of The American Legion emblem

The American Legion emblem and other legally protected logos of The American Legion Family is restricted and typically may not be used without permission from National Headquarters.

According to the Post Officers Guide: "The American Legion emblem is fully copyrighted and patented in the name of the National Organization. The emblem is also protected by federal legislation which makes it a criminal offense to use, without formal approval of the National Organization, the patented insignia of any veterans' group chartered by Congress, one of which is The American Legion."

The use of the emblem by an individual Legionnaire is limited to the wearing of the official insignia and to the possession of authorized jewelry or merchandise bearing the insignia. Posts are confined to using the emblem or reproduction of the emblem on stationery, post publications, notices, posters or place cards, or matters of similar character used in the ordinary routine and conduct of legitimate post business. Departments are similarly limited.

Any other use of the name "The American Legion" or the emblem shall be subject to the approval of the national adjutant. Requests to use the emblem may be submitted

In a 2019 memo, the National Adjutant's Office issued a statement reiterating the rules about emblem use, not to preclude ordinary business practices:

All of The American Legion emblems are owned by the national organization and licensed for use by posts, departments and other organizations that request, in advance for review to National Headquarters, their use. Yet this license always

requires pre-approval from the National Adjutant whenever there is any type of financial exchange.

All uses may not be approved – for example, adding a different color or changing the emblem's design. The design of a new logo with the additional use of a current logo may not be legal, either. Additionally, The American Legion does not want any emblem to appear on tobacco, beer and alcohol products because such placement does not help our public image. Most important to remember is that the non-approved use of any American Legion-owned emblem is illegal and will not be tolerated.

"This advisory does not, of course, preclude posts, counties, districts or departments from normal promotions of American Legion activities ... nor does it mean that respectful commercial uses of the emblem will always be denied.

The key questions to ask when emblem use is desired or requested can be found in Resolution 1: Rules and Regulations Governing Use of the Name and Emblem of The American Legion, passed by the National Executive Committee May 9-10, 2018. Those questions are:

1. Is the request of use for commercial purpose, outside normal post event promotion?
2. Does the request involve, in any way, reproduction of the name or trademarked emblems for commercial use by any entity other than the American Legion post?
3. If the emblem, other American Legion-trademarked logos and/or the words "The American Legion" or "American Legion" involve sale of any merchandise, does my post, district or department have prior written permission from the National Adjutant or the National Adjutant's designated representative, specific to that use?



The perfect image

An article, no matter how well written, usually benefits from a visual element. Photos and videos are quicker to digest, which is crucial for a digital audience. While these should be done well, one does not need to be an award-winning photographer or movie director to produce a well-rounded visual component for a story.

Techniques

A compelling photo will garner greater engagement with the story it supports. The following tips will help you create good visual media for your post or department:

Camera – Any smartphone or point-and-shoot camera is capable of capturing the same image. Be sure to turn phones sideways (“landscape”) for most photography and videography work. Holding the phone vertical (“portrait”) is more common in photos but is not flattering in video. A good rule of thumb is to always keep the camera oriented sideways.

Landscape



Portrait



Lighting – Outside light is preferable to indoor light, so try to get subjects outdoors or near a window when taking a photo. Be aware, however, that taking a photo with the window behind someone results in an unappealing “backlight” effect. Position yourself between the window and the subject so the light is shining on instead of behind them.

Distance – When recording an interview or photographing an event, distance makes all the difference. Don’t be afraid to get up close to your subjects. It is hard for audiences to connect with distant shots taken from more than 30 feet away. Every situation is different, but try to be within 10 to 15 feet of your subjects.

Setting – Bad audio can ruin an otherwise good product. To make sure you’re getting clean audio in interviews, limit the ambient noise. Is someone trying to talk over an air conditioner unit or loud kitchen noises? Select a quieter room to film so the camera doesn’t pick up all the extra sounds you don’t need. Start by sitting completely quiet in a room and documenting all the sound you hear. If you hear unwelcome sounds, so will viewers. Quality microphones can help limit or even eliminate background noise, but that’s an added expense.

Interviewing – When recording an interview, keep the subject from talking straight to the camera. Holding the camera to the left or right of your head and maintaining eye contact with your subject will keep the person looking off-camera, which is less intimidating for the interviewee and the audience watching the video. When asking questions, avoid interjecting yourself into the subject’s answer with the occasional “uh-huh” or “hmm.” If you must, give non-verbal affirmations like a head nod or a thumbs-up so you don’t talk over the audio bite.

Composition – Positioning subjects within the frame is an advanced technique but an important one. The “rule of thirds” divides any image into nine pieces, like a tic-tac-toe board. The four intersections are the most dynamic parts of the frame, meaning any faces or points of interest will be well-received in those positions.

Editing – For quality control, a good visual editor might touch up photos and videos. There is free editing software available online that can help brighten and straighten photos. Video editing programs such as iMovie allows the user to put text on videos, which is helpful for identifying a person giving an interview.

Many web tutorials dive deeper into these topics. Remember, the best way to improve skills is to practice. Novice visual artists should practice shooting photos and videos of family members, pets or wildlife to become familiar with camera settings. Some media opportunities only occur once, and it’s the responsibility of the photographer or videographer to be prepared.



Section Fourteen / Outdoor Advertising

The big picture

There are many ways to advertise, but few offer a 24/7 presence, targeted coverage and bold, colorful images to thousands of people every day – and at a cost-per-thousand exposure that is relatively low. In some cases, it can be absolutely free.

Outdoor signage comes in a variety of sizes and shapes: lighted and unlighted, digital, on the sides of buses and trucks, and other nontraditional platforms.

Outdoor signage catches viewers when they are away from their homes during the course of their daily activities. There is no filter, no time when the sign is not available. Your post's message could reach commuters going to and from work every day for as long as your message is posted. A good surface street can reach about 10,000 to 20,000 viewers per day, and a highway location anywhere from 60,000 to 200,000 viewers per day.

Naturally, outdoor advertising companies seek to keep all their billboards running with commercial, paid messages. The reality, however, is that there usually will be boards available where advertisers have dropped their contracts for a variety of reasons, leaving outdoor signs empty. Use your negotiating skills to ask the advertising company to post your billboard message as a public service until it can obtain the next corporate advertiser.

Types of billboards

Outdoor signs come in a variety of sizes. The most common include:

- **Bulletin**, ranging from 10.5' x 36' up to 14' x 48'
- **Poster** or 30-Sheet, typically 12' x 24'
- **Junior Poster** or 8-Sheet, typically 6' X 12'

Digital signs rotate messages. These offer an advantage in that physical sheets do not have to be printed and posted. Additionally, the message can be dynamic and easily changed. The downside is that the message is just one of many in rotation; there is no exclusivity with this form of signage.

Design for success

The KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid) is an art form with outdoor advertising. Use just one sentence to tell the whole story, along with a photo or artwork.

Consider such successful campaigns as McDonald's "i'm lovin' it." Posts might use The American Legion's motto, "*Veterans Strengthening America*." If promoting a youth program, a good action photo of a young person engaged in the activity with one sentence and your post's phone number could draw the attention of young people and their parents. Creativity, a good design and brevity of message are important. A website address or the URL to an American Legion post or department helps, too. More on that later.

Lettering on the sign should be large – very large. The letters should be at least $\frac{1}{4}$ the height of the billboard for the main copy and never smaller than $\frac{1}{8}$ for other copy. To test a potential sign, print it off in 8½ x 11 formats and tape it to a wall. See how far you have to move to the paper to read the ad. The closer you have to get, the less successful the sign will be.

Contrast on the billboard is the second key. Many poorly designed signs suffer from lack of contrast between the lettering and the background.

How to find a billboard

Billboards are most likely located throughout your area, but finding one that is available might be tricky.

- Browse **outdoorbillboard.com** under the heading "billboards for rent."
- Search "outdoor advertising near me" on Google and look for local companies.
- Drive around the area and note the billboards in your market that offer potential for your messages. Visit those companies to discuss vacancies and the possibility of public service assistance to The American Legion.

As a nonprofit organization with a history of supporting veterans, their families and the youth of America, The American Legion qualifies as a 501(c)(19) charitable entity. Many outdoor advertising companies assist American Legion posts and departments with signage as a free public service on their unsold boards for a month or more. Others, however, may have rigid policies that preclude public service advertising. Every company and location is different.

Try developing an ongoing relationship with a local outdoor advertising company that will be amicable

and productive over the long term. By posting PSA signage to keep unsold boards current, the company can enhance its own reputation as a committed corporate entity in the area. Start with a personal visit and a discussion of your post's need to reach out to people in the area. Remember, the company does not have to offer you free space; it would do so because it also believes in what The American Legion is and does for the community. Your mission is to request its assistance in getting out the word and to show appreciation to any company that helps in those efforts.

Other signage

Passenger bus “wraps” are common in metropolitan areas. Commercial truck advertising allows for advertising on the sides and backs of tractor-trailers engaged in interstate commerce. In some areas, mobile billboards are driven to strategic locations and left for contractual periods, reaching commuters in nontraditional areas. As with other forms of advertising, the cost decreases with length of service.

As with any community outreach effort, the success of outdoor advertising (whether free as a public service or paid for by your post) should be considered one part of a total package, which includes reaching out to the community through TV, public events, letters to the editor and local talk-radio programs. The more transmissions from The American Legion are heard by intended receivers, the more likely the message will result in the action step by the audience.

Action step

If a billboard message has a call for action requesting veterans to reach out to your American Legion post, remember that the outdoor billboard is working 24/7. It's best to provide a website rather than a phone number that wouldn't be answered around the clock. Be sure to use a short URL; drivers can't remember or jot down long addresses. **Legion.org** is easy. So is **post123.com**. A URL like **galvintbriscoBLEgionpost123.com** will not generate a lot of response and might even cause an accident.



Paid messaging

As a nonprofit veterans service organization, The American Legion conducts veterans' and community-service programs that can be publicized for free with public service announcements in print and electronic media alike. Newspapers and broadcast stations frequently donate space and time to free activities that benefit their audiences. Websites will sometimes agree to offer links to other sites as long as the content is worthwhile or likely to be of interest to visitors.

These complimentary services are offered voluntarily on a case-by-case basis, as space and time allow. The priority of any business, however, is to attract revenue. Though they may also serve other purposes, media outlets are businesses. There are a number of reasons to consider purchasing media advertising, even if you are successful in placing post program information as public service material.

Membership in the business community

By doing business with local media, you establish a relationship as a respected corporate entity. It is easier to open doors to newsrooms or broadcast stations when your post is on the list of advertisers. Promoting an American Legion news story or publicizing a veterans' event is often easier if there is an established, positive business relationship.

Purchasing advertising puts you in control. Your American Legion message will run exactly when you want it for as long as you want it. For example, a post could advertise for new members in time to process them well in advance of deadlines to qualify for department and national awards. Promotion of the Oratorical Contest could encourage students to apply in time to enter post competition. The same could be done for Boys State applications. While media outlets are accustomed to denying coverage due to space or time constraints, rarely will they turn down opportunities to run tasteful advertising. This is a case where you not only control the message, but can actually dictate it.

Determine goals

Commercial advertisers usually have clear and obvious goals, such as selling soap, insurance policies or automobiles. Some businesses or firms prefer softer

public relations advertisements to convince viewers that they are good corporate citizens.

Before deciding whether to invest in advertising, determine your goal. Is it increased membership? Donations to a building a memorial at your post? Passage of an important veterans bill before your state's legislature? Ideally, progress toward your goal can be measured so you can have a basis to determine the effectiveness of the advertising.

Next, you should fix a budget. A commercial on a network television show will obviously cost considerably more than an announcement on the local radio station. A page in a major metropolitan or national newspaper can run hundreds of thousands of dollars while a fractional ad in a community publication can be quite affordable. Internet and social media advertising can also be purchased at reasonable price per-click rates.

When funding advertisements with donated money, it's important to be up front with contributors. Many charities have received negative scrutiny because they overspent on promotions and underspent on the cause that they were publicly promising to support. If your general budget does not include money for advertising, you can hold a fundraiser with a stated cause of "purchasing membership ads," or "advertising our youth programs."

Once your budget is determined, you can reach out to advertising sales departments. You will want to know the demographics of their audiences. If your goal is to attract active-duty military members to your post, find out of the average age of the radio station's listeners. If your goal is to raise funds for an American Legion program, the income-level and charitable giving of a newspaper's readership would be important information. Purchasing advertisements in a high school yearbook or school newspaper can also be a great way to inform students about your youth programs.

A good advertisement has a reasonable timeline. If you want to advertise your post open-house, you should probably not run the first ad the day of the event. However, if your post wants to publish an annual salute to area veterans, then Veterans Day might be the perfect day for it. Advertising departments have rate cards. Most of the time the listed rates are negotiable. Prices

are often reduced based on frequency and size of the overall purchase. Relationships also factor into the price. For starters, remind the advertising sales representative that The American Legion is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the community and nation.

If you are not satisfied with the advertising rates that were quoted to you, shop around. Even the smallest communities usually have multiple advertising options. Like anything else, the least expensive option is often not the best option. It may take a few cycles to determine the effectiveness of an advertisement or the outlet carrying it.

Clear messaging

Viewers often fast-forward or take restroom breaks during the playing of television commercials. Readers often skip over advertisements with nary a glance. To make your message stand out, keep it simple. Your advertisement should not resemble a lengthy article. Compelling art and powerful phrases help. Revisit your goal and include an action step, “Honor the veterans who sacrificed for us. Come to The American Legion Post 123 Veterans Day Observance on November 11 at 11 am.”

If your goal is to raise funds for a program, include an anecdote about one of your program’s success stories. The national motto of The American Legion is *Veterans Strengthening America*. These are strong succinct words that describe what The American Legion does everyday. It can be used as the “why” as you incorporate the Who, What, When, Where and How into your ad copy.

Brevity can also bring down cost. “If you are a local veteran, join your friends and comrades at American Legion Post 123. Visit [www.\(website\)](#) or call (Phone Number). The American Legion, *Veterans Strengthening America*.”

News media do not have a monopoly on advertising. Swag items such as mouse pads, key chains, brochures, bumper stickers and ball caps can also effectively spread your messaging and branding.

Church bulletins, billboards, door hangers and flyers can be used for announcements and messaging as well. The point is that advertising does not have to be costly. Posts and districts have been known to combine resources and purchase group advertising to target larger areas.

Sell your own ads

By applying other tools in this book, your American Legion post can establish a strong bond with

businesses in your community. Your post newsletter, website or department newspaper offer value as well. Offer others the opportunity to advertise in your American Legion medium.

Maybe a car dealership offers discounts to veterans. A bowling alley may offer free games to veterans on patriotic holidays. Free meals for veterans are common at many restaurant chains on Veterans Day.

Business owners know and respect The American Legion. By purchasing space in your media products, these businesses will be publicly acknowledging that they value and support veterans.

Not only can advertising sales help pay for the overhead of your media products, but they also can perform a service to your readers who may be searching for good deals and discounts.

Let loyal and frequent advertisers know that you appreciate their support by offering discounted space and added value. Advertising rates are usually based on CPM, or cost per thousand. The “M” is not a typo, but is derived from the Latin word “mille,” meaning thousand. These thousands can represent readers, impressions, listeners or viewers.

Your rates should be based on the local market. Through your own advertising purchases, you may already have an idea of what constitutes typical and reasonable rates. Remember, the value that you are offering is to a specific demographic – veterans and American Legion Family members. Just as you like to obtain good deals when purchasing advertising, don’t inflexibly stick to your own rate card when selling to others. Trading or exchanging advertising space can sometimes be mutually beneficial to the parties involved. The fairest exchanges usually involve similar sized audiences.

Finally, your American Legion post can be judged by the advertising and sponsorships it accepts. Image is important. If a business or entity has a shady reputation, don’t accept its advertising. Consumers who are mistreated won’t just blame the businesses but their associates as well.

The American Legion is an organization that is respected worldwide. Its advertising and the advertising that it accepts should never detract from its esteemed reputation.



Network with others

No one person has all the answers when it comes to public relations, communications or media operations. Fortunately, there is an American Legion group dedicated to these endeavors. PR and media practitioners at every level in the organization are encouraged to join The American Legion Media Alliance (TALMA), where they can compare notes, swap advice and network with like-minded American Legion Family members.

Created in 2020, TALMA provides resources, education and training for those who handle communications and public relations at the post, district and/or department levels.

The national chairman of the American Legion Media & Communications Commission oversees TALMA. The chairman appoints a task force representing the commission, as well as representatives from Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.

The task force guides TALMA, working with a liaison from the national Media & Communications Division. Throughout the year, the task force meets to discuss progress, assess goals and judge the annual contest.

Membership in TALMA is open to all members of the American Legion Family. Dues are \$15 per year. The membership year begins Sept. 1, and eligible members can join at legion.org/talma/join.

Among the benefits of TALMA membership:

- A press credential and lanyard
- Free entry into the annual contest

- Access to monthly virtual training sessions
- Access to a private Facebook group
- First crack at resources from National Headquarters to promote post events, including flyers, ads, social media promotions, posters, press release templates and more
- A newsletter distributed at least monthly

Annual contest

The annual TALMA contest entry period runs throughout the year. All entries must be submitted electronically and will be judged by the M&C Commission, led by the TALMA task force.

The contest is open to all alliance members in good standing. Entrant(s) must be a current TALMA member(s) and all entries must be the original work of the entrant(s). Violations of copyright laws, plagiarism or other ethical breaches could result in the entrant's dismissal from TALMA.

Categories include publications, websites, social media campaigns, visual media, editorial/news writing, editorial/informational writing and public relations/community outreach.

Additionally, TALMA has the Chairman's Award (a best-in-show award, an overall winner of all categories) and an Innovation Award, which honors efforts that demonstrate true innovation.

Professional development, camaraderie and peer recognition are just a few reasons to join TALMA.

Annex A - News Releases



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Memorial Service and Parade Set For Veterans Day (Day), Nov. 11, 20XX

(CITY) (Month date, year) -- Two of the key events scheduled for the City of (name) to celebrate Veterans Day are scheduled for (day), Nov. 11.

The events begin with a memorial service at (time, location). The featured speaker will be (name, title). Also included will be proclamations from state officials, music by (unit), and (weather permitting) a flyover by the (unit) of the (state) Air National Guard.

At approximately (time), the annual Veterans Day Parade will kick off, following the traditional downtown parade route starting at (location) Streets and ending at (location).

The parade will feature more than (number) units and nearly (number) people including groups from various veterans organizations, several marching bands from area high schools and the (military unit) Band. High School Junior ROTC units and other military and veteran-related groups will also appear. The parade will last approximately (XX) minutes.

The memorial service and parade are sponsored by (name).

"(Quote about importance of remembering)," said (full name) commander of American Legion Post XXX in (city).

(Metered parking is free downtown all day Nov. 11).

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Media Contact: (name, cell, phone number; email address)



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Revitalizing American Legion Post (##) in (City, State); Veterans Wanted

(CITY) (Month date, year) – Veterans of the (city, state) American Legion are looking to expand an already active home for veterans to bond and serve the community. The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, is inviting all who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces in the area to join them in revitalizing American Legion (Post name & number).

Officers and staff members of the Indianapolis-based American Legion National Headquarters and the (State) American Legion Headquarters will be in town (day, date) through (day, date).

A "Welcome Home" ceremony for all veterans, present and past, will be held at (address, day, date, time from/to). Membership and veterans' information staff will be available at that location on (day, date, time). Veterans with questions may call (name, number).

In keeping with The American Legion's devotion to mutual helpfulness, the newly re-energized American Legion post in (city, state) will focus on community service and assistance to veterans. The scope and nature of the post's community service will be determined by its members and input from local civic and community officials.

Since its founding in 1919, The American Legion has been a key advocate for veterans' benefits, children & youth, patriotic American values, a strong national defense and quality-of-life issues for those serving in today's armed forces.

The organization, which created the original GI Bill, is a strong advocate for a successful and high-quality VA health care system capable of addressing the needs of all veterans. The American Legion was also instrumental in the establishment of the VA Home Loan, Veterans Preference Hiring and disability benefits for veterans suffering from illnesses related to their military service, including ailments stemming from exposure to Agent Orange, open-air burn pits, atomic radiation and other environmental hazards.

Equally aggressive are The American Legion's efforts to promote responsible citizenship among young people through numerous programs, including American Legion Boys State, American Legion Boys Nation, Junior Shooting Sports, the National High School Oratorical Contest and American Legion Baseball.

Thousands of certified American Legion service officers assist veterans, regardless of membership status, free of charge to understand and obtain benefits they have earned.

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Media Contact: (name, cell, phone number; email address)



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Budget Cuts Could Hurt (City) VA

CITY (Month date, year) – American Legion Post (XXX) Commander _____ voiced his concern that the latest round of budget cuts to veterans health care could adversely impact local veterans using the _____ Medical Center in (City).

“We understand that resources are limited, but veterans risked their lives defending this nation and our elected officials need to understand this,” (name of commander) said. “When someone complains about the cost of veterans benefits, I like to remind them of the cost of being a veteran. What price can you put on the freedom that veterans have provided this nation?”

When The American Legion was founded in 1919 by World War I veterans, it dedicated itself to upholding President Lincoln’s promise to “care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and for his orphan.”

The American Legion was instrumental in not only drafting the original GI Bill, but it used its influence as the nation’s largest veterans service organization to help create the Veterans Bureau, which later became the Veterans Administration and achieved cabinet-status as the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thousands of American Legion service officers assist veterans with obtaining benefits, free of charge and regardless of membership status in the organization.

“Every day, The American Legion is using its influence to encourage Congress, the White House and the Department of Veterans Affairs to serve veterans as well as veterans have served this nation,” Post Commander _____ continued. “Veterans in this community need to speak out with a united voice and insist that we treat our local heroes with the gratitude they earned.”

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Media Contact: (name, cell, phone number; email address)



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion Post (###) conducts Buddy Checks to assist hundreds of (town) veterans

CITY (Month date, year) – American Legion Post (XXX) Commander _____ announced that Legionnaires from (his/her) post have reached out to hundreds of area veterans to check on their wellbeing during this challenging economic time.

The nationwide American Legion Buddy Check program was widely adopted nationwide during the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 and 2021 and continues to serve veterans who may be isolated or otherwise in need.

"Veterans who hear from us may be perfectly fine," said (last name). "We make no assumptions. We just want to let them know that as fellow veterans we understand and appreciate their service and that we care about them. We are here to assist. Veterans are diverse and have various needs. Maybe they just want to someone to talk to. Maybe they need a ride to the pharmacy or grocery store. Whatever it is, we want to offer our help. We want veterans everywhere to know that they have friends in The American Legion."

The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, is dedicated to the motto of "Veterans Strengthening America." Chartered by Congress in 1919, The American Legion is committed to mentoring youth and sponsoring wholesome community programs, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting a strong national security and continued devotion to servicemembers and veterans. Nearly 2 million members in posts across the nation and regions overseas serve their communities with a devotion to mutual helpfulness.

Post ____ is located at (address). The post holds meetings the first and third Tuesday of every month at 7 pm. Area veterans are encouraged to attend to learn more about the local American Legion.

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Media Contact: (name, cell, phone number; email address)



(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code
Phone number

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Future Leaders of America Wanted for The American Legion's Boys State

(CITY) (Month date, year) -- The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization, is inviting all members of (name of community) to join them in sponsoring young men to attend The American Legion's Boys State program this summer in (location of Boys State).

"These young men are the future leaders of America," said (full name of post commander), commander of (name and number of post). "We are seeking boys with outstanding qualifications in character and leadership to attend one of the most respected and selective educational programs of government instruction ever designed for high school students."

High school juniors are selected in early spring by local American Legion posts to attend the program, which will be held at (name of the facility where it will be held) from (dates).

"It is a program where each young man becomes a part of the operation of his local, county and state government," said (post commander). In most cases, a sponsoring American Legion post, a local business or another community-based organization pays expenses associated with attending this program.

"I encourage the entire community – and in particular high school counselors, community leaders and business owners – to submit their recommendations for candidates to attend The American Legion Boys State program."

The training at The American Legion Boys State is objective and practical with city, county and state governments operated by the students elected to various offices. Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, chorus and recreational programs.

"The American Legion's Boys State program is a unique way for young men to learn about the American system of government by taking part in a mock governmental system," said (post commander).

American Legion Boys State is conducted in states across the nation. All Boys State programs adhere to the basic concept of teaching government from the township to the state level. Two outstanding delegates from each Boys State program are invited to attend American Legion Boys Nation in Washington, D.C. Alumni include past and present members of Congress, entertainers, business leaders, celebrities and even a former U.S. president.

The American Legion Auxiliary sponsors a similar program for young women called Girls State.

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Media Contact: (name, cell, phone number; email address)

Annex B - Media Advisories

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Day, Month, Year

(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code

MEDIA ADVISORY

(City) Youth Bound for American Legion Boys State **Boys from around the state to learn about city, county and state political process**

Who	(Name of youth), a student at (Name of High School)
What	American Legion Post (XXX) has selected (name) to participate in the upcoming American Legion Boys State program, a one-week intensive education program of government instruction for high school students. It is a participatory program where each becomes a part of the operation of his local, county and state government. (Name) will be available for interviews prior to and immediately following his Boys State experience. Media are also invited to cover his participation in the program. Interviews with a Post (XXX) spokesman to talk about the program can be arranged.
When	(State) American Legion Boys State will be held the week of (dates). (Name of student) will be available here in (City) for interviews on request. Call contact below to arrange.
Where	(Location of Boys State). Post (XXX) is located at (address).
Why	At American Legion Boys State, participants are exposed to the rights and privileges, duties and the responsibilities of franchised citizens. The training is objective and practical with city, county and state governments operated by the students elected to various offices. Activities include legislative sessions, court proceedings, law-enforcement presentations, assemblies, bands, chorus and recreational programs. High School juniors are selected by local American Legion posts. Mentoring of youth is one of the Four Pillars of The American Legion.
Media contacts	Contact (Post chairman/spokesperson name), at (phone and email) to schedule interviews or arrange coverage at Boys State. Complete details on The American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation program are available at www.legion.org . The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans organization.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Day, Month, Year

(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code

MEDIA ADVISORY

Legion Flag Experts Available for Interviews as Flag Day Approaches

Who	American Legion experts on the U.S. Flag Code, flag etiquette
What	Available to discuss proper methods to display the U.S. flag; why flag protection is important
When	(Day, date) through (day, date). Available live between ____ a.m. and ____ p.m. or taping by phone or teleconference. To book a spokesperson, call (name, number) Flag Day is (day), June 14.
Where	Post XXX (location)
Background	• Founded in Paris, France, in 1919 by a group of World War I veterans, The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans organization. • The American Legion is recognized as the preeminent expert source of information on the U.S. Flag Code. It publishes and distributes the pamphlet, "Let's be Right on Flag Etiquette," a comprehensive guide on how to properly display the U.S. flag under all conditions. • The American Legion founded the Citizens Flag Alliance, a group of civic, fraternal and veterans organizations with one purpose: restore the right to protect Old Glory from acts of physical desecration, through a constitutional amendment.
Media contacts	Contact: (name, office, cell phone; email address)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Day, Month, Year

(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code

MEDIA ADVISORY

American Legion Post ____ Provides Veterans Service Day

Who	American Legion (district/post(s) name/number)
What	Will conduct the area's largest-ever outreach to military veterans of all war eras and branches. Veterans Service Day will provide free benefits information and assistance to veterans and their families. Additionally, the latest information on issues of importance to veterans in the current Congress will be provided to each along with information on how they can work with their elected representative. Activities will include a job fair for veterans and local colleges will display education benefits for veterans. Public invited to stop by and "thank a veteran." U.S. (Rep./Sen.) (Name) will be at the (location, time) to meet with constituents and their families.
When	(Date and time (from-to))
Where	(Address)
Background	This event is free to all veterans and their families, as well as the public. In addition to providing valuable benefits service and assistance to veterans and their families, each will receive information on how to become engaged as a grassroots advocate to help Congress keep the VA health care system the best in the world.
Media contacts	(Name, phone number)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Day, Month, Year

(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code

MEDIA ADVISORY

VETERANS DAY ACTIVITIES (Day) Nov. 11, 20XX

The following activities will be conducted by American Legion Post XXX and our corporate sponsors in celebration of Veterans Day 20XX. All events with the exception of _____ are free and open to the public. The following events will be conducted on Nov. 11.

11:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Memorial Service • Conducted at (location) • Featured Speaker is (name and title) • Will include (flyover, band, etc.) • Sponsored by (name)
11:45 a.m.- 2:00 p.m.	Parade • Starts at (location) Street ending at (location) Street. • Reviewing stand at (location) Street. • Features more than (number) units and over (number) participants. • Sponsored by (name)
5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.	Reception and Banquet • Features numerous awards to military and civilian individuals and organizations • Entertainment provided by (name) • Location is _____ • Reservations and tickets required. For press attendance, contact the individual named below. • Sponsored by (name)
Media contacts	(name, office & cellular phone numbers; email address)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Day, Month, Year

(Name) American Legion Post #
123 Main St.
Anytown, Any State, ZIP code

MEDIA ADVISORY

American Legion Post ___ Commander to meet with Governor

Who	American Legion Post __ Commander (name) will meet Governor _____ to discuss current legislation being considered by the legislature.
What	The American Legion in (town, state) has been united in its call to exempt military pensions from state income tax. There have also been proposed cuts to veterans' benefits in (state) that will impact the quality of life for thousands of veterans throughout the state.
When	Date, time.
Where	American Legion Post ____ (complete street address, town, zip code)
Why	The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans organization and its leading advocate for a strong national defense, patriotic youth programs, Americanism and fair benefits for military members, veterans and their families. Both Gov. _____ and Cmdr. _____ have agreed to answer questions from media and interested citizens following the meeting. For more information, visit www. (website address) Reporters wishing to confirm the schedule closer to the event should contact (name/office/cellphone/email address)
Media contacts	(name, office & cellular phone numbers; email address)

Annex C - Radio Scripts

Radio PSA – Working Hard For America (15 seconds)

THE AMERICAN LEGION. WE'RE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND ON CAPITOL HILL, WORKING HARD FOR VETERANS, MILITARY FAMILIES AND YOUTH EVERY DAY. WE ARE VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA. FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN JOIN OR SUPPORT US. VISIT (web site or "your nearest legion post") FOR MORE INFORMATION.

###

Radio PSA -Local Youth Programs (30 seconds)

THE AMERICAN LEGION IS DEDICATED TO SERVING THE CHILDREN OF AMERICA AND (City or State). AMERICAN LEGION BOYS STATE AND BOYS NATION, AMERICAN LEGION BASEBALL, THE CONSTITUTIONAL SPEECH CONTESTS AND OUR SUPPORT FOR SCOUTING ARE JUST A FEW OF THE PROGRAMS BACKED BY THE AMERICAN LEGION.

CONTACT THE AMERICAN LEGION ONLINE AT (website) OR CALL (phone). FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN JOIN US AS WE CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN AMERICA.

###

Radio- PSA American Values (60 Seconds)

RIGHT HERE IN _____, WE HAVE A DEEP SENSE OF PRIDE IN OUR COMMUNITY — IN THE AMERICAN FLAG THAT FLIES AT COUNTLESS HOMES AND BUSINESSES — AND IN OUR COUNTRY.

A SPECIAL BREED OF PEOPLE HERE IN _____ NOT ONLY SHARE THIS PRIDE — THEY DO THEIR BEST TO SEE CORE VALUES PASS ALONG TO NEW GENERATIONS.

THEY'RE THE MEN AND WOMEN OF AMERICAN LEGION POST _____. THAT'S RIGHT — THE AMERICAN LEGION.

THE NATION'S LARGEST VETERANS ORGANIZATION HAS FOSTERED AMERICAN PRIDE SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 1919. RIGHT NOW, THE LEGION CONTINUES TO EMPHASIZE WHAT IS RIGHT ABOUT AMERICA. LEGIONNAIRES ARE COMMUNITY LEADERS IN PRESERVING AMERICAN VALUES.

CAN LEGIONNAIRES HELP YOUR YOUTH GROUP LEARN AMERICAN PRIDE AND VALUES ?

CALL _____ AT _____. LET LEGIONNAIRES FROM _____ HELP YOU. CALL _____ —WE ARE THE AMERICAN LEGION, "VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA!"

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Radio PSA –Membership (60 Seconds)

IF YOU'RE A VETERAN, THERE ARE MANY REASONS TO BELONG TO THE AMERICAN LEGION. IT'S A SOUND VALUE FOR A FEW BUCKS.

AMERICAN LEGION MEMBERS ENJOY BENEFITS SUCH AS:

A BROTHERHOOD AND SISTERHOOD WITH OTHER VETERANS WHO UNDERSTAND SERVICE AND SACRIFICE—

A SUBSCRIPTION TO AN AWARD-WINNING MAGAZINE — HOTEL AND RENTAL CAR TRAVEL DISCOUNTS — TEMPORARY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE MEMBER FAMILIES IN NEED— AND MUCH MORE.

WHEN I RETURNED FROM AFGHANISTAN, I JOINED THE AMERICAN LEGION BECAUSE IT IS MAKING SURE OUR HEALTH CONCERNS ARE HEARD BY THE GOVERNMENT.

THAT'S JUST THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG. IF YOU'RE A VETERAN AND WOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHAT THE AMERICAN LEGION HERE IN _____ IS DOING — GIVE US A CALL. CALL _____ . THE NUMBER AGAIN:

_____. OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE, WWW._____ THAT'S WWW._____

CHECK US OUT TODAY —WE ARE THE AMERICAN LEGION, VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA!

THIS MESSAGE BROUGHT TO YOU BY THIS STATION AND THE AMERICAN LEGION.

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Annex D - Proclamation



PROCLAMATION

To all whom may be present, we the undersigned, hereby extend respect, admiration, and appreciation for the following reasons:

Whereas, since 1919 when The American Legion was founded upon the honorable service of men and women who took up arms in the cause of freedom; and

Whereas, Americans, devoted to liberty and to their country continue to remain on duty in perilous times and places; and

Whereas, the blessings of liberty require constant vigilance and sacrifice, and every man, woman and child in this great Nation owes a debt of gratitude to those who have, or still are serving so selflessly; and

Whereas, all these brave soldiers, sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, airmen and Guardians, past and future, are the beloved sons and daughters of our citizenry; and

Whereas, 20__, marks the __ year since the signing of the Armistice ending World War I on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918; and

Whereas, this day in November is a time for all to pay tribute to those who have dedicated their lives to serving our great country with pride and courage; now therefore be it

Resolved, that, as the Department Commander of the State of XXXXXXX, I am issuing this Proclamation to declare November 11, 20__ as

VETERANS DAY

And be it further Resolved, that all citizens of this State and wonderful land we live in are invited to take due note of the continuing commitments of these young men and women who place their lives in harm's way protecting American values and preserving democracy for the world;

And be it finally Resolved, that the observances taking place on this day should be appropriate exercises in commemoration of the historical events associated with the day and towards those that we honor.

Respectfully Submitted and Approved, on this xxxxx day of xxx, 20__.

Attest:

Department Commander

Department Adjutant



P.O. Box 1055
Indianapolis, IN 46206
(317) 630-1200

 legion.org

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