



AMERICAN
LEGION



WELCOME TO THE AMERICAN LEGION

A toolkit to create a lasting impression

Preamble to The American Legion Constitution

FOR GOD AND COUNTRY WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES
TOGETHER FOR THE FOLLOWING PURPOSES:

*To uphold and defend the Constitution
of the United States of America;*

To maintain law and order;

*To foster and perpetuate
a one hundred percent Americanism;*

*To preserve the memories and incidents
of our associations in all wars;*

*To inculcate a sense of individual obligation
to the community, state and nation;*

*To combat the autocracy of both the classes
and the masses;*

To make right the master of might;

To promote peace and goodwill on earth;

*To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles
of justice, freedom and democracy;*

*To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship
by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.*

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WHY FIRST IMPRESSIONS MATTER

A member's first impression is often the most lasting. If they are welcomed as a new member with a phone call from the post commander or adjutant, an American Legion challenge coin, or a new-member orientation where they meet fellow post members and learn how to get involved within the post, they will be engaged. That engagement from the start is critical to renewal.

American Legion posts welcome new members in a variety of ways that other posts, no matter how big or small, can adopt. This toolkit is filled with best practices of how posts are welcoming new members, and it includes resources on ways to educate new members on who The American Legion is, and the impact the organization has from the post to national level. We encourage you to send us your best practices to welcoming new members. Please email dispatch@legion.org.

Remember, a welcoming environment leads to post membership success. And retention starts the moment a new member joins The American Legion.

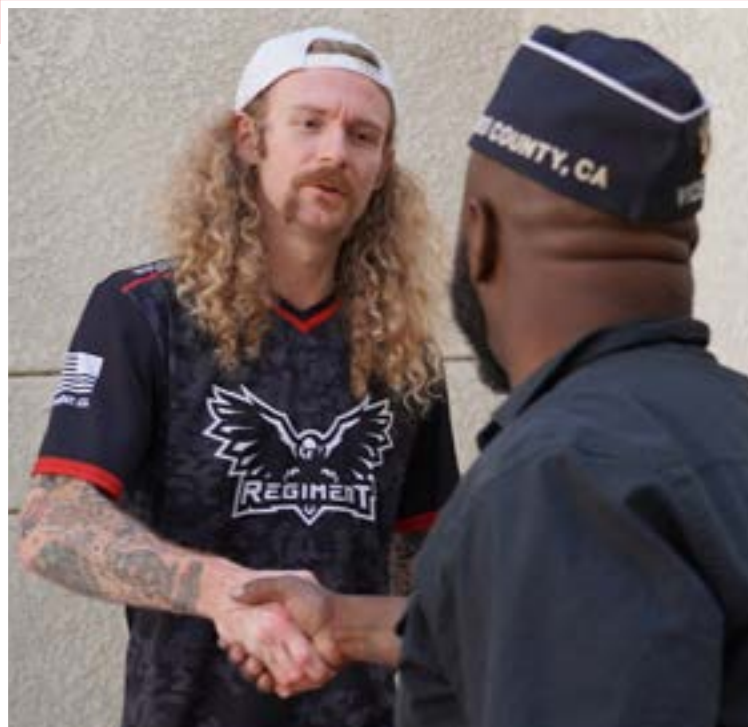
To get started, here are few do's and don'ts to welcoming new members:

DON'T

- Assume by their gender that they are not a veteran.
- Ignore them when they walk through the door, whether it's their first or fifth time.
- Be a dump truck and overload them with too much information about the post.
- Hand out outdated Legion brochures.

DO

- Have a short elevator speech about who The American Legion is.
- Greet new members immediately when they walk through the post doors, with a positive attitude.
- Train all staff to be welcoming.
- Follow up with a new or potential member by phone or email when you say you will.
- Share Legion Family information and applications to sign up a spouse or child.
- Have a bulletin board highlighting post functions and who they can contact for more information.
- Keep Legion swag on hand to give out, like challenge coins, Legion stickers, flags and pins.
- Give each new member a Why You Should Belong brochure and a copy of a Post Membership Impact report (see page 9).
- Ask them if they need anything or if the post can provide them with any assistance.



HOW TO CREATE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Oftentimes, you only get one chance to make a good first impression. If a new member walks into the post and it's not inviting, no one shakes their hand or acknowledges their presence, they will most likely leave. Give them a reason to stay and want to belong.

It's the first impression that is critical for a new member to feel welcome, get engaged and renew their membership. Make a good first impression with these best practices.

- **Prominently display** a bulletin board in your post with photos of members in action. This could be post members marching in a Veterans Day parade, hosting a Memorial Day ceremony, volunteering at the local VA, holding a food drive, welcoming new members during an initiation ceremony, hosting a Be the One suicide prevention run/walk, participating in a youth program like Boys State, hosting a holiday event where kids receive gifts from Santa, or building a ramp for a disabled veteran.
- **Hang photos** of post officers and program leaders and place their contact information underneath their photos. This helps a new member identify post officers and program leaders and gives them an opportunity to reach out if he or she needs anything.
- **Frame a copy** of the post's mission statement and history. Every post has a story. Share its founding, namesake and chartering members, plus historic photos.
- **Educate members** on how to greet a new Legionnaire or potential member when they walk through the door. A simple handshake and introduction can be, "Hello, my name is Scott. Welcome to Post 123. How can I help you?" Take the initiative to introduce yourself and be of service the moment someone walks through your post doors.
- **Set up** a welcome table at the post entrance. On the table, display one-sheets and pamphlets about the post's Legion Family, the programs your post supports and the community activities that you're involved in year-round.
- **Check** curb appeal. Maybe a little landscaping will help, a fresh coat of paint on the front door, or a sign welcoming members inside.
- **Social media channels and website** must be continuously updated; there is no bigger turnoff than to see an outdated social media page or website.

"It's easy to get stuck fixing plumbing, but a nice curb appeal is just as important. Would the average person be excited to come into your building? Or does it look run down? Pull the weeds, plant some flowers and put a fresh coat of paint on. If you don't have a ton of money for renovations, discuss your plans and see how a business partner could help. Perhaps they could sponsor a fundraising dinner so you can raise money for outside curb appeal needs."

Laura Dean, Post 1 in Anchorage, Alaska



BEST PRACTICES TO WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Everyone has their way to join The American Legion. And with that come best practices to welcome new members.

Posts, no matter the size, have great examples of what they do to welcome new members. Whether it's a phone call, a mailed welcome letter, initiation ceremony, free Legion T-shirt or recognition in the post newsletter, new members are welcomed from the start. How you welcome new members will be a lasting memory that will keep them coming back and recruiting others.

Welcome committee. A welcome committee should consist of at least three to five members and can be chaired by the post sergeant-at-arms. Members of this committee will welcome and introduce new members at their first post meeting, organize a new-member initiation ceremony or orientation, mail new members a post welcome kit, keep in contact with new members to encourage their attendance at post meetings and events.

Membership cards. When you mail a new member their membership card, add a letter that lists the names of the post officers and the day/time of the next post meeting.

Communicate. Send a welcome letter, e-mail or text message informing the new member about day and time of post meetings, events that the post participates in, contact information for officers and the post, and social media platforms for the new member to follow.

"A welcome call or handwritten note from the post commander or adjutant helps new members feel valued from the start."

David Heredia Jr., Department of Maryland

Phone. Have the post commander/adjutant call or text new members to welcome and invite them to attend an upcoming post activity.

Script: "Hello (member name). This is Commander (name) of Post (x). I want to welcome you to our post. We would like for you to join the next post meeting on (date and time) to meet other members and learn about what we are doing within the post and community. I look forward to seeing you, and please reach out if you need anything or have questions."

Mentor. Assign a mentor to the new member who will sit with them at their first post meeting and answer questions they may have over the course of their first year in The American Legion. The mentor can identify the new member's interest to assign them into a committee and sit with them when they take the online Basic Training course.

Flyer. Create a one-page handout that is displayed on the welcome table, handed to new and potential members, and feature it in the welcome kit that highlights all the programs and activities the post is involved in. You can also add to it the financial impact the post has had on veterans, youth and the community.

Kits. Provide new members with a welcome kit that includes a welcome letter, post calendar, officer directory, post bylaws, post/district/department newsletter, a new member swag like a flag pin purchased through Emblem Sales, and a current copy of *The American Legion Magazine*.

Emblem Sales sells a new-member kit ([Item No. 735:501](#)) for \$6.99 a piece. The kit includes a welcome letter from the national commander of The American Legion; certificate of initiation; American flag window sticker; and Legion logo lapel tack, removable window decal and key ring.



"My journey began at Fort Knox, Ky., where during the in-processing reception, a chance encounter with a member of American Legion Post 113 in Elizabethtown would forever change the course of my life. His name was Joe Garret, the current department commander in Kentucky. Joe spoke passionately about the organization's role in creating the GI Bill and how membership offered a way to continue serving even after active duty ended. Inspired by this message, I joined The American Legion at 17, and this year marks my 25th year of membership. I credit that initial encounter at Fort Knox for igniting my dedication to the Legion."

Frank Hirrill, Post 52, Department of Arizona

Orientation. Host a new-member orientation that introduces the post's mission, history and activities, and explains how new members can get involved and make an impact within the post. This is a great opportunity to gauge what the new member's interests are to see how they can be engaged – maybe it's youth programs, honor guard, organizing fundraisers or dinners.

Swag. Provide a first-year member swag like a flag pin, challenge coin, Legion shirt, mug/cup, or cap. These items are available for purchase through American Legion Emblem Sales.

History. Share the history of The American Legion by purchasing and providing a copy of the bookazine ["Century of Service."](#) The bookazine features never-before-published photographs take readers on a colorful 124-page journey filled with voices, images and reflections about what would become the nation's largest and most influential veterans service organization.

Spotlight. Do a new-member spotlight in your social media – Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn. The spotlight can include their branch of service and war era, family, hobbies and what they most look forward to about being a member of the post.

Gather. Host a special event like coffee and dessert to introduce new members and provide an opportunity for engagement.

Meal. Make their first meal at the post free; it can be breakfast, lunch or dinner.



LEGION FAMILY DAY

American Legion posts use this day, the last Saturday in April, to invite the community in to the post to educate about who the Legion Family is. Examples include:

- **Post 1532 in New Haven, N.Y.**, had representatives from the Legion, Auxiliary and SAL on hand to answer questions about each branch of the Legion Family. The event also included free hot dogs, macaroni salad and drinks.
- **Post 7 in Rochester, N.H.**, had games, giveaways and free food, while providing information on how the Legion benefits veterans, youth and community.
- **Post 92 in McCloud, Calif.**, provided cornhole, table tennis and other games, as well as tours of the post and free hot dogs, chips and dessert. The post's Legion Riders chapter motorcycles were on display, while members of all four branches of the Legion Family were on hand to answer questions.

Download the Legion Family Play Day Toolkit on legion.org/publications to use for your post event. Resources in the toolkit include a customizable flyer, media advisory and social media posts.

"Fellowship gatherings are held every third Friday at our supporting partner's Columbia Crossing Mission BBQ Restaurant. Our goal is to welcome new recruits and transfers from the national holding post into our Legion Family in a festive atmosphere. This event is an opportunity to exchange introductions and begin conversations. By the end of each fellowship, existing and new members are sharing their service experiences and learning how they can join our programs to serve veterans, children and youth, and the community at large. All members receive a current calendar of service opportunities to take home so they can choose projects they are in interested in. They may pair up with an experienced member to ease the transition."

George E. Delaney, Post 300, Department of Maryland



INITIATION CEREMONY

Initiation of new members is an important post function. They need to be shown, officially and formally, that they're a part of The American Legion. Instructions on how to conduct a new-member orientation ceremony can be found in the [Officer's Guide on legion.org/publications](https://www.legion.org/publications). [Click here](#) to download a PDF of the short-form script.



The new member initiation ceremony:

- Can be held during the first post meeting of the month.
- Should include the commander, chaplain, sergeant-at-arms, first and second vice commander, and past post commander.
- May involve presenting the new member with a small U.S. flag and Legion lapel pin, or other Legion item, purchased through Emblem Sales.

"We start with shaking hands, offering a new-member challenge coin and then we give a tour of our post to show what is available to our members, including our onsite veteran service officer. We then give them a copy of our newsletter that explains everything going on daily at our post. It also shows what upcoming special events we have. We invite them to our next monthly general membership meeting and to our new-member orientation meeting. There we show the welcome new-member video (with Matt Jabaut) then we present a slide show about Hardin Post 113 and the different ways they can get involved, like volunteering or running for officer positions or simply supporting our post through a variety of ways. We then finish up by answering any questions and share our website hardinpost113.com and Facebook page."

Drew Chitty, Post 113 in Elizabethtown, Ky.

POST IMPACT REPORT

A part of membership engagement is showing members and potential members the value of membership, and where their dues are going. One way to do this is through a post impact report. Customize this tool to show new members how the post makes a difference in the lives of veterans, their families, children and the local community. You can easily take information from your Consolidated Post Report and drop it in.



[Post Impact Report Template](#)

DEPARTMENT IMPACT REPORT

American Legion departments like Ohio use impact metrics to show the might of the organization on a state level. This is also a valuable information piece for a member who has joined a local post, to see the power of numbers behind the services, programs and initiatives of Legionnaires across their states.

Post and Department Impact Reports are excellent for websites, social media and membership recruitment events.

Numbers do tell a story, and The American Legion has numbers that amplify the organization's ability to change lives, even save lives, and support the time-honored values of the organization at the local, state and national levels.



RESOURCES TO ENGAGE NEW MEMBERS

New members of The American Legion are usually eager to learn the mission, vision, values and impact of the organization at all levels. Use these available resources to show new members who The American Legion is, what we do and how they can get involved.



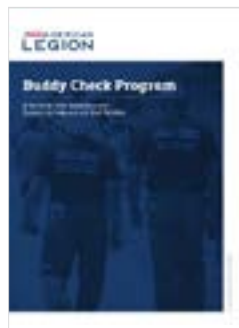
New member video. Maine American Legion member Matt Jabaut hosts a new-member orientation video that provides a clear understanding of the nation's largest veterans organization and what the Legion does to strengthen America. The video is great to show new members during orientation at the local post, or to show to potential members. You can also email it to new members.

Access the video at <https://vimeo.com/910849192>. To download, hit the down arrow button icon. To share, hit the diagonal arrow icon.

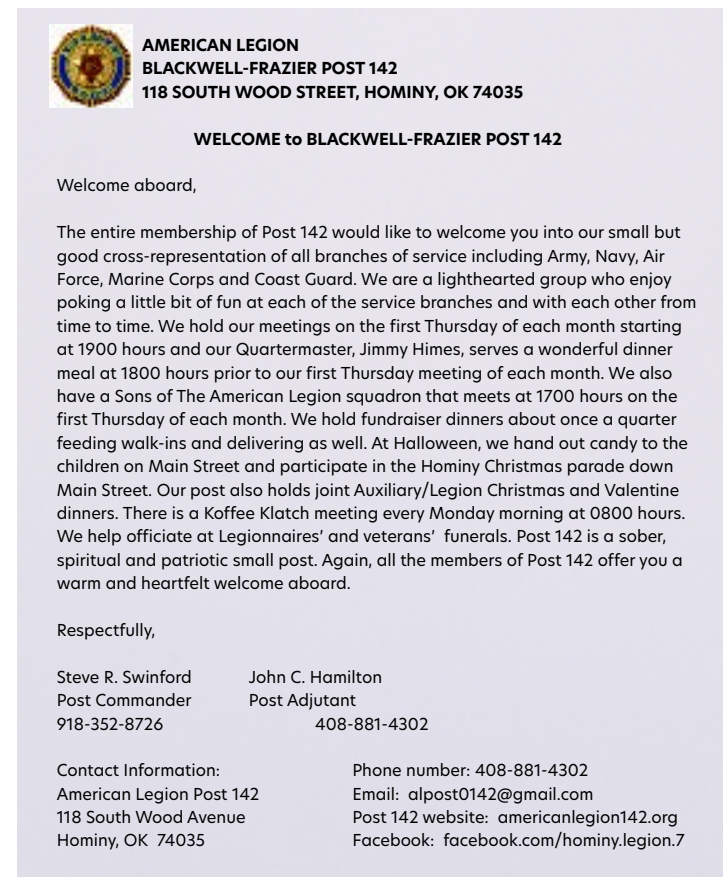
Annual Report. The report covers the organization's programs and priorities in a digital format. Visit legion.org/reports.

Why You Should Belong brochure. This full-color brochure educates prospective new members on the Legion's four pillars and how they translate into action. To those unfamiliar with the Legion's reach into nearly every community in America, this brochure identifies and explains dozens of helpful programs that impact millions of lives each year. Visit legion.org/publications to download the brochure found under Organization, Membership & Awards.

Buddy Checks. More than 1.5 million veterans have been reached by American Legion Family members since the Buddy Check program launched in 2019. Through phone calls, texts, emails, letters, cards and face-to-face meetings, Buddy Checks let veterans and their families know somebody cares. The Legion has a national resolution calling for Buddy Checks to be conducted in the weeks leading up to Veterans Day and the organization's birthday in March, but posts are encouraged to conduct them year-round. Visit legion.org/buddycheck to download the Buddy Check Toolkit for steps on organizing your own Buddy Check and phone scripts.



Welcome message. A personal welcome message mailed, e-mailed or sent by text message to new members is a great way to introduce the Legion Family and post leadership, inform about the next post meeting and share upcoming post events. **American Legion Post 142 in Hominy, Okla.,** shared an example of its welcome letter:



New member email series. American Legion National Headquarters is sending out seven weekly emails to new members who join online through legion.org. The weekly emails engage new members to:

1. Find a local post, access member benefits, learn about the history of the organization and connect with an accredited veteran service officer.
2. Create a MyLegion account to manage their membership.
3. Follow the Legion on social media and subscribe to e-newsletters.
4. Learn about and support the Legion's Be the One veteran suicide prevention mission.
5. Become active in the Legion's legislative priorities through its Grassroots Action Center.
6. Learn about Legion youth programs, Legion Riders program, grant opportunities and scholarships.
7. Shop American Legion and Be the One merchandise.



EDUCATE ABOUT THE AMERICAN LEGION

The following resources will educate new members about the history of The American Legion; its vision, mission and values; advocacy efforts at the national level; their dues in action; and how they can stay informed of latest news.

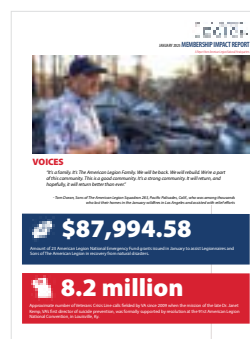
Basic Training. This online course is the official training program for officers, members, Legion College applicants and those who simply want to expand their knowledge of the organization.

It features videos, digital photos, clickable links, a historical timeline and additional features that revolve around what the Legion does, its history and today's Four Pillars, with a quiz after each section. The training is now available online or via a mobile device. Basic Training is free for all Legion Family members. Take the course.

National impact. Give a printed copy of the monthly Membership Impact Reports that National Headquarters produces. The monthly reports provide a summary of membership, participation and volunteerism impact in the lives of veterans, families and communities. Visit legion.org/reports.

Calendar. Share the National Headquarters online calendar that features events, conferences, program dates, membership deadlines, award information and more. Visit legion.org/calendar.

Suicide prevention. Be the One is a priority of The American Legion which aims to reduce the number of veterans and servicemembers lost to suicide each year. The American Legion is accomplishing this mission through training, events and asking everyone to be the one to save a life. Visit betheone.org.



Benefits. Share all the benefits The American Legion has to offer at the national level with membership. This includes discounts with travel, health, retail and more. Visit legion.org/benefits.

Online. Help the new member stay connected with The American Legion at the national level to see how their membership is supporting veteran legislation, children and youth, and communities at large. Visit legion.org.

Legion+. The American Legion membership app provides a direct route for members to access their digital membership card, manage membership information, recruit a new member, help a suicidal veteran and get the latest news on legion.org. [Download the Legion+ app](#) through Apple iTunes and the Google Play store.

Vision, Mission, Values. The American Legion's vision statement declares our future and long-term directional goals: "The American Legion strengthens America by improving the lives of our veterans, the military and their families." The American Legion declares how we intend to fulfill our vision: "The American Legion strengthens our communities, states and nation with programs and services for our veterans, the military and their families."

The American Legion's value principles guide our business decisions and actions:

- A veteran is a veteran
- Selfless service
- American values and patriotism
- Family and community engagement
- Advancing the vision
- Honoring those who came before us

Opportunity for American Legion Family engagement

Veterans who join The American Legion, or thinking of doing so, may not realize the kind of family experience awaiting them. Spouses and descendants are welcomed to the American Legion Auxiliary. Male descendants of qualified veterans can become Sons of The American Legion. And all American Legion Family members are eligible to join the American Legion Riders. The [Join The American Legion Family brochure](#) offers handy application forms.

Or simply go online at legion.org/join - legion.org/sons/join - ALAForVeterans.org

New members urged to set up a MyLegion.org profile

Once a veteran has joined The American Legion, an important next step is for that new member to create a MyLegion.org profile. There, it's fast and easy to renew, a digital membership card can be found, and a portfolio of money-saving member benefits is available. New members can also choose e-newsletter subscriptions of interest to them, read *The American Legion Magazine* in digital format and more.





For God and Country