



**American Legion Auxiliary
Public Relations Guide and Tips for Volunteer Recruitment**

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Media Relations Best Practices

Create Useful Media Lists

Up-to-date and accurate media lists can be a public relations team's most valuable asset. This list catalogs contact information for the media you'd like to share information with about American Legion Auxiliary activities and events. By having a robust and well-organized list of key outlets and contacts, you can quickly identify those you would like to reach out to with a pitch for your volunteer event or important date.

Follow these instructions for building a database of media contacts:

- **Compile a list of outlets.** Think about those reporters and bloggers you would like to feature information about the Auxiliary. It helps to brainstorm which outlets potential volunteers pay attention to, and to talk to fellow members in your unit to determine what they read and watch.
- **Identify contacts.** Page through your local newspaper or turn on a local morning television program to determine which reporters, editors, producers and bloggers cover areas of interest to your organization. The Internet is another great tool to determine local media contacts.
 - Try these resources to get started:
 - Search Google.com
 - Keyword examples:
 - “Colorado Springs newspapers”
 - “San Antonio military reporter”
 - “Seattle volunteer and events reporter”
 - “Norfolk, Virginia television news contacts”
 - Sort through Google.com/blogsearch to find bloggers
 - Read through military newsletters and local military base newspapers and magazine publications
- **Leverage existing relationships.** You, or even your fellow unit members, may have a relationship with reporters or producers from local media outlets.
 - For example, a fellow unit member might have a relative or close friend who writes for your local military base's publication. Through this relationship, your unit member could reach out to her contact to see if they might be interested in covering your upcoming volunteer event, or if they can recommend a better contact for you to reach out to.
- **Include every detail.** To make media outreach a smoother process, try using Microsoft Excel or other spreadsheet management software to house all of the information for your contacts. Include all information you find – phone numbers, email addresses and mailing addresses in your media list.

Outlet	Contact Name	Phone Number	Email	Address	Notes
San Antonio Express-News	Mary Jones	555-555-5555	email@email.com	123 Apple Lane San Antonio, TX 78023	Likes to be pitched via email.
Fox 21 News Colorado Springs	Michael Johnson	555-555-5555	email@email.com	1212 Main Street Colorado Springs, CO 80915	Called on 4.5 and left voicemail. Michael will be back in the office on 4.11.

Insert the outlet name, contact name, phone number, email, address and any other details you find.

You may also use this document to keep notes regarding conversations with your contacts.

- **Keep it updated.** Media contacts tend to shift positions frequently. Make sure you constantly keep your contact list updated by checking every couple of months for new resources. As you are pitching your volunteer events to local media contacts, it is always important to keep track of their preferences or specific interests. For example, some reporters might prefer to be contacted in the mornings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and some may have set deadlines. Others might prefer you fax them a hard copy of your media alert. By taking these preferences into account, you'll build a strong rapport with reporters, bloggers and producers.

Building Relationships with Media

Relationships with members of the media are the foundation of successful public relations efforts. Whether the media contact is a reporter from a local newspaper or a blogger, all contacts should be carefully cultivated.

These tips will help you build relationships with reporters, bloggers, producers and news assignment editors:

- **Research, research, research.** Before contacting any reporter, it is crucial to do your homework. Read a hard copy of your local newspaper, and visit the outlet online to determine who covers stories of interest relevant to your organization. Keep detailed notes regarding their areas of coverage, and check the outlet frequently for stories the reporter or blogger covers.
 - The best pitches¹ leverage recently published articles from the reporter. For example, if John Smith of the *Lexington Herald-Leader* recently wrote about local volunteer opportunities, follow up by referencing the specific article, and share why your information is relevant to his audience or why it is a natural flow based on his last story.
 - Also, it helps to track the reporter's personal interests – sometimes, this action can help signal areas of interest and ease conversation. Say Mary Smith of the *Virginian-Pilot* is a veteran's wife – she may be particularly interested in your unit's activities.
- **Know when to follow up.** Don't be afraid to connect with a reporter a few times a month. For example, if a reporter did not respond to your first email outreach but you note that he has written a story two weeks later, reach out to him again by phone or email to see if he has time to connect. Feel confident in following up when you have new information or an event to share, but be mindful of how frequently you do so. If a reporter hasn't connected after one or two attempts, it's time to take a break for a few weeks.
 - Once you are able to reach media contacts by phone, take note of any preferences they share with you. This may include requirements for meeting their deadlines, length of a submission, requirement for visuals (if TV), taping requirements if radio, and print resolution quality requirements for photos, etc.
- **Approach bloggers carefully.** One of the challenges many bloggers face once they become established and develop a profile in their niche is becoming the target of an overwhelming amount of "pitches," or people making requests of them. Similar to newspaper reporters and television news producers, bloggers receive hundreds of pitches every day. To ensure a blogger responds to your request – whether it's coverage or promotion of your unit's upcoming volunteer events – keep the following in mind:

¹ A pitch is a description of a potential story idea to an editor, reporter, blogger, news assignment editor or producer. It can be delivered verbally or sent via email. A pitch lays out why a story matters and makes the case for doing a certain story at a certain point in time. It should quickly and succinctly do a few things -- summarize the story you want a media outlet to cover and explain why that story matters.

- **Be genuine. Comment first. Pitch later.** Become a genuine and active member of the blog that you are pitching before you make personal contact. Typically, bloggers are more willing to interact with you if they can see you've gone to the effort of interacting with the content they've written. Add value to the conversation happening on the blog, and show that you're not just there to "take" but to "give."
- **Show you know who they are.** Bloggers tend to ignore automatically generated emails or ones that lack any personal touches. Take the time to get their details right. Use their name, mention their blog, and show that you're not just sending an email to multiple people but are directly reaching out to them.
- **Keep it simple.** It's important to keep your emails to bloggers brief, and pitch your idea quickly. If additional details are needed, you can provide those in a follow-up email or share a hyperlink that will direct them to more information. And last, but not least – whatever you are pitching - it will have more of a chance of success if there's something in it for the blogger. Clearly outline what you're asking for and how it will benefit the blogger, their blog and their readers. For example: If you are reaching out to a local military mom blogger, note how your upcoming volunteer event will benefit local military families and why they would be interested in attending and participating in the event.
- **Getting to know TV producers and assignment editors.** TV producers and news assignment editors work on a much different deadline schedule than print and online media contacts. The focus of their coverage can change at a moment's notice. For example, they might have a reporter scheduled to cover a ribbon cutting at a local business, but when a nearby factory fire claims the lives of workers, that reporter could be reassigned in an instant. When conducting media outreach to TV producers and reporters, keep these things in mind:
 - **Know the meeting schedule.** Every local TV station has morning and evening news planning meetings that are held at the same time every day. During these meetings, the producers decide the news they will be covering throughout the day and evening. It's important to know when these take place so you can provide assignment editors with information about your event ahead of the meetings so it can be considered for coverage.
 - **Send your information after you call.** Always send your news release or media alert to the news assignment desk after you've called to pitch your event. News assignment editors receive hundreds of news releases and media alerts daily; by sending your information after you speak with assignment editors, it creates a "mental flag" for the assignment as they check their email inbox.
 - **Always include your cell phone number:** News assignment editors and producers often make last-minute decisions to cover local news stories, so it's imperative to include your cell phone number on your news release or media alert. You could be out to lunch when a news assignment editor calls to let you know he will be sending

a reporter and camera crew out to your event, or he may even have follow-up questions before solidifying whether he can dispatch a camera crew.

- **Offer visuals and interviews:** News assignment editors and producers are always looking for captivating audio and visuals they can share with their local audience. It's up to you to share ideas for ways they can film your event, what types of dynamic visuals they can capture and who you have available on site for interviews. If you do offer individuals for interviews, ensure that you have identified a spokesperson that is well-prepared ahead of time and feels comfortable in front of the camera while articulately conveying key messages about your local unit and the event.
- **Say "thank you."** Like anyone else, reporters, bloggers, producers and news assignment editors like to feel appreciated. Express your gratitude for their time, especially if you inevitably work together or the reporter attends an event. It will make them more likely to remember you and work with you again in the future.

Promoting Volunteer Events and Building Engagement Using Social Media Channels

The social media tips and best practices included here will help you effectively engage with your unit's Facebook fans and Twitter followers. Also included is actionable advice regarding a recommended timeline for promoting your unit's upcoming volunteer events.

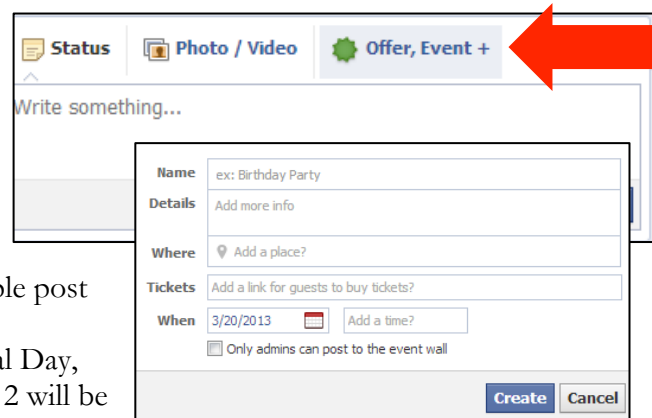
Keep these tips in mind when leveraging social media outlets for promoting your unit's volunteer events:

- **Provide all of the information.** When sharing event information, be sure to include the 5 W's: *who, what, where, when and why* in your posts. Providing these details will help your audience feel well-informed and more likely to participate.
- **Assess in real time.** Try to stay engaged with the real-time conversations your audience is having – are they asking questions? Answer them. Do they seem excited about an upcoming event? Share your mutual excitement! Engagement is a two-way street, so interacting with your audience will only amplify their interest and may even spark them to engage with others on the same topics.
- **Share photos/videos.** Visual assets make for great content in social media because they are easily shareable and more stimulating than copy alone. Incorporate photos with your posts leading up to an event. After the event, consider sharing photos or a video capturing event activities or interviews.
- **Encourage interaction.** Asking your Twitter followers to “retweet” (or “RT,” for short) is a simple way to encourage them to take action and spread the word about upcoming volunteer events. On Facebook, inspire fans to pay attention to posts by asking them to “Like” it. When your fans engage with your page, their friends will see it, which exposes your page and your events to more eyes.
- **Ask questions.** A great way to engage with fans is to ask easy-to-answer questions. It will help pique their interest and make them feel as though their input is important. Here are a few examples:
 - How are you honoring the veterans in your life on Veterans Day this year?
 - Is your family watching or participating in a Memorial Day parade this year?
If so, upload a picture of you and your family in their red, white and blue!
 - It also gives you information that you can compile and share back as news with your followers or fans. For instance, you may be getting some interesting answers on how people are honoring veterans that can be shared back.

Event Promotion Social Media Timeline

The following timeline is a model to follow to raise awareness of an upcoming volunteer event using Facebook.

- **2 weeks prior to the event:** Create a Facebook event by adhering to these instructions:
 1. Click “Events” on your page
 2. Fill out the event details
 3. Invite fans to RSVP
- **1 week prior to the event:** Share a simple post outlining details about the event.
 - Example: “In honor of Memorial Day, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 2 will be gathering to lay yellow roses at the San Antonio War Memorial. Join us on May 27 at 5:00 p.m. – we’d love your support!”
 - You can also add a visual element to your post by including a picture from last year’s event.
- **3 days prior to the event:** Gently remind your fans about the upcoming event, and encourage them to share the details with their friends.
 - Example: “Will you be joining us at the San Antonio War Memorial on May 27? We will begin laying yellow roses at 5:00 p.m.”
- **1 day prior to the event:** Upload a photo related to your event, and encourage fans to share it with their friends.
 - Example: “SHARE this photo if you plan on helping us honor our veterans tomorrow at the San Antonio War Memorial at 5:00 p.m.”
- **The day of the event:** Share a reminder post to encourage last-minute attendance.
 - Example: “We’ll be laying yellow roses at the San Antonio War Memorial at 5:00 p.m. tonight. We hope to see you there to help honor our veterans. For more information, contact Sally Smith at 123-456-7890 or sallysmith1@aol.com.”
- **1 day after the event:** Thank your fans for their support, and upload a photo from the event. You can also encourage those who attended to upload their own event photos.



The screenshot shows the Facebook event creation interface. At the top, there are three tabs: 'Status', 'Photo / Video', and 'Offer, Event +'. A red arrow points to the 'Offer, Event +' tab. Below the tabs, there is a text input field labeled 'Write something...'. Below that, there is a form with several fields: 'Name' (with a placeholder 'ex: Birthday Party'), 'Details' (with a placeholder 'Add more info'), 'Where' (with a placeholder 'Add a place?'), 'Tickets' (with a placeholder 'Add a link for guests to buy tickets?'), and 'When' (with a date picker showing '3/20/2013' and a placeholder 'Add a time?'). There is also a checkbox labeled 'Only admins can post to the event wall'. At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: 'Create' and 'Cancel'.

Media Relations Support Tools

Local Letter to the Editor

A letter to the editor is designed to express a point of view or deliver a call to action. The sample letter on the next page encourages local women to join the Auxiliary. The copy is meant to be customized based on your unit's specific details. In addition, it should be modified to meet the submission requirements of your local newspaper.

Prior to submitting a letter to the editor, keep the following in mind:

Accuracy: Double-check all your facts, the spelling of names and places, and make certain you have no grammatical errors. Even simple mistakes can hurt your credibility and cause an otherwise well-written piece to be rejected. Also, be certain to use the ALA's proper full name on first reference—American Legion Auxiliary—not a variation such as American Legion Ladies' Auxiliary, or the Auxiliary.

Length: Follow the word-length limits set by your local publication. Your piece is most likely to be selected if it fits the format. Each publication sets its own limit and the trend is toward shorter pieces. To confirm the format requirements, check the publication's website or follow up with the editor to confirm these details.

Identification: Always include your full name, contact information and association with the American Legion Auxiliary when submitting your piece on behalf of the organization.

Submission: Virtually all letters are submitted via email. Most publications will include the submission address on their opinion pages.

Responding to online outlets: Consider using your letter to the editor as a response to a timely online article by inserting it in the comments section.

Local Letter to the Editor Content Example

The honor and sacrifice of our country's military servicemembers come to mind when we see images of men and women deployed overseas or a young child being reunited with his/her mother or father who was serving abroad. All of these images tug at the heartstrings, but once gone, they are quickly forgotten.

More than 1 million military troops serving around the world will join the ranks of America's more than 22 million veterans in the next five years. The transition back to civilian life is not always an easy one – many troops will come home to Veterans Affairs hospitals, struggle to find employment and try to relearn how to live a daily civilian life. There are many ways [INSERT CITY NAME] residents can help returning troops make this transition.

As a member of the [INSERT CITY] unit of the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA), you can support and honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad. The ALA is the world's largest women's patriotic service organization, with nearly 800,000 members and 9,000 units in communities across the nation. I invite you to learn more about the ALA at www.ALAforVeterans.org.

The American Legion Auxiliary serves nearly 1 million veterans every year. Right here in [INSERT CITY NAME], we continue to help mitigate the challenges our veterans face and deliver upon our mission by organizing multiple events throughout the year to support veterans and their families in civilian life.

The time to honor and support those who have sacrificed so much to serve our country is now. If you are a wife, mother, daughter, sister, grandmother, granddaughter or great-granddaughter of a war-time veteran, or if you are a veteran yourself who has served our great country, I'd like to extend the invitation for you to learn more about our organization by participating at an upcoming volunteer event. By serving and supporting those who have given so much to us, we can help reshape and establish a thriving future for them. Please join us.

[INSERT YOUR FIRST AND LAST NAME HERE]

[INSERT YOUR LOCAL ALA UNIT TITLE (EXAMPLE: PRESIDENT, SECRETARY, MEMBER, ETC.)]

[INSERT YOUR LOCAL ALA UNIT NAME HERE]

Media Release Example



American Legion Auxiliary

Media Release

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Street Address, City, State ZIP Code

www.ALAforVeterans.org (and your unit/department's website, if available)

Contact: [PR chairman], [PR chairman's phone number]; [PR chairman's email address]
for [department president's name]

March 20, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209 to honor local Veterans with rose ceremony on Memorial Day

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – To honor the sacrifice of those who have served and continue to serve our country, American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) Unit 209 will be laying seven yellow roses, one for each unit within its district, at the Vietnam Memorial at the Colorado Springs Vietnam Memorial Park on Memorial Day – Monday, May 27. The ceremony begins at 1:00 p.m. MST.

The tradition of the laying of the yellow roses is a biannual event that takes place on both Memorial Day and Veterans Day and is one of the many ways American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209 delivers on its mission to serve our country's veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad.

“We look forward to having members of the Colorado Springs community join us on Memorial Day for this important event,” said Jackie Bowen, ALA Unit 209 president. “The ceremony helps us keep the memories of those who have served our country alive in our minds and hearts.”

The public is invited to join the ceremony with members of the American Legion Auxiliary. The Colorado Springs Vietnam Memorial Park is located at 1605 E. Pikes Peak Ave., Colorado Springs, Colo., 80901.

More information can be found on ALA Unit 209's website at <http://www.americanlegioncoloradosprings.org/auxiliary.cfm>, or by calling 719-574-1223.

American Legion Auxiliary members have dedicated themselves for nearly a century to meeting the needs of our nation's veterans, military and their families both here and abroad. They volunteer millions of hours yearly, with a value of nearly \$2 billion. As part of the world's largest women's patriotic service organization, Auxiliary volunteers across the country also step up to honor veterans and military through annual scholarships and with ALA Girls State programs, teaching high school juniors to be leaders grounded in patriotism and Americanism. To learn more about the Auxiliary's mission or to volunteer, donate or join, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.

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Media Release Key

A powerful news release can tell a story, report news or help a cause. By sharing the vital information that will interest media, you can increase the visibility of your volunteer event within your local community. The key included below will help you shape a strong news release.

Header: Includes local information for your unit. Enter your unit's specific contact information into the highlighted area in the media release template. This includes your department, your unit's website (if applicable) and your unit's public relations contact.

American Legion Auxiliary
Media Release
DEPARTMENT OF COLORADO
123 Legion Lane, Colorado Springs, Colorado 73066
www.ALAforVeterans.org (<http://www.americanlegioncoloradosprings.org/auxiliary.cfm>)
Contact: Karen Smith: Karen.Smith@alaforveterans.org

Timestamp: The "timestamp" consists of the day, month and year of the release's distribution.

April 9, 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Headline: A powerful headline will draw readers' attention faster and better than anything else. It's important to spend time creating one that is relatively short and will make people keep reading.

American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209 to honor local Veterans with rose ceremony on Memorial Day

Lead Paragraph: You should include a one- to four-sentence summary paragraph directly after your headline. This is a concise, condensed version of the information contained in the rest of your release. In this paragraph you will identify your organization, describe your activity briefly and provide an overview of the information you will expand upon in the remainder of the body of the release.

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. – To honor the sacrifice of those who have served and continue to serve our country, American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) Unit 209 will be laying seven yellow roses, one for each unit within its district, at the Vietnam Memorial at the Colorado Springs Vietnam Memorial Park on Memorial Day – Monday, May 27. The ceremony begins at 1:00 p.m. MST.

Main Body of the Release: After the lead paragraph, you should take the opportunity to explain the volunteer event and elaborate on the details. The purpose of the main body of the release is to increase interest and provide information. Quotes from participating members or unit leaders are appropriate in this section and will add credibility to the overall release.

In general, news releases should be kept to one page in length. Short, concise paragraphs are important. Remember: Media contacts receive numerous news releases each day. Keep it short and to the point.

In addition, many contacts will not open attachments as a precaution against spam. To ensure they read your release, copy and paste the text into the body of your email.

The tradition of the laying of the yellow roses is a biannual event that takes place on both Memorial Day and Veterans Day and is one of the many ways American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209 delivers on its mission to serve our country's veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad.

"We look forward to having members of the Colorado Springs community join us on Memorial Day for this important event," said Jackie Bowen, ALA Unit 209 president. "The ceremony helps us keep the memories of those who have served our country alive in our minds and hearts."

The public is invited to attend the ceremony, joining members of the American Legion Auxiliary. The Colorado Springs Vietnam Memorial Park is located at 1605 E. Pikes Peak Ave., Colorado Springs, Colo., 80901.

More information can be found on American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209's website at <http://www.americanlegioncoloradosprings.org/auxiliary.cfm>, or by calling 719-574-1223.

Boilerplate statement: This follows your final paragraph and typically contains standard information about your organization and its mission. You should make sure the Auxiliary boilerplate is included at the end of all news releases. You may opt to add an additional sentence at the end of the standard boilerplate describing your local unit. For your reference, following is the approved national Auxiliary boilerplate:

American Legion Auxiliary members have dedicated themselves for nearly a century to meeting the needs of our nation's veterans, military and their families both here and abroad. They volunteer millions of hours yearly, with a value of nearly \$2 billion. As part of the world's largest women's patriotic service organization, Auxiliary volunteers across the country also step up to honor veterans and military through annual scholarships and with ALA Girls State programs, teaching high school juniors to be leaders grounded in patriotism and Americanism. To learn more about the Auxiliary's mission or to volunteer, donate or join, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.

News release ending: The traditional mark used to indicate a news release is finished is a series of three pound signs, or ###.

###

Media Alert Example



American Legion Auxiliary

Media Alert

Department of Texas

123 Main Street, San Antonio, Texas 77630

www.ALAforVeterans.org (and your unit's website, if available)

Contact: [PR chairman], [PR chairman's phone number]; [PR chairman's email address]
for [department president's name]

American Legion Auxiliary to place yellow roses on San Antonio Vietnam Memorial

Organization shows deep gratitude to servicemen and women on Veterans Day

Who/What: In honor of Veterans Day, the American Legion Auxiliary (ALA) Unit 526 will lay yellow roses at the San Antonio War Memorial. America is built on the service of extraordinary citizens, and placing yellow roses at the War Memorial is a striking symbolic gesture to demonstrate our gratitude for the sacrifice of our nation's armed services. While ALA Unit 526 will be placing yellow roses at the local War Memorial, other ALA units across the nation will be doing the same in their respective communities.

American Legion Auxiliary members have dedicated themselves for nearly a century to meeting the needs of our nation's veterans, military and their families both here and abroad. They volunteer millions of hours yearly, with a value of nearly \$2 billion. As part of the world's largest women's patriotic service organization, Auxiliary volunteers across the country also step up to honor veterans and military through annual scholarships and with ALA Girls State programs, teaching high school juniors to be leaders grounded in patriotism and Americanism. To learn more about the Auxiliary's mission or to volunteer, donate or join, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.

When: **Monday, Nov. 11, 2013 (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.)**

- 6:00 – Arrival/Opening Ceremony
- 6:15 – Placement of roses
- 6:30 – Guest speaker: Jessica Martinez, daughter of the late Joe Martinez, Vietnam War veteran
- 7:00 – Social gathering
- 8:00 – Closing remarks and dismissal

Where: Auditorium Circle
1234 Veterans Lane
San Antonio, TX

Special Guests: Jessica Martinez, daughter of the late Joe Martinez, Vietnam War veteran, will share her personal story about her father's sacrifice for our country and commemorate all of those who have also made the sacrifice to serve our nation.

Media Alert Key

A media alert should answer only the important questions: Who, What, When, Where and Why. The below key will provide you with an overview of the type of information to include in each section of the media alert template.

Header (Top Section): This section sets up the entire document. It provides the basic contact information for the American Legion Auxiliary and your unit specifically.

Who/What/Why: This section introduces your event to the media. This section should be one to two paragraphs and include a description of the event, why the Auxiliary is putting on the event and how the event is beneficial to serving our country's veterans, military and their families. After seeing this section, a reporter or blogger should have a good idea of what the event is, why it is important and what type of story he or she can put together based on the event's details.

When: Includes the date, time and duration of the event. If your event has a specific itinerary of activities, include it as a bulleted list here. By providing a bulleted itinerary, the media can prioritize which parts of the event are the most compelling and determine when spokespeople will be available. This can also help guide them as to when the best photo or video opportunities will occur.

Where: Lists the venue, street address, city and state of the event. It's important to include as many details as possible in this section. Sometimes it's helpful to note cross streets or nearby landmarks so that reporters and editors can find the location with ease.

Special Guests: Features significant or newsworthy guests or attendees. Always point out if there is an interview opportunity. This is an important section because it adds another dimension to the event announcement for the media, and, in some cases, a prominent figure from your local community can help draw the media to your event. However, it's important to note that before adding the names of special guests to your media alert, it is always important to confirm they are willing to participate in interviews with media and that they have enough understanding of the Auxiliary to make certain their comments are on point and match your desired messaging.

Event Promotion Tools

Newsletter Templates

- Newsletter templates are available in two different versions that exist outside of this guide.
- You can download these from the Resources page of www.ALAforVeterans.org.
- Both templates have been created in Microsoft Word format.
- The Microsoft Word templates allow you to easily populate each with content relevant to your unit's recent news items, photographs and volunteer events.
- Once templates have been populated with content, they can be printed and distributed locally.

Tips for Optimizing Media Opportunities at Events

Follow these tips and best practices to ensure media contacts have the best possible experience at your volunteer events.

Prior to the event

- **Prepare.** Provide the media contact(s) with a cell phone number for someone from your organization who will be an on-site contact. You may do this via email or phone, but it is nice for them to have it in writing.
- **Gather materials.** Bring any materials that might be of use to media contacts with you to the event. Compile multiple copies in a folder so they are all in one place, and make sure you or the assigned on-site media contact has this folder at all times during your volunteer event.

Examples of these materials:

- Fact sheets
 - News releases
 - Media alerts
 - One page document featuring photographs of speakers or special guests with captions identifying each
- **Identify a spokesperson to work with media.** As the head of public relations for your unit, this person may be you. Whether it is you or another unit member, ensure the following key preparations are taken:
 - The spokesperson should be prepared with key messages and statements ahead of any interviews.
 - To help prepare the spokesperson, stage a mock interview so she can practice weaving in key messages and statements into her responses in a natural manner.
 - Your spokesperson should appear confident and convey a positive presence on camera or even while conducting a telephone interview with a reporter.
 - The spokesperson should also be available and accessible for media opportunities, as these moments can arise at any time.
- **Prepare statements.** Media will want to speak with members of your unit. Prior to the event, host a meeting to go over any key messages you'd like them to convey to the media. Remember to:
 - Keep messaging simple. Example: "The American Legion Auxiliary is dedicated to meeting the needs of veterans through events such as this."
 - Point to solutions. Example: "Becoming a member of the American Legion Auxiliary is a rewarding way to give back to our veterans."
 - Direct people to your website. A reporter may ask, "Where can folks go for more information about the American Legion Auxiliary?" By directing individuals to your website, www.ALAforVeterans.org, they can find out more about the organization and how it delivers its mission.

At the event

- **Say hello.** Once a member of your organization has been assigned as an on-site media contact, she should be responsible for greeting media when they arrive. These individuals should be positioned at the entrance of the event. The on-site media contact should also be aware of where all approved spokespeople are; that way, she can easily direct media to them if they are looking to conduct an interview or obtain a quote.
- **Connect them with a spokesperson who can serve as the lead to deliver key messages.** Confirm that the spokesperson you have identified for your unit can be easily accessed and available to participate in interviews. Media often show up without notice, so being able to quickly make the connection between the reporter and your spokesperson is essential to ensure coverage of your event.
- **Offer volunteers.** Have volunteers readily available to speak on behalf of your unit. Media may ask questions for which they can provide the best response. Introduce your media contact(s) to one or two volunteers who can have a conversation with him or her.
- **Provide materials.** Leverage the folder you prepared prior to the event to provide relevant media materials. Reporters often like to take these materials before they leave so they can reference information after the event.
- **Exchange contact information.** In some cases, a media outlet may send a reporter or camera crew that you did not have previous contact with. In these cases, it's important to ask for that individual's business card or contact information. By obtaining this additional information, you will not only add to your media list, but you will now have the necessary information for follow up after your event.

After the event

- **Follow up.** It is vital to conduct a follow up with all media contacts who attend your volunteer event. Send them an email or give them a call to:
 - Express gratitude for their attendance
 - Determine if they have any questions
 - Inquire when and if they will run a story
 - Determine if they need help identifying individuals they may have photographed
 - Inform them of other upcoming volunteer events and activities
- When the story runs in print or airs on television, make sure you obtain a printed copy or a recorded copy for your files, allowing you to share the event coverage with other members in your unit.
- Embed or post a link to the coverage on your unit's website and Facebook page (if applicable) so visitors will have the opportunity to see your unit's volunteer work captured on film or in print.

Enhance Your Volunteer Event by Inviting Local Celebrities and Public Officials

Including a local celebrity or public official in your program lineup can add a “wow” factor to your event that attracts media by providing a quote and photo opportunity.

Consider inviting the following:

- Mayor
- President of city council
- City council members
- State representative
- Well-known business owners
- Chamber of Commerce president
- Actors/dancers/singers/musicians who are well-recognized
- Local sports heroes – coaches, athletes, trainers or officials

Introduce the American Legion Auxiliary and your cause: Reach out to these special guests via email, phone or regular mail to share information about the Auxiliary, the organization’s mission and your unit’s activities.

How they can help: Share specifics about the event details and what you would like their role to be. For instance, you might like the mayor to show his or her support by speaking to the volunteers at your event, or by sharing a few remarks at a ceremony honoring locals who sacrificed their lives while serving our country overseas. If they agree to speak or attend your event, be sure they receive the date, time and location information well in advance. You should also provide the cell phone number of an on-site contact from your unit. A local sports celebrity might help get the crowd fired up and excited before a fundraising event and might agree to autograph a picture afterward.

Why they should help: Local celebrities and public officials may have limited time and resources, so be sure to explain why this event is so important and that you will limit their involvement to the specific request.

Who they can contact: Provide them with your contact information so they can follow up with any questions and let you know their decision.

A thank-you: Finally, be sure to thank them for their time and consideration. Let them know you are excited about the possibility that they may participate and attend your unit’s volunteer event. You’d love to have them on board!

Recommended Information to Include in Event Flyers

You can download these from the Resources page of www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Headline: What are you promoting? Make sure the type is legible and large. The headline should be engaging and inviting. For example: “Help us honor the memory of servicemembers in our community at a wreath-laying event.”

Location, date AND time: This information should be placed near the top of your flyer and should include specific details. Provide the street address, cross streets (if necessary) and the location of the event check-in.

Event description: This section of the flyer should include a few strong lines about the event, but not multiple paragraphs. It should explain what the event is and what volunteers will be doing.

Event description example:

On Saturday, August 10, American Legion Auxiliary Unit 209 will be helping patients beat the heat with a sweet treat during its annual ice cream social at McCandless Veterans Nursing Home.

Volunteers will help serve ice cream and toppings to patients while serenading them with the songs of summer. The ice cream social will provide an opportunity for patients to socialize with others and enjoy a refreshing treat.

Questions and contact information: Include a name along with an email address or phone number that people can call for more information or to sign up to help in advance of the event. Check messages on the day of the event in case there are last-minute questions.

Tips for flyer placement: Check the rules for each location, but consider locations that get a lot of foot traffic, including:

- Military bases
- Popular local dining establishments (coffee shops, restaurants, cafés)
- Libraries
- Supermarkets
- Banks
- Shopping centers
- Post offices

New Volunteer Communication Tools

Following Up with Advertising Responders by Phone

Once you receive the contact information for a potential new volunteer or member who has expressed initial interest in the American Legion Auxiliary by contacting the call center or website, you will want to contact her by telephone quickly.

The following script provides guidance on how to inform a potential member or volunteer about the American Legion Auxiliary, your particular unit and invite her to one of your unit's upcoming volunteer events.

ALA UNIT MEMBER: Hello, this is [YOUR FIRST AND LAST NAME] calling on behalf of the [INSERT CITY] unit of the American Legion Auxiliary, may I please speak with [SAY POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER'S FIRST AND LAST NAME]?

ONCE POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER ANSWERS THE PHONE

ALA UNIT MEMBER: Hi [POTENTIAL VOLUNTEER'S NAME]. My name is [YOUR FIRST AND LAST NAME]. I am calling on behalf of the [INSERT CITY] unit of the American Legion Auxiliary. I am following up with you because you had expressed interest in our organization after seeing information about our mission to serve our country's veterans. Is this a good time for you to talk?

If it is not a good time for the potential volunteer to talk, work with them to identify a time that works best for their schedule. In addition, share your phone number and email address.

If it is a convenient time for the potential volunteer to talk, allow time for her to share what inspired her to contact the call center or visit the website for more information about the ALA. Once she shares why she is interested, be prepared to extend an invitation to her to join your unit at one of its upcoming volunteer events later in the month. You should be prepared with a list of upcoming volunteer activities and events your unit will be organizing, so you can share several options with her.

If the potential volunteer agrees to attend one of the volunteer events, express enthusiasm about her interest, and share the following:

Event location – address and cross streets

Parking information – if necessary

Date and time she should arrive

Name of the individual(s) she should check in with when she arrives, location of where she should plan to check in, as well as cell phone numbers for those on-site contacts

Background information about the event and how it aims to deliver upon the Auxiliary's mission

An overview of the types of volunteer work they would be doing

Once you share the upcoming volunteer event details, answer any follow up questions she may have.

If the potential volunteer still has additional questions about the Auxiliary after you have shared information about your unit's upcoming volunteer events, you can weave a few of the below key messages into your conversation; however, if conversation does not allow for mention of these, they do not need to be referenced.

After you have addressed her questions, thank her for her time and note that you are excited to meet her in person. Keep the lines of communication open by telling her she can contact you at any time with questions. Prior to saying goodbye and hanging up, share your telephone number and email address. In addition, let her know she can learn more about the Auxiliary by visiting the organization's website – www.AL4forVeterans.org, and your unit's website, if applicable.

If the potential volunteer does not commit to attending an upcoming volunteer event, thank her for her time and let her know she can reach out to you at any time to further discuss her interest in the ALA and answer any additional questions she may have. Prior to ending your conversation, share your telephone number and email address. In addition, let her know she can learn more about the ALA by visiting the organization's website – www.AL4forVeterans.org, and your unit's website, if applicable.

American Legion Auxiliary Key Messages

The mission of the American Legion Auxiliary is to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad. We advocate for veterans' needs, educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace and security.

Founded in 1919 during the first National Convention of The American Legion, we have grown to be the world's largest women's patriotic service organization.

We are nearly 800,000 wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters of veterans who served our great country during times of war. Some of us are even veterans ourselves.

If you aren't eligible to join, will you work side-by-side with us as a volunteer?

We have nearly 9,000 units in local communities across the USA and in a handful of foreign units around the world.

American Legion Auxiliary members volunteer more than 6 million hours a year for a collective value of service to our veterans, servicemembers and their families of more than \$1.4 billion.

If you value patriotism, responsible citizenship, volunteerism and advocacy for veterans, the military and their families, you will feel right at home in the American Legion Auxiliary.

You can educate our nation's school children about the American flag, assemble care packages to send to our troops, or volunteer at a local VA Medical Center.

As a volunteer or member of our local Auxiliary unit, you'll have many hands-on opportunities to serve in ways that truly make a difference.

Enhancing the Volunteer Experience

Determine an Event Point of Contact for New Volunteers When They Arrive

Prior to a new volunteer arriving at your event, select a person or persons from your unit for that individual to “check in” with when they arrive. That person might be you!

Point(s) of contact should plan to make an introduction, ensure the new volunteer feels comfortable and share the following:

- “Welcome! My name is [SAY FIRST AND LAST NAME] it’s so nice to meet you. Thank you for coming out to volunteer today.”
- “I’ve been a part of our unit for [NUMBER OF YEARS/MONTHS/WEEKS] and really enjoy serving our country’s veterans, military and their families. I believe today’s volunteer event will provide you with a great firsthand experience of how we put our mission into action, and we’re so glad you can be part of that.”
- “I’d like to introduce you to some of my fellow members and show you around so you can become familiar with how the event will run. After I walk you through everything, we can work together to determine a role you can play that works best with your talents and experience.”
- “If you have any questions at all, please do not hesitate to ask me or one of my fellow unit members. We’re happy to answer any questions or address any concerns you may have.”

Be Prepared to Answer Questions

A new volunteer may have several questions about the event and the role she’ll play; it’s up to you to be armed with the information and knowledge to answer these questions.

Having the below information in your “back pocket” to speak to will be helpful for sharing with a potential member:

- How will today’s volunteer event run?
- What are the key roles volunteers will play during today’s event?
- How many veterans are we planning to serve today?
- As I am volunteering, if there is a problem, who should I notify?
- How long is the duration of today’s event?

Match a New Volunteer to the Appropriate Volunteer Role

Just like an employer seeks to match its employees to positions where their intelligence and experience can be best utilized, aim to “match” a new volunteer with a suitable role/position of responsibility. Nothing can be more discouraging to a new volunteer than to assign her to a task that is not a good fit.

- To help align her with a role/position that best fits her talents, gather basic information about whether she prefers to work on the frontlines with veterans or supporting and organizing behind the scenes.
- At the event, you can walk her through the flow of how it will run and provide her with an overview of different roles she can play.
- Once the potential member has a grasp of the different roles she can play, work with her to identify one or two roles she would like to fill.

Integrate New Volunteers into the Event

Once your new volunteer has determined the role she would like to play at your volunteer event, it's important she is paired up with an experienced volunteer to show her the ropes. The new volunteer will get up to speed faster and, if she does her job well, will feel more like a part of the unit from the start.

When pairing your new volunteer with a fellow unit member, prompt the unit member to make an introduction and share a welcoming message. In addition, the experienced unit member should do the following:

- Answer questions and engage in small talk.
- Be prepared to share information about her involvement with the American Legion Auxiliary and how she supports its mission to serve our country's veterans, military and their families.
- Introduce the new volunteer to other unit members.
- Check in regularly with the new volunteer to ensure she is having a positive experience.

Touch Base Before They Leave

Following the completion and cleanup of your event, it's important to take time to speak with the potential member and gather feedback regarding her volunteer experience. A few questions you should ask:

- How did you like your experience today?
- Is there anything you felt was unpleasant about your volunteer experience today?
- Is there anything you would suggest to improve our volunteer event?
- Is there anything we could have done to make your experience better?

Say Thank-You

Most important of all – SAY THANK-YOU! Before a new volunteer departs from your event, please be sure you and your fellow members thank her for her time and hard work. She should be recognized for her efforts and the impact she has made on veterans in your community.

After you have thanked her, let her know you will be following up with her shortly. At this time, you can also ask her the best way to reach her (phone, email, etc.). This will help ensure your follow-up communication is effective and garners a response.

Engage New Volunteers After the Event

Once a new volunteer has participated in an event organized by your unit, it's important to continue to keep her engaged and interested in joining your unit. Following are suggestions on how to continue to stay in touch and build interest.

Say Thank-You

- Let the new volunteer know how much you appreciated her sharing her time and efforts to support the American Legion Auxiliary's mission to serve our nation's veterans, military and their families.
- Encourage other unit members to say thank-you to the new volunteer before she leaves the event.
- Follow up with a thank-you letter, mailed or emailed promptly (a sample has been provided in this tool kit).

Ask for Feedback

- After you've thanked a new volunteer for her time and participation at the event, ask her for feedback regarding her experience, as she will appreciate the opportunity to share her opinions
- By having new volunteers share feedback, you and your unit will gain insights that can enhance and make your future events more productive

Extend the Invitation Again and Keep In Touch

- Remind the new volunteer of upcoming events that your unit will be hosting
 - Don't just share dates and times for the upcoming events, but let the new volunteer know exactly what the event entails, how she can help and how the event will make a lasting impact for veterans and their families
- Invite the new volunteer to an upcoming unit meeting so she can have a close-up of what it would be like to be a member, if she's eligible.
 - By having a new volunteer attend an upcoming meeting, she has yet another opportunity to become acquainted with other unit members and will have a firsthand look at how your unit functions and plans to deliver on its mission
 - During your unit's meeting, you can also demonstrate the impact her work will have on the Auxiliary and the veterans and their families you serve
- If she's not eligible for membership, ask if she'll continue to work side-by-side with us as an ALA volunteer.
- Ask her to meet for coffee, tea or lunch
 - During this time you can follow up to see if she has any additional questions about your unit and its work, talk more about her experience volunteering, get additional names of individuals who may be interested in joining the Auxiliary and further gauge her interest.
 - You can also ask her how she enjoyed her first volunteer experience.
 - By garnering feedback from her first volunteer experience, you can use this information to ensure other future new volunteers are provided with a positive experience at events.

After Volunteer Event Thank You Letter for New Volunteers

The content below should be inserted into the official American Legion Auxiliary stationery, or can be emailed to a new volunteer.

Dear [INSERT FIRST NAME OF POTENTIAL MEMBER HERE]

On behalf of American Legion Auxiliary Unit [INSERT UNIT NUMBER], we sincerely thank you for joining us in our volunteer efforts. My fellow members and I enjoyed meeting you in person and having you work alongside us at the event.

Your enthusiasm and hard work contributed to the overall success of the event. Your effort and support meant a lot to those we served and helps the ALA deliver on its mission to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of our veterans, military and their families, both at home and abroad.

We very much look forward to having you continue to join us as we serve our country's veterans and hope you will consider membership in our organization. Together, we can do more to serve the millions of veterans who need our support. If you are interested in attending our unit's meeting to learn more about becoming a member, or if you would like to participate in additional volunteer opportunities, please do not hesitate to contact me or one of my fellow unit members.

Thank you again for your time and efforts! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Very Best,

[TYPE YOUR NAME HERE AND SIGN ABOVE ONCE LETTER IS PRINTED. IF YOU SEND THIS BY EMAIL, PLEASE USE AN EMAIL SIGNATURE THAT INCLUDES YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION]

[INSERT YOUR PHONE NUMBER HERE. IF YOU TEXT, MENTION THAT AS WELL.]

[INSERT YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS HERE]

[INSERT YOUR UNIT'S WEBSITE ADDRESS AND/OR FACEBOOK WEB ADDRESS HERE]