

How to Partner with Organizations for Community Outreach

Many times, programs and projects held by the American Legion Auxiliary are held at the post with primarily members attending and volunteering. In an effort to promote patriotic community service activities and build community partnerships, units are encouraged to host events to raise community awareness of what we do while focusing on our national heroes. (It is encouraged not to use these events for membership recruitment purposes.)

Community Outreach Examples:

- Plan a Send Off and/or Welcome Home event.
- Plan a stand down.
- Coordinate a Veterans Creative Arts Festival with your local VA facility.
- Facilitate theme-related events such as a Back to School Bash, Easter Egg Hunt or a holiday-themed party (with gifts) for military and underprivileged children at the post or local community center.
- Hold 5K Freedom Walk with proceeds going to a veterans-related cause.
- Hold a Community Covenant event, 9/11 Remembrance event or Blue Star Banner Salute (see our guide: How to Invite Community Support for those Serving).
- Hold other mission-focused events that are open to the community.

How to Partner:

- Gather up to five active Auxiliary members (not necessarily officers) and develop a list of community influences—both individuals and organizations. Host a planning event to bring this focus group together to discuss your project. See Possible Local Partners/Volunteers for possible partnering organizations. Contact any additional organizations/groups that would make good collaborators on this project.
- Working with your partnering organizations/groups, design an event that will benefit veterans and their families in your community. See Community Outreach Examples for some event possibilities.
 - Secure an honorary chairman for your planning committee. This person could be a local TV or radio personality or local celebrity, but it should be someone that the community trusts and to whom they listen.
- Run your event like a business. Create a budget. Secure media partners for promotion of the event and any sponsorships needed to fund it (i.e., sponsorships for free food, giveaways, prizes).
 - As you solicit donors and the media, have a prepared “elevator speech” that covers the aims and goals of the project, including information about the key organizations with which you are collaborating.
 - Know your objective and target audience.
 - Focus on the shared purpose/passion behind the project.

- Identify a media outlet that best fits the needs of your project; the one you like best may not be the best to promote the project. You might select one key media source for any special promotions or access, but you should send information to several television and radio stations.
 - If you are seeking donation of television time, be cautious of February, May and November, as these are “sweeps” months. During these months, a television station may be less likely to donate airtime.
 - Notify the media of your event in advance with a media advisory and phone call, inviting specific contacts at the outlet to attend four to six weeks in advance. Remind the general media of the event two weeks before the event date with the media advisory
 - Be sure to ask your media sponsors for time, not money. Remember: Their donated time is money you save and be aware the size of the media market in your town.
 - A large media market may mean you are able to get the radio or TV station to develop the promotional spot and donate airtime, but please do not expect this as it is rare. A smaller market means you may be able to get more coverage of your event.
 - Regardless of the size of the media market, be sure to announce where those interested can get additional information.
 - Ask for a specific schedule of when your advertisements will appear.
- Be firm on project deadlines.
- Scope out possible locations for your event. Community events are often too large to host at a post home. Consider a central community location so as not to give the impression of a recruiting event. If the event has sponsors, they could donate space to hold it. Obtain and have the necessary permits on hand. Plan for extras that will be needed such as food and audio/visual equipment.
- Fulfill all promises to sponsors, such as booths or signage at the event.
- Recruit volunteers for additional help at the event, as it becomes necessary.
- Submit new releases to be published within 10 days before the event, inviting the community to attend. While the weekend paper gets the most exposure, it is the most difficult to get into. If the wording is changed, it can be resubmitted for the day of the event, but it is most likely the release will be published only once.
 - Add the event to community calendars for newspapers and media outlets.
 - Provide information on main partners’ websites and social media accounts.

Possible Local Partners/Volunteers:

- Local high school National Honor Societies and JROTC
- Local college students [Community Engagement/Service office and/or Student Veterans of America (SVA) group]
- Local churches
- Family Readiness Groups
- U.S. Navy Seabees
- Girls State alumnae
- American Legion Baseball teams
- Boy and Girl Scouts; Cub Scouts and Brownies
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America affiliated Military Youth Centers on military installations

- Any partnering organizations already with a connection to your unit
- Individuals interested in volunteering with the Auxiliary (“Auxiliary Advocates”)

Follow-Up: Evaluate the Success of the Event

- Did your event accomplish the stated objectives? If not, was there another meaningful outcome?
- Did those in attendance express interest in getting more information about or joining the Auxiliary? This event should not be an overt membership tool, but some of your community volunteers and attendees may have asked about membership or expressed interest in the Auxiliary. This should be considered a success since you were a positive representation of the Auxiliary.

After the Event:

- Be sure to thank any sponsors or donors with a personal note saying why their donation mattered. If you have any media clippings or participation number to cite, include them.
- Send a personal note of thanks to any community volunteers expressing your appreciation. Say how much you enjoyed working with them (if you did) and invite them to participate again with the Auxiliary at a specific volunteer event, if available.
- Thank any organizations or individuals who helped your event run smoothly (i.e., getting a permit or promoting the event) with a token of appreciation such as a greeting card signed by the committee. Be sure to include “American Legion Auxiliary” and other partnering organizations on the card.
- Send photos and detailed information about your event for consideration in the *Auxiliary* magazine to alamagazine@ALAforVeterans.org. Doing so may gain more exposure for your unit and sponsors!