



How to Mobilize Community Support for Those Who Serve

The American Legion Auxiliary is well-positioned, due to our history and reputation, to mobilize our communities in support of veterans, servicemembers and their families. Units and departments should closely examine the needs of their communities and organize programs either of their own initiative or in cooperation with The American Legion or other organizations to cultivate a patriotic community. Cultivating patriotism in the community involves acknowledging our country's military history, saying "thank you" to veterans and servicemembers and supporting with practical and tangible services and supports the servicemembers, veterans and their families who have sacrificed for our freedom.

The Community Blueprint Network is an initiative to assist communities in gathering veterans, servicemembers and their families; community leaders; community volunteers; government agencies; and nonprofit organizations to foster collaborative and integrated solutions to the most common challenges facing veterans, servicemembers and military families in their communities. The Community Blueprint provides a guide for anyone who wants to organize community-wide support for the veterans, service members and their families. The Community Blueprint also provides recommendations for service action in the areas of behavioral health, education, employment, family strength, financial and legal services, housing and homelessness, reintegration and volunteerism. The Community Blueprint Network is inspired and supported by a coalition of over 55 veteran and military serving organizations (including the American Legion Auxiliary), and administered by Points of Light. The Community Blueprint Network is the only national, scalable approach currently available for building robust community-wide public-private support for veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

How to Coordinate with the Community Blueprint Network:

There are two main ways a unit or department can get involved. Firstly, Auxiliary members can take an active role in participating in a Community Blueprint coalition and implementing the service actions identified by the coalition. Secondly, members can serve as a driving force behind starting a Community Blueprint coalition in their community. Members can choose either or both paths. Please note that additional resources for all the following steps can be found on the Community Blueprint Network website.

- A. Join a Community Blueprint coalition in your community:
 - Locate the organization(s) in your community leading the initiative. This may be done by word of mouth or by visiting the Community Blueprint Network website.
 - Join the coalition and participate actively and regularly.
 - The Community Blueprint coalition should be implementing various service actions recommended in the Blueprint. Auxiliary units and departments can assist by:
 - Contributing knowledge on veterans, servicemembers and their families in the community to ensure the right service actions are selected.

- Actively encouraging participation in the service actions amongst the local military community.
 - Donating space for an action event or program, i.e., if the community is hosting a job fair, perhaps a Legion Family post home could serve as the venue.
 - Volunteer to ensure the service action is a success.
- B. Start a Community Blueprint coalition in your community
- Identify the need for an initiative like the Community Blueprint Network and register on the Community Blueprint Network website
 - Convene community leaders and partners to gather support for the initiative.
 - Perform a detailed analysis of your community to evaluate all services currently offered to the military community and any unfulfilled needs.
 - Form teams to evaluate specific community needs and the capabilities to provide these services for these needs to the military community. These teams should also identify potential service actions for the community to implement.
 - Using the step-by-step practice(s) selected, begin implementing the service action. Be sure to mobilize the community for additional volunteers before, during and after the event.
 - Assist in evaluating the impact in the community to ensure that the program achieved its goals.

Community Forces:

Community Forces seek to ensure that veterans, servicemembers and their families receive the support and services they need —right where they live. Formerly referred to as “Inter-Service Family Assistance Committees (ISFACs),” Community Forces are typically initiated by the National Guard in each state. Community Forces come in many forms, may have different names at the state and local levels (including some that continue to use “ISFAC”) and are spearheaded by a united partnership of area leaders who combine local talents and services to help their military neighbors thrive, prosper and maintain their resiliency.

How to Collaborate with a Community Force:

- Determine whether your state or area has an established Community Force by visiting the Joining Community Forces website. In the upper-right corner, ensure that your state is selected from the drop down menu, and click “Connect”. A pop-up message will appear, providing you with the state’s contact information, as well as allowing you to contact the Community Force.
- If your state or area has a Community Force, express interest in joining it. Begin by attending and actively participating in meetings and discussions, depending on the needs of the Community Force.
- Once you have an understanding of the Community Force’s focus areas, begin to contribute additional information relating to the needs of veterans, servicemembers and military families, as needed, and assistance in planning solutions with service action opportunities. This could include educating the other entities in the Community Force on specific programs the Auxiliary offers locally, assistance in planning.

Community Covenant:

Originally a program to honor members of the Army, Community Covenants now demonstrates community support for members of the five branches of the United States Armed Forces. Designed to foster and sustain effective state and community partnerships with the military, the Covenant aims to improve the quality of life for service members and their families. Covenants can be tailored to a specific community's needs. More than 450 Covenants have been signed in 48 states, three territories and Washington, D.C. To see if a Community Covenant has been signed in your community and learn more about their activities (and how the Auxiliary might be able to support the Covenant), contact Community Covenant staff by visiting their website and filling out the "Contact Us" form by clicking "Contact" in the top right.

Blue Star Salute:

With history traced back to the World Wars, a Blue Star Service Banner signifies that a loved one is serving in the Armed Forces. Each blue star represents one family member serving. Banners are available with up to five stars. If the servicemember is killed or dies while deployed, a smaller golden star is placed over the blue star.

Blue Star Banners can be purchased through Emblem Sales. Blue Star Banners can be presented to family members with deployed loved ones year-round without ceremony, or you can hold a Blue Star Salute. The American Legion offers a comprehensive guide to planning a Blue Star Salute event as an Armed Forces Day Celebration (the third Saturday in May) on their website. This guide includes a sample timeline and schedule, talking points and remarks, as well as public relations samples. Certificates for servicemembers and family members also can be downloaded from the event planning page of The American Legion's website. Many of these certificate templates recognize the efforts of the entire Legion Family.

September 11th Commemoration:

The American Legion Family is dedicated to honoring the victims of the September 11 attacks. Members are encouraged to plan annual patriotic or memorial events in the community on that date so that the memories of the victims do not fade. For your ease, The American Legion offers a comprehensive guide to planning an "A Day to Remember" event to commemorate September 11, 2001 on its website. This guide includes a sample timeline and task schedule, talking points and remarks, ways to get local students and groups involved, and public relations samples.