

Community is a social unit of people who share something in common – such as location, identity, values, or interest. This is the actual definition of Community. The Legion family is a community, the Military is its own community, your church is a community. So how do you bring them all these different communities together? Community Service.

For those of us who grew up or married into Military life, you moved around a lot. Your neighbors changed, the schools changed, your friends changed, what did not change is every place you moved to you would go into these cities outside of the military base were the people that have lived there for their entire lives are so welcoming to us the outsiders living in their community. They treat you like family for the short time you live there.

Whether you are a temporary resident or now a permanent resident of your community, it's time to thank your neighbors, thank that business that donated to your fund raiser or show up for your events.

Below are some easy and truly impactful ways to make a difference in the Community where you live.

- Volunteer at a food bank or soup kitchen
- Clean up public spaces like parks or beaches
- Doing yardwork for elderly/ill neighbor
- Participate in Blood drives
- Assist with local animal shelters
- Read to children at libraries or hospitals
- Put together first aid kits for homeless shelters
- Volunteer at a local nonprofit or community center
- Plant trees or a pollinator garden
- Encourage voter registration

I ask you to take the time to read through this Program Engagement Plan and let it inspire you to look around your community and find ways to March our mission throughout our community.

For God and Country,
Alysia Lombard,
Department of Florida
Community Service Chairperson
communityservice@alafll.org
#MASH #LETSMOVE



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 the 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 of 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 with 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 representative 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 numbers 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!



How to Participate in the 9/11 National Day of Service

9/11 Day, known formally as “Patriot Day,” has been designated by Congress as a national day of service and remembrance to pay tribute to the victims of 9/11 through charitable service and good deeds.

The American Legion Auxiliary urges its members to participate in 9/11 Day. We encourage members to make an official pledge of service on the 9/11 Day of Service website. We then invite members to “pass It on!” and share their pledge with other through Twitter, Facebook or other means. By sharing your pledges of service with others, ALA members serve as role models who motivate and challenge others to serve. Participating in national days of service, such as 9/11, is a suggested activity within the ALA community service plan of action.

Make a 9/11 Day of Service Pledge

To get involved in the 9/11 Day of Service, make a pledge to serve others on or around 9/11. You can participate in a volunteer activity or project of which are already a part and encourage others to join you. Or, you can organize a service activity specifically for 9/11 Day. Your service pledge can be as broad or as specific as you’d like, so long as it is in the spirit of service and remembrance. If you are looking for a lead to a specific service opportunity, consider pledging to sign up as Military Spouse eMentor, a new online program sponsored by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation where volunteers can share advice with military spouses seeking employment. Additional information about the mentor program is available at <http://ementorprogram.org/p/milspouse/about>.

Share Your 9/11 Day of Service Pledge with Others

ALA encourages its members to share their 9/11 day of service pledge on social media sites. We recommend X and Facebook.

A. Share your pledge on **X or Facebook**:

1. Visit 911day.org and make your pledge.
2. On the same screen as the pledge, scroll down to the header, “**Help Us Grow the 9/11 Day Movement.**” Select the share option.
3. “*Pass It On!*” by sharing your pledge on X or Facebook. Be sure to include the **#911day** and **#ALA** tags in your message to make sure your pledge is seen by others.
4. Search **#ALA** throughout the day on 9/11 to see how other ALA members are pledging to serve.
5. Be sure to follow **@ALAforVeterans** to keep up with ALA via Twitter on 9/11 Day and every day.

Example Tweet: “*I will sign up as an eMentor to help military spouses gain meaningful employment. What good deed will you pledge? 911day.org #911day #ALA*”

Example Tweet: “*I will read to kids on my military base next week. What good deed will you pledge? 911day.org#911day #ALA*”

B. Share your pledge on **Facebook**:

1. Visit 911day.org and make your pledge.
2. On the same screen as the pledge sign up, scroll down to the header, “**Help Us Grow the 9/11 Day Movement.**” Select the share option.

3. “Pass It On!” by sharing your pledge on Facebook. Be sure to tag us by including ‘@American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters’ and ‘#ALA’ in your post to make sure your pledge is seen by others.
4. ‘Like’ the ALA National Headquarters Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ALAforVeterans.

Example: “I will sign up as an eMentor to help military spouses gain meaningful employment. What will you do today? 911day.org @American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters #ALA”

Example: “I will read to military kids on base next week. What will you do today? 911day.org @American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters #ALA”

Other Ways to Get Involved in 9/11 Day

Not everyone can or wants to pledge their service online. Please participate in 9/11 Day somehow. Visit 911day.org to explore service project opportunities in your community and State. If there are no projects listed in your area, consider working with your Unit to organize your own 9/11 Day project, or do some volunteering individually.

Report Your Impact

Be sure to report your 9/11 Day activities and hours to your unit’s Community Service Chairman.



How to Participate in a Martin Luther King Jr Day of Service

History:

In 1994, Congress passed the King Holiday and Service Act, designating Martin Luther King, Jr., Day (observed on the third Monday of January) as a national day of volunteer service. Instead of a day off from work or school, Congress asked Americans of all backgrounds and ages to celebrate Dr. King's legacy by turning community concern into citizen action.

Participating on This Day:

The intention of the American Legion Auxiliary is to promote patriotic community service activities and to build community partnerships. Our service on this day elevates our presence in the community while focusing on the needs of our national heroes. It is encouraged not to use this day for membership recruitment purposes, but to approach this holiday as an opportunity to serve veterans in accordance with our mission.

Ways to Serve:

Here are six ideas to serve veterans on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day:

1. Help veterans in their home. Examples of these projects include building wheelchair ramps, basic home repairs and yard work.
 - a. [See 5 Ways to Help Veterans Around Their Home](#) (follow hyper link or see print version within this packet)
2. Organize or participate in a stand down.
 - a. [See How you can help local veterans by planning a stand down](#) (follow hyper link or see print version within this packet)
3. Host a job fair for veterans at a post, community center or library.
4. Organize a mid-year school supply drive for military children. To maximize effectiveness, collaboration with other units in your district and/or area is recommended.
5. Encourage Juniors to create Hero Packs, in conjunction with Operation: Military Kids, to be given to military kids who have a deployed family member.
6. Bring at least one new person (this can be a member that doesn't normally volunteer or a non-member) along as you visit with veterans at VA Medical Centers or state veterans' homes.

5 ways to help veterans around their home

Posted On: Sunday, 29 January 2017

Many of our nation's veterans need assistance around their home. Elderly or limited-mobility veterans may not be able to take care of all their housekeeping requirements and would appreciate some extra help.

Knowing that veterans and current servicemembers do not always ask for help in times of need, your local American Legion Auxiliary is a great place to look for assistance in locating veterans who may need some help at home. If you are unfamiliar with your local American Legion Auxiliary, you can find your state department [here](https://www.alaforveterans.org/) (<https://www.alaforveterans.org/>), who can put you in touch with a representative in your area.

Often, organizations or individuals aware of a veteran's issues will encourage those in need to share their information with the local American Legion Auxiliary unit. In this manner, volunteers can be matched with veterans in need of assistance.

Ways to Help Veterans at Home:

- Basic home tasks or repairs (i.e., painting a room or the exterior of a house, assembling a shelf, programming electronic devices or computers, hanging picture frames).
- Yard work (i.e., snow removal, raking leaves, weeding, mowing the lawn, brush cleanup).
- Build a wheelchair ramp for a veteran who has lost a leg or an elderly veteran who is less mobile.
- Cook a meal for them at their home.
- Do their laundry or housecleaning.

Now it's your turn!

- Find a veteran. Ask organizations or volunteer groups if they know of anyone you can help.
- Ask friends or family members to help. Two people can help tackle more projects.
- Follow up. After you complete the project, check back with the veteran and see if there is anything else you can do (i.e., if you mow the lawn, see if it needs mowed again in a few weeks).
- Share your experience to encourage others to find ways to help veterans.

Original link: <https://member.legion-aux.org/Blog/5-ways-to-help-veterans-around-their-home>

How you can help local veterans by planning a stand down

Posted On: Thursday, 09 April 2020

On any given evening in our country, 39,471 veterans are homeless, and 9 percent of those are women, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

During a stand down in Dixon, Calif., Robert Lacosse, a Marine and five-time attendee of the event, sat calmly in a barber's chair, enjoying a haircut and a beard trim. "It's great for the veterans," he said. "You don't have to worry about anything when you're here." Lacosse stood up from the barber chair with a smile. "I feel better already," he said, looking into a mirror. "I feel lighter."

Barber Kevin Hancock, a first-time volunteer at the stand down, appreciated the praise. He said he wanted to give back. "It's just good to volunteer," he said.

Stand downs are organized by self-appointed community coalitions that take on the task of holding the event. The philosophy of a stand down is to give homeless veterans a hand up, not a handout. For more information about stand downs, see our post **What's a Stand Down?**

"You find out there are people who do love you and who do care about you," said Army veteran Kenneth Jackson at a stand down in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Here's what it takes to plan a stand down as a one-day homeless veterans health fair:

1. Contact your local Veteran Service Organizations. Support organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary, The American Legion, VFW, DAV and others can offer insight and experience with events like this.
2. Visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless> to see if any stand down events are already planned for your area. If so, consider serving as a volunteer.
3. Approach the Homeless Outreach office at the VA medical center in your area and tell them you'd like to plan a stand down. Ask for the approximate number of homeless veterans in your area.
4. Determine when and where you would like to host the event. Consider your climate when deciding to have the event. If you are planning to host it outside, find a large, open space that is cost-effective to rent. Secure the proper permits.
5. Contact homeless centers and food banks in your area to spread the word about the upcoming stand down to other homeless or at-risk veterans in the community.
6. After seeing what services the VA medical center can provide, contact the following, as needed, to provide as many free services as possible:
 1. Health care screening and services:
 - Local chapter of the American Medical Association
 - Community Outreach Programs department of a large local hospital
 - Medical schools
 - Local health department
 - Eye Care – This is probably the most difficult service to find. Not everyone is eligible for vision benefits at the VAMC. Call ophthalmologists in your area to see if anyone is willing to donate their time.
 - Dental Care – Contact the local community college—many have dental programs with students who will volunteer. In addition, dental students have to practice on a certain amount of patients in order to graduate.
 - Social Security and food stamps – Contact the respective local offices.

The VA should offer information on VA benefits. They will probably be able to offer information on substance abuse and housing services. For veterans to be admitted to veteran only transitional housing, the referral often comes from the VA. For further assistance, contact local Vet Centers and the state Veterans Administration office.

7. Invite your local American Legion Auxiliary to assist in helping with questions you might have. They can be helpful with useful information, like how a veteran can obtain a copy of their DD-214, which is a document of the United States Department of Defense, provided upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active duty in the Armed Forces.
8. Download the most current Stand Down Information Form. http://nchv.org/index.php/service/service/stand_down/ to be listed in their database of stand down events, follow the directions to submit the form to National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.
9. Prepare to serve lunch to the veterans. Ask a restaurant or caterer to donate food. One option is to bring out a large grill and serve hamburgers.
10. Check with American Legion Auxiliary to encourage Legion Family members to volunteer at the event; veterans often enjoy spending time with other veterans.

Original link:

<https://member.legion-aux.org/Blog/How-you-can-help-local-veterans-by-planning-a-stand-down-event>



How to Make a Buddy Basket

Posted On: Tuesday, 03 April 2018

Moving to transitional or permanent housing can be particularly tough on homeless veterans – especially since they are less likely to have basic household items such as light bulbs, laundry detergent, and toilet paper.

Homeless veterans are thankful to get off the streets, but having basic supplies can be hard to come by.

Buddy Baskets, containers filled with common household goods, help meet those needs for veterans and military families in these situations. These baskets are part of a project started by The American Legion Family in Virginia several years ago.

The Buddy Basket Project can be done anywhere. Here are some helpful tips to get you started:

Locate a veteran or military family in need.

By visiting the [National Coalition for Homeless Veterans](http://www.nchv.org/) (<http://www.nchv.org/>), you can easily locate organizations that could help you find someone in need. Also, contact your local Veterans Affairs Medical Center's homeless coordinator.

Ask for donations (items or money).

Involve American Legion Family members for donations of items or money. If you are looking for lots of items, contact outside sources for donations and help. Reach out to local schools, businesses, or relatives and friends of members.

Set a deadline and establish a drop-off location for donations.

Provide contact information at those locations in case donors have questions for you.

Use monetary donations to purchase items at a discount store.

Set an assembly date, after the donation deadline, for members and volunteers to come together and make Buddy Baskets.

On assembly day:

- Sort all like items in a pile. For example, put all paper towels together, all laundry detergent together, etc. It might be best to start with larger items first and then move to the smaller items.
- Make sure to have signs by each pile explaining how many of each item needs to be in each basket.

- Designate a group of individuals to start by grabbing a basket and placing items in the basket, another group to package the finished baskets, and another group to write letters thanking veterans for their service and military families for their sacrifices and welcoming them into their new home.

Communicate with each of the veterans or military families – or the organization with which you are working – and determine how and when to get the baskets to the veterans or military families.

Make arrangements to drop off Buddy Baskets at the home or the organization. If taking the baskets to the new homes is not an option, see if the organization is able and willing to be the Buddy Basket drop-off location for you and the pick-up location for the veterans or military families. In case of inclement weather, secure the Buddy Baskets with plastic wrap.

Buddy Baskets are filled with basic household items to help veterans get back on their feet.

Suggested items:

- Laundry basket/waste basket
- Paper towels
- Bathroom tissue
- Window cleaner
- Scrubbing cleaner
- Rubber gloves for cleaning
- Dustpan with hand broom
- Light bulbs
- Shower curtain
- Bath towels
- Laundry detergent
- Eating utensils
- Dishes

Bonus Tip: Make the Buddy Basket look like a gift! Use plastic wrap to bundle around the basket and tie a ribbon at the top or add tissue paper and bows/ribbons to the side of the baskets. And don't forget your "welcome home" note!

Information provided from www.ALAforVeterans.org.

Original link: <https://member.legion-aux.org/Blog/How-to-Make-a-Buddy-Basket>

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.

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.

2026-2027 Community Service Program Awards Deadline and Submission Requirements

Department Awards:

Marching Boots Award

Awarded by the Chairperson to 1 Unit per membership grouping with the most miles, hours and donations during this reporting year.

1. Page header should include:
 - a. Unit Name and number
 - b. Location
2. Short narrative describing your Units Community Service efforts during this reporting year. Must include pictures, a minimum of 4 pictures.
3. Deadline for submission to be received by the Department Chairperson via email no later than May 26th, 2027.

Jan Croft “Hometown Award”

Sponsored by Boynton Beach, Unit 164

To be awarded to the Unit reporting multiple projects within the community.

1. Fly Page:
 - a. Name of Award
 - b. Unit Name and number
 - c. Location
 - d. Population of town or city
2. Entry to be in narrative form, double spaced, 8.5”x11” paper, not to exceed 1,500 words.
3. List all activities, hours spent, number of members participated, total value of projects.
4. Newspaper clippings, pictures, posters, and flyers may be included at the end of report.
5. Entries must have the name of the Unit President and Unit Community Service Chairperson at the end of the narrative.
6. Entry to be received by the Department Chairperson via email no later than May 26th, 2027

Cathy Larkin-Richards “Back the Badge” Award

Sponsored by Madeira Beach, Unit 273

This award will be granted to the Unit that had the greatest impact in supporting local law enforcement. Entries will be judged on the basis of the program’s overall effectiveness. Some suggestions are: Involvement with local law enforcement P.A.L. (Police Athletic League) or other sponsored at-risk youth mentoring, sponsoring high school future police officer initiatives, promoting community police appreciation events, and/or contributions to fallen officer memorials.

1. The Unit must submit a cover page stating the name of the award, Unit name and number, location, number of members, population of the town/city, and name of the law enforcement organization chosen for the program.
2. The entry must be written in narrative form, double-spaced, and must include all activities, hours spent, names of participating Unit members, and activities relating to the event from inception to conclusion.
3. The event/activity must be clearly explained and include the outcome or rationale for winning this award (what was accomplished either as it relates to one individual, event group or community).
4. The submission must include dollars spent and proceeds, specifically, what was given by the Unit and date in which it was received by the law enforcement agency or it's designee.
5. Deadline for submission to be received by the Department Chairperson via email no later than May 26th, 2027.

National Awards:

All award submissions must include a narrative (either a PDF or Microsoft Word document) explaining why the unit you are nominating should receive the award. You may also upload other supporting documentation that will give the committee a full picture of the important mission work your unit has accomplished this year. These files can be photos (JPG, JPEG or TIFs — no larger than 14MB) or PDF documents. If you have more than three supporting files, please email the committee at the email address listed in the form.

Committee-Specific Reporting Guidelines:

- What specific things did your unit do to make their communities a better place to live?
- What did your unit do to mobilize community support for those who are serving our country?
- How did your unit participate in the Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service and the 9/11 National Day of Service? Please give as many specific details as possible.
- Did your unit find new and creative ways to promote the ALA Community Service program? Please give specific examples.
- How did your unit participate in American Legion Family Day?

Unit Award: Most Outstanding Unit Community Service Program (per division)

- All unit entries must be submitted via [electronic form](#) by 5 p.m. EST on June 1.

Note: You will receive a confirmation when your award is submitted.

National Awards Form Link: <https://www.legion-aux.org/National-Awards-Form>

Unit Award: Best Promotion of American Legion Family Day (one per division)

- All unit entries must be submitted via [electronic form](#) by 5 p.m. EST on June 1.

National Awards Form Link: <https://www.legion-aux.org/National-Awards-Form>

(As a special request, if you submit for a National award, please let me know so that I can be on the lookout for it during the National Pre-Cons)

