

The Four Pillars of The American Legion

The American Legion's four pillars – **Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children and Youth** – are as relevant today as when our organization was founded in 1919.

All American Legion officers should be familiar with the programs offered under each pillar, along with how to conduct and publicize them, recruit participants and inspire community involvement.

In addition, all officers should know the Legion's legislative positions and be fully engaged in discussing with local, state and national elected officials how to support and achieve our legislative goals.

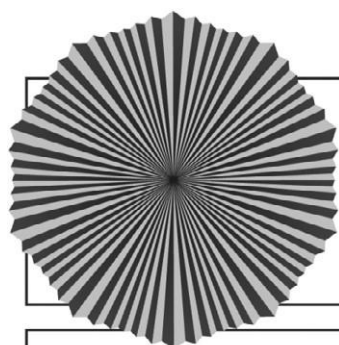
As an officer, strive to become a source of Legion history and knowledge. Be eager and prepared to answer any and all questions from a potential new member, and to speak with authority about The American Legion to other community groups.

Welcome every new member into the Legion by assigning him or her a mentor who is familiar with our traditions, customs, policies and programs.

Finally, encourage members old and new to complete the **BASIC TRAINING** course, which is the best and most convenient way to gain basic knowledge of who we are and what we do. Many Legionnaires want to become stronger leaders and only need the opportunity, making continuous training and education programs necessary at every level – post, district, county and department.

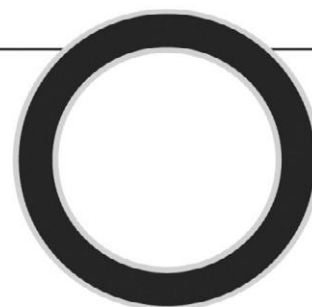
The American Legion emblem

Every part of the American Legion emblem has meaning. The emblem is laid upon the rays of the sun, giver of life, warmth and courage; foe of the cold, of the darkness, of fear, of apprehension. In turn, each of the emblem's parts signifies a meaning, which no American Legionnaire who wears the emblem should take lightly, and which he/she should know from the first moment it is put on. Why does the star signify constancy of purpose? Because the stars are fixed in the heavens. As the stars do not wander, so should The American Legion not wander from its fixed purposes. Further, the words "The American Legion" demand that the wearer "shall ever guard the sanctity of home and country and free institutions" There shines the emblem of The American Legion. It is your badge of pride and distinction, honor and service.



The rays of the sun

The rays of the sun form the background of the emblem and suggest the Legion's principles will dispel the darkness of violence and evil.



Outer rings

The larger of the two outer rings signifies the rehabilitation of our sick and disabled comrades. The smaller inside ring denotes the welfare of America's children.

The wreath

The wreath forms the center, in loving memory of those brave comrades who gave their lives in the service of the United States that liberty might endure.



The star

The star, victory symbol of World War I, symbolizes honor, glory and constancy. The letters "U.S." leave no doubt as to the brightest star in the Legion's constellation.



The words

The words "American Legion" tie the ring together for truth, remembrance, constancy, loyalty, honor, service, veterans affairs and rehabilitation, children and youth, national security and Americanism.

Inner rings

The smaller of two inner rings set upon the star represents service to our communities, states and nation. The larger outer ring pledges loyalty to Americanism.



Usage of the American Legion cap, emblem, facilities and political donations

According to Article II, Section 2, of the Constitution of The American Legion, “The American Legion shall be absolutely nonpolitical and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor for the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office or preferment.” The national charter, approved by Congress, also stipulates The American Legion as an organization is nonpolitical*, which has been interpreted by the national judge advocate as “nonpartisan” in modern lingo. Therefore, The American Legion as an organization is prohibited from contributing, helping or endorsing a candidate. However, a member – as a private citizen and not representing the organization – can employ whatever legal and ethical means to advance his or her candidate.

The Legion cap is considered the official Legion uniform (**see p. 40**). It is not an individual Legion member’s decision on the appropriate usage of the cap and emblem. If attending a political event, the American Legion cap, or any clothing with the emblem visible, should be removed so as not to imply endorsement by The American Legion. The problem is the assumption of endorsement by those who see the emblem or name worn at an improper location, such as a partisan rally.

When using post facilities to host candidates, the post should remove the emblem and American Legion flag to avoid any impression of endorsements. Candidates for all parties must be presented equal opportunity at the same time to use the facilities on the same terms and conditions as other competing candidates.

The American Legion values its independence and effectiveness on veterans’ issues. This stance is best maintained by neutrality on individual candidates or political parties. The American Legion by legal definition is nonpartisan and supports only issues that impact the Four Pillars.

The following is the position of the National Headquarters of The American Legion regarding financial contributions that might be offered by candidates for political office, campaigns, political action committees or political parties:

- The American Legion is very appreciative of donors who contribute to its programs, which enhance the quality of life for thousands of veterans, young people and their families.
- While The American Legion is pleased to see candidates address issues of concern to America’s veterans, it is a nonpartisan organization. The American Legion Constitution prohibits the organization from endorsing any candidate for political office.
- If a candidate, PAC or political party were to offer a financial contribution to The American Legion or its programs, the Legion would politely decline. While accepting the contribution may be perfectly legal, The American Legion wants to avoid even the perception that the organization supports any candidacy. Again, The American Legion values its independence and is beholden to no political officeholder or candidate.

** This means “nonpartisan” in today’s society. The American Legion is allowed by Congress to lobby for veterans benefits and a strong United States of America (NJA, October 25, 2012).*

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION**

**Indianapolis, Indiana
October 17-18, 2018**

Resolution No. 10: Support of the Veteran's Creed

Origin: Internal Affairs Commission

Submitted By: Internal Affairs Commission

WHEREAS, The American Legion has since its founding in 1919 dedicated itself to the service of veterans, their families, active servicemembers and the local communities where we live; and

WHEREAS, One of the reasons The American Legion exists is "...To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy ..."; and

WHEREAS, The Veteran's Creed is very similar to the U.S. Army's Soldiers Creed which has the intent to underline the "altruistic ethos of veterans themselves"; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans across America, seek to continue to make a difference in their communities and across our country; and

WHEREAS, Many veterans continue to take their oath of allegiance to their country and brothers and sisters in arms seriously; and

WHEREAS, In the fall of 2017, veterans groups worked with Georgetown University, located in Washington, D.C., to establish a Veteran's Creed whose intent was to inspire veterans to continue to serve and lead in service to their communities and country; and

WHEREAS, The American Legion can use the Veteran's Creed as a rallying point for our brothers and sisters in arms to understand that our mission is far from over; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 17-18, 2018, That The American Legion support, by appropriate means, the Veteran's Creed and its eight points; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion publish the Veteran's Creed as follows in the Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies:

- 1) I am an American Veteran**
- 2) I proudly served my country**
- 3) I live the values I learned in the military**
- 4) I continue to serve my community, my country and my fellow veterans**
- 5) I maintain my physical and mental discipline**
- 6) I continue to lead and improve**
- 7) I make a difference**
- 8) I honor and remember my fallen comrades**

SECTION I

Post Operations

The post

The American Legion is incorporated by an act of Congress and is organized into local posts, which, for purposes of coordination and administration, are grouped into departments. The post is the combat unit of The American Legion. Depending upon our posts' ability to realize American Legion values, effectively communicate them to others, and to carry out unselfish activities for community, state and nation, our organization will either succeed or fail. The post is The American Legion. Our duties are beautifully spelled out in the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion. Membership is by post only. Programs are effective to the degree the post adopts and puts them into operation. Mutual helpfulness becomes a reality through the post's comradeship, social activities and service programs.

The individual Legionnaire's perception of The American Legion – particularly the post officer's perception – largely defines the post. If The American Legion is perceived to be a bar, the post will be a bar. If post leadership thinks the post is doing a good job but still isn't attracting and engaging new members, the post is not what the majority of veterans in the area want from a veterans service organization.

Posts do not have to operate alike, regardless of the tendency to think they do. Membership troubles can arise in a community when a group with a narrow perception of The American Legion becomes dominant and suppresses any group with a different perception. This can prevent the development of activities that produce new leaders and new members. They also help or hinder the establishment of new posts that attract and serve entirely new groups of veterans.

The post has a responsibility to the veterans and children of its community – and to the community itself. What the community thinks of The American Legion is basic to what a Legion post thinks of itself. The American Legion exists only with the approval of a large segment of our society. Each post is judged by the community. Its success or failure depends on the community viewing it as a positive partner. A good post will encourage active participation by its members with other civic-minded committees and organizations within the community. It will seek to participate whether or not the activity is initiated by The American Legion.

A good post will know the needs of the community. The simple process of planned contacts by representative post members with city officials, educators, welfare workers, community leaders, and other civic and fraternal groups will provide this knowledge. A Legionnaire who serves his or her community deserves recognition from the post, whether the project was post-sponsored or not.

Veterans activities alone do not establish the Legion as an asset in the eyes of the community. These are, however, of particular importance to an organization composed exclusively of veterans.

Types of posts

Each Legionnaire sees The American Legion through his or her personal experiences or desires. The organization is big enough and broad enough to accommodate everyone, but the post will reflect the composite personality of its members. There are country club-type posts and community posts. There are posts of ethnic groups and all women. There are business and professional posts, company posts, and posts formed by fraternal groups. Some posts have several thousand members, while others are successful with fewer than a hundred. All are doing the work of The American Legion.

The post officers are responsible for helping a post outline its vision for service to the community and put it in action. The goal is for members to promote their mission in their community while having fun. Thus, post officers must be aware of the likes and dislikes of its members, as well as the needs of the community.

Developing leaders

The American Legion requires a terrific amount of manpower. More than 12,000 new post commanders are needed each year. This number tops 100,000 when other post officers are elected. While some members hold the same office year after year, there is always a need for fresh insight from new volunteer leaders.

Where are they found? First, a veteran becomes a member. Then, experience and exposure through serving on committees and participating in training, conventions and conferences prepare members for other responsibilities. Training and mentoring, whether formal or informal, should be pursued by the individual and by the post.

If a post is productive and the present officers have been effective, there should be competition for elected post offices. There may be times when someone must be approached and urged to run for post commander or other office. This is particularly true in small posts where many members have already served. Leadership succession should be anticipated and planned. The present officers and active members must be on the lookout for future leaders, and Legionnaires showing ability and interest should be seek opportunities to positively affect the organization.

Elections

The post constitution and by-laws determine the dates for nomination and election of officers. These should agree with the department constitution and by-laws. For best communications between the post and department, it is desirable for posts to conduct elections near the same date, with the results promptly reported to the department.

Installation

The installation of a new group of officers is the first occasion of the new Legion year for an impressive ceremony and one of the top social events on the post's calendar. If new officers are casually installed, their attitude toward their obligation will be casual. If the installation is accompanied by a banquet, visits from department and district officers, and entertainment that draws a crowd, the event instills among all attending the importance of the roles being assumed by the new officers.

Impressive installation ceremonies can provide the framework around which other rituals can develop. The Manual of Ceremonies covers the initiation of new members, dedication of halls, funeral services and other rituals that are standard throughout The American Legion. Department headquarters and National Headquarters can provide additional tools to make these ceremonies more effective.

In many departments, regulations are in effect as to who the installing officers should be. Check with your district commander for these details.

District/county

Departments have the authority to create intermediate bodies between the post and department to assist as a liaison between such organizations, and for the purpose of promoting the programs of The American Legion. The department executive committee or constitution defines the powers of such intermediate groups. In no event shall such powers invade the prerogatives vested in the post, department or national organization.

The most common division is the department's partition into districts. However, many departments do provide for county organizations, inter-county councils and other subdivisions below the district level. In one department, county organizations substitute for districts.

Depending upon the powers delegated, the district does have some supervisory powers over the posts comprising the district, but the primary purpose is to promote, educate and coordinate programs so the posts can be more effective.

The *District/County Commander's Guide* is published annually to assist newly elected district and county commanders. This guide is sent to the departments for distribution and available online at **legion.org/publications**.

Department

The American Legion is organized into departments and these, in turn, into posts. There is one department in each state and the District of Columbia, and there may be one in each territory and insular possession of the United States (Puerto Rico). Each department may prescribe the constitution of its posts, and the department has supervision of the posts within its boundaries and the posts assigned to it by the National Executive Committee. There are also foreign departments in the Philippines, France and Mexico. In all, there are 55 departments.

National Headquarters

The top legislative body of The American Legion is the convention delegates at the annual national convention. The National Executive Committee is vested with administrative authority between national conventions.

Through the offices of National Headquarters in Indianapolis and Washington, D.C., the policies of The American Legion are clarified and its activities are centered and directed. Thus, the influence of more than 12,000 posts is coordinated and directed within American Legion policy.

Post officers

Commander

Your ability to lead is recognized by your election to the office of post commander. Now you must draw on your ability and past experience while developing new skills to help the post prosper.

The charge you have accepted, commander, is broad and difficult. How you respond will determine to a large degree the standing of The American Legion among your associates and within the community. Your own ability, the support of district and department officers, the information in this guide, and the help you will get from the post officers who form your team will together make the performance of your job possible. As you look to the overall operation of the post, you'll realize you have stepped to another level. You may see the step as too high, but as you proceed, following the suggestions and recommendations in this guide, you may find your year as commander the most rewarding of your life.

Planning post operations for the coming year

New post officers generally take office without enthusiasm and a desire for a successful year. In the charge you accepted at your installation, you are entrusted with the supervision of the duties of all other post officers. You should encourage them to use initiative and develop new ideas. You will be judged by their effectiveness.

There are many ways to determine whether a post commander and his or her officers are having a successful year. Value judgments are made by the members, the community, and by The American Legion itself. Like it or not, a gain or loss in membership is the measure most commonly used.

The membership record is a reliable barometer of what your post is doing. An active post where the members enjoy themselves often creates a word-of-mouth membership campaign. The members are proud to belong. It's natural for them to talk "Legion" to their friends, neighbors, relatives, coworkers and business associates. If they enjoy belonging to the Legion, they are more likely to want their friends to belong as well.

Before salespeople can sell a product, they have to have a good product – something people want and value. Programs, social activities, the opportunity to make new friends, even the post home itself – these are what The American Legion has to sell.

Post executive committee

Running even a small post is more than a one-person job. This is why a post constitution should provide for a full group of post officers, as well as an executive committee. Others are elected to fulfill specific roles. It's up to you to get them to work together for post success.

Start your year by having an organizational meeting of your officers and executive committee. This can happen even before you are installed, and the outgoing post commander and adjutant can be invited to attend.

Records, minutes and other materials

You and your adjutant should know what post records are used, where they are kept, and how to use them.

Members are proud of their record of continuous membership. Keep these and all other membership records up to date.

Maintenance of meeting minutes is extremely important. More than one legal case has turned on what an adjutant wrote in the minutes of a meeting held years ago.

Verify the financial accounts are in balance and accurate. Update current authorized post representatives with your financial institutions and verify officers handling money are bonded.

Locate important post documents, such as charter, constitution and by-laws, state articles of incorporation, licenses, insurance, etc.).

Budget and fundraising

One of the first things reviewed by new post officers should be your post budget. The officers need to know what income is expected for the year and how it should be spent.

You'll have a good chance of staying out of money troubles if you follow these three general principles:

- First, have your annual dues cover the expenses related to your administrative costs: postage, stationery, and per capita payments. These are costs every post must cover to stay functional.
- Second, if the community is to benefit from an American Legion project, don't hesitate to solicit the community for funds – for example, an American Legion Baseball team, a community playground or a swimming pool. The post will add to its reputation with such projects, but always prepare a full public accounting of all funds received and of how they are spent.
- Third, don't ask the public to give in the name of charity for any project that benefits primarily to Legionnaires. A business may donate to send a young man to Boys State, but it probably wouldn't

care to give money to buy a new cooler for your bar. Sometimes it is necessary to raise funds from outside for something that is strictly for the benefit of the post and its members. When this happens, make sure that the public receives full value.

Committee assignments

Elected officers will be responsible for some of the activities and projects. Your appointed chairs will be in charge of others. Decide at the very beginning what is going to happen, when it is going to happen, and who is going to make it happen. Most of the assignments will be to carry on established programs or activities.

Handbooks, manuals and brochures exist for all of the Legion's premier programs: Boys State, American Legion Baseball, scholarships, and more (**see page 153**). These publications are available from department headquarters and have information and ideas that your committee chairs need. Take them to the first planning meeting and turn them over to the proper people.

Programs new and old

Programs are needed to maintain interest and, most importantly, stay relevant to your members and community. Every new activity or program offers the opportunity to interest new people in joining the post. Inactive members can be turned into active members through engagement with our programs.

Just about every post has service programs and social activities started long ago that are now traditions. However, organizations, like individuals, fall into ruts. Any program run the same way year after year grows stale. At your organizational meeting, review the post's programs and activities. Decide which need some changes or an update. A program won't happen without volunteers to make it happen. Every program or activity needs to have someone in charge – usually a post officer or committee chair. If the selection is good, the program will succeed. Have each chairperson and officer build a event timetable to integrate with the master post calendar.

First post meeting

At the first post meeting, expect to be compared to previous commanders. This is the time to set the tone for the entire year. If changes are going to be made, start now. The basic framework for any post meeting is found in the *Manual of Ceremonies*. By following the prescribed ritual and order of business, even a person who has never before presided over a meeting can do an adequate job.

As a new commander, you might feel self-conscious about running a formal meeting, particularly in a post that has gotten away from the *Manual of Ceremonies*. Don't. The American Legion is a respected organization, and its meetings should be suitably formal and impressive. No time is saved by omitting parts of the ritual. Meetings, of course, can and should vary. But by following the prescribed ritual and order of business, you should target your agenda to be completed in about an hour.

Agenda

While the *Manual of Ceremonies* provides the framework or the skeleton for a meeting, the commander's agenda puts meat on the bones. Your agenda for the first and each succeeding meeting should list the exact committees scheduled to report. Before putting a chairperson's name on the agenda, ask that person if he or she is ready to report. This is an easy way to verify if the chairperson is doing the job. If not, a little encouragement, along with a few suggestions or perhaps some prodding, might lead to action.

Protocol

Although "protocol" is a term used primarily in setting the rules of etiquette that govern diplomatic functions, there is a certain amount of protocol applied to American Legion meetings and social functions,

especially those with dignitaries present. This is the responsibility of the post commander, from the planning to the event itself.

If the department commander is to be invited, the request should be registered promptly with department headquarters. In preliminary planning, it is advisable to have an alternate date in the event the department commander is already committed for the original date.

The invitation should list the time, place, whether dinner is included, significance of the event and any other information. Will it be a joint Legion-Auxiliary function? Will there be non-Legionnaire dignitaries present? Remember, this is your “home,” and those you invite deserve all the courtesies and considerations accorded a distinguished guest.

If the event is a dinner, notify those who will be seated at the head table before they arrive. Escort them to their places to avoid confusion. The presiding or host officer is seated just to the right of the lectern. The master of ceremonies is seated just to the left of the lectern. Use place cards to identify those at the head table.

Introductions begin after the meal. The presiding officer stands at the center of the head table and makes the introductions, beginning at the extreme left, continuing to the center of the table, and then starting at the extreme right and continuing to the center. The main speaker, the guest of honor, is the last person introduced.

Officers are introduced in the order by which they were installed: sergeant-at-arms, service officer, historian, judge advocate, chaplain, finance officer, adjutant, vice commanders and commander.

As with all rules, there are some exceptions. If the event is a function of both the Legion and the Auxiliary, the Auxiliary officers and dignitaries are introduced first. A national executive committeeman or alternate national executive committeeman should be introduced immediately before the department commander.

Welcome committee

The first meeting is a great time to start a welcoming committee, if the post doesn’t have one already. Ask two or three members – including the sergeant-at-arms – to take on the job of welcoming new members, guests or even older members who are not well acquainted, helping them feel at home and introducing them. An active welcome committee is part of the post’s public relations job.

Pageantry and honors

Pageantry and patriotic observances are something your community expects of its American Legion post. A well-trained color guard and even a burial detail composed of members of the Legion family will help keep the local post visible in the community.

Community projects

A good post commander will encourage members to actively participate in civic affairs. The entire post should be proud when a member is elected to the school board, heads up the United Way or gets a promotion in a job – and will go out of the way to congratulate members on their accomplishments, whether in the Legion or in another field.

Saying “thanks”

Plan, assign responsibilities, check back to see that the job is being done, and then say, “Thank you very much!” A post can express its appreciation in many ways, including awards, citations and recognition at a post meeting. Even a simple “thank you” note can mean a great deal. This simple courtesy should never be overlooked.

Resolutions

If you have an idea that will improve The American Legion at any level, put the idea into the form of a resolution. Have it passed by your local post, then by your district at its annual convention. All resolutions passed at a district convention are delivered to the resolutions committee at the next department convention. At the department convention, you should appear before the resolutions committee and advocate for your resolution. Be prepared to support its passage on the floor of the department convention. All resolutions pertaining to the national organization passed by the department are forwarded to the national convention. For guidance on writing resolutions, see **page 135**.

Sources of help

A commander relies on a team of post officers and taps the potential of post members. But valuable assistance comes from past post commanders, district officers, department officers and, where necessary, National Headquarters staff.

- **Past commanders** Many posts have an active Past Commanders' Club. Sometimes its primary purpose is social – retention of good fellowship among those who have served as commanders. This group can be a wealth of knowledge and ability. Don't let it go to waste. Whether such a club is formally organized in your post or not, it is helpful to build a Commander's Advisory Committee with your past commanders.
- **District officers** The post is a separate and distinct unit that functions independently. However, the work of the post can be more effective when tightly linked to the department and national organization. Your district officers provide that link. The district commander is usually the elected representative of posts in the district, but an obligation to provide guidance and oversight is implied. Posts are charged with carrying out the Legion's objectives and programs and to comply fully with the obligations assumed under the post, department and national constitutions. But if your post becomes inactive or falters, expect your district commander to get involved. The district commander has a position of respect in our organization. A visit to your post calls for something special. Make it a social event significant enough to draw a crowd. The dignity shown the office helps increase the importance of the office of post commander.
- **Department officers** Department officers are "show" people. A visit from one usually offers an opportunity for media coverage, and the type of Legion function attracting your members and community leaders. These officers are your elected leaders and deserving of every respect. Not every post will receive annual visits from a department commander. If your invitation is accepted, or there is occasion to visit your post, make the most of it.
- **Department headquarters** The department headquarters is the link between local posts and the national organization. The post will deal directly with the department adjutant. Routine business should be conducted through department headquarters. Questions of policy and organization should also be referred to department headquarters. The post commander should closely follow department affairs, know what statewide activities are going on, and involve the post. Commanders should also study all instructions from department headquarters and pass them on to the appropriate officer or committee for action. Finally, the post's membership needs to be informed of any new activities initiated by the department.
- **National Headquarters** Nearly all your contacts with National Headquarters rightfully come through department headquarters. There is, however, one publication that should be faithfully read and kept, issue by issue: *The American Legion Dispatch*, which provides you the latest Legion news and information on which to base your programs. Post officers should

also subscribe to *The American Legion Online Update* and other digitally delivered newsletters at **legion.org/newsletters**.

Auxiliary unit

The Auxiliary unit is an important part of the post's organization. Official contact with the unit is through the unit president. The unit can help only in proportion to its opportunity. A good commander will find opportunities for the Auxiliary unit to assist the post. The commander, or a designated representative, will keep in close touch with the unit and give its members plenty of inspiration, encouragement and support.

Conventions

While your post could continue to operate without the district, department or national organization, it is more effective as a part of a team. You may have an idea to be developed and expanded beyond your post. Certainly you want your post to have a voice in the future programs and direction of the Legion. District, department and national conventions are where Legion policy is determined. Be certain that your post is represented by properly elected delegates, particularly on the district and department level.

The American Legion Education Institute (ALEI)

The new **BASIC TRAINING** course provides a pillar-by-pillar understanding of American Legion services, programs and history. The mobile-friendly online training is available free for members of The American Legion, Sons of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.

BASIC TRAINING is a five-part course offered under the American Legion Education Institute banner at **legion.org/alei**. Core topics covered are History & Organization, Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth. Each core topic includes suggestions on ways American Legion Family members can influence and strengthen their local communities.

Course graduates can download and print a certificate of completion and order a pin from Emblem Sales.

Program reminders

Post programs require intelligent planning. Each year the district and the department should conduct training on both general operations and specific Legion programs. You can help reduce the risk of leadership problems in your post by having the post represented at training sessions. Attendance at district and department functions also helps build esprit de corps for a good Legion post. Per Resolution No. 16, passed by the National Executive Committee in October 2016, the Legion expects all participants of our programs to show proper respect to the U.S. flag at all times, including during the national anthem.

JANUARY Initiation ceremonies are good membership stabilizers. Keep working on membership, especially by contacting those who became delinquent Jan. 1. January is a good time to present flags and copies of the flag code to local schools. Check dates for post, district/county and state Oratorical contests. March is Community Service Month, so now is the time to plan initiatives and projects. A community assessment can reveal areas where additional effort is needed most.

FEBRUARY – Americanism Month Plan school awards with local educators. Sponsor religious emphasis activities. Start planning the upcoming American Legion Baseball season. Invite a local veteran employment representative to speak at a post meeting. Consider hosting observances of Abraham Lincoln's and George Washington's birthdays. Plan a big American Legion birthday program for March.

MARCH – Community Service Month Give priority to Boys State selection by this month. Close out the membership campaign, and mail per capita fees and cards to the department. Recognize the anniversary of The American Legion's founding March 15-17. This is an occasion for post officers to focus on projecting your vision and image of The American Legion in the community, in the programs sponsored and services provided, and also on the appearance of the post home and surrounding grounds. The post should be a

stakeholder in the community, conscious it represents the national organization to local citizens. Renewed attention to appearance doesn't require a capital improvement project, merely attention to detail and routine maintenance, from signage to inside and outside improvements. This should be included on your annual Post Responsibility Audit (**see page 23**). Between January and March, consider forming a committee to host an open house.

APRIL – Children & Youth Month Coordinate Children & Youth activities and recognition with the post's Auxiliary unit. Obtain Children & Youth Guide from department headquarters. Plan election of new officers, summer Scouting activities and Boys State. Put American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Week on the post calendar.

MAY This month marks the anniversary of the St. Louis Caucus, where organization of The American Legion was completed in 1919. National Poppy Week, Memorial Day, Armed Forces Day and Mother's Day form the basis for good post programs and outreach to U.S. military personnel in communities nationwide. Consider honoring them with a Blue Star Salute. Honor veteran gravesites. Present school awards at the end of the semester. Kick off American Legion Baseball and summer athletic programs. Ask school officials to approve American Legion activities and put them on the calendar for next year: Oratorical Contest, Boys State, school awards, American Education Week.

JUNE Start planning a membership drive for next year. Develop a plan engage veterans. June 14 is Flag Day, so consider surveying people and businesses in the community, asking who flies flags on patriotic holidays. The history of Old Glory would make an excellent program for a post meeting. Summer youth programs need members' support and attendance.

JULY Host a community Fourth of July celebration. Certify new officers with department headquarters. Installation of officers makes an impressive ceremony at a post meeting. Continue efforts on behalf of summer youth programs.

AUGUST By now the post has received next year's membership cards from department headquarters. In many communities, school starts at the beginning or middle of the month. Begin planning a community Veterans Day observance.

SEPTEMBER – National Disaster Preparedness Month Encourage the community to recognize Patriot Day, Sept. 11. Celebrate the anniversary of Congress' charter of The American Legion on Sept. 16, perhaps with an event including civic leaders. Sept. 17 is Constitution Day, an ideal time for a citizenship program. The third Friday of the month is National POW/MIA Recognition Day.

OCTOBER Launch your membership campaign. Remember, dues for the following year are payable by Oct. 20. Organize and participate in Halloween safety programs.

NOVEMBER Continue full speed ahead on the membership campaign. Get them in before Dec. 31. Lead your community in observing Veterans Day and American Education Week.

DECEMBER Acknowledge Pearl Harbor Day on Dec. 7, "a day that will live in infamy." As the holiday season begins, encourage and support activities that bring Christmas cheer to underprivileged families in the community. Keep plugging for renewals and new members. Visit veterans who are ill or in assisted living facilities.

Adjutant

The adjutant is the primary administrative officer for the post and is like the first sergeant of a military unit. Post activities revolve around the adjutant. Most posts retain a good adjutant in the officer over a period of years. The role of adjutant provides continuity for a post. While the commander's duties are largely inspirational and executive, an adjutant's duties are administrative and functional. The commander navigates the ship, while the adjutant is the engineer who sees that the ship's machinery is working and maintained.

The adjutant is the personnel officer and personal point of contact for individual members of the post. He or she maintains membership records and minutes of meetings, checks up and assists the work of the other officers and committees, and publishes official orders, announcements and communication with post members.

All post records should be maintained and accessible by the adjutant, in a comprehensive filing system.

The office involves a great deal of work and attention to detail. An effective adjutant is an essential component of a successful post. Some degree of compensation should be paid to the adjutant, particularly in large posts, due to the commitment required by the role.

Suggestions for the new adjutant

The only indispensable qualifications for the job of adjutant are honesty and willingness. He or she should go through all the post records at the first opportunity. The constitution, minutes of meetings, and reports of officers and committees will give insight into the post's policies and traditions. Communications from department headquarters will bring the adjutant up to date on instructions.

The Post Adjutant's Manual has detailed instructions on the handling of membership cards, per capita payments and other duties. Every adjutant should have a copy.

First vice commander

In the majority of posts, a first and second vice commander are elected, with membership the primary concern of the first vice commander.

While each post is different, a membership campaign should cover certain fundamentals. Look at the methods used in the past. Develop new procedures to improve the methods being used.

In a successful post, a new commander is going to contact the post officers and committee chairs immediately after election to schedule a meeting where they can lay out a general plan of operation for the entire year. This is when the membership plan should also be decided.

The four W's of planning

- **WHO** – Who's going to execute each step necessary to reach the goal?
- **WHERE** – Where do you want to go? What's the objective?
- **WHAT** – What steps are required to reach the objective?
- **WHEN** – When is the work going to be done?

You and your post best know the membership potential in your community. The steps to get there are similar for every post. If you can answer the following questions for your post and community, you have your job outline and know how to reach your goal:

- Mailed dues notices will bring in about 80 percent of your current member renewals. Who is going to contact the remaining 20 percent who do not respond?
- How are you going to contact and recruit prospective members? Who's going to contact them? How will new recruits be assimilated into the post?
- Who can be counted on to work at membership and how will they be organized?
- What awards or special recognition will be given?

- What special events can be tied in with membership, such as Veterans Day, team competition, contests with other posts, The American Legion's birthday, etc.?

Other duties

Membership may be the primary assignment of a first vice commander, but during a normal year, the first vice commander will have many other duties. He or she should become familiar with the ceremonial protocol for regular meetings. He or she will likely be called upon to conduct one or more meetings during the year due to an absence of the post commander. Knowing how to develop an agenda, run a meeting and follow protocol are useful skills to develop. The vice commander should be ready to fill in for the commander at a moment's notice.

Second vice commander

The second vice commander is responsible for building an atmosphere in which Legionnaires have fun while accomplishing the mission of your American Legion post.

The commander depends on the second vice commander to help run operations to spice up meetings and attract members to the post. The social calendar should be filled months in advance with activities designed to engage members.

One of the second vice commander's first duties should be to contact other veterans and civic groups to verify each patriotic holiday and observance receives the respect it deserves.

The second vice commander should be looking for ways to involve members in post activities, operations and programs to assist the first vice commander by providing improved member retention.

Finance officer

The finance officer should be honest and have experience in handling financial affairs. The post depends on fiduciary integrity and should acquire expert advice in formulating and administering its financial policy.

The finance officer usually serves as the chair of the finance committee and is in charge of all receiving and disbursing of post funds. The post adjutant, in all matters relating to finance, should carry on the work in close correlation with the finance officer. Both officers must be covered by adequate bond. Department headquarters should be consulted for blanket bond arrangement. Post accounting forms are available to meet the requirements of American Legion posts in maintaining a correct and permanent membership and finance record. Because of their simplicity, they require no special knowledge of bookkeeping or accounting. Consult the Emblem Sales catalog for prices and detailed descriptions, or go online to emblem.legion.org.

Be prompt in remitting national and department per capita fees and cards to department headquarters. It is essential the finance officer maintain accurate financial records for all post operations and activities.

Post service officer

A good service officer should be retained. The value of a post service officer increases with length of service. As the service officer's reputation grows, so will the value of the organization in the veteran community. The job requires a competent, dedicated and organized person, preferably one is readily available to provide assistance. He or she is responsible for bringing awareness to all veterans and their dependents the rights and benefits granted them by law.

The service officer must know how to access and utilize the expert services available through The American Legion, state and federal government agencies, and local community agencies. The job requires timely submission of information to full-time professionals so veterans and their dependents are adequately represented. The service officer's report should be a standard part of every meeting.

The American Legion maintains a full staff of appeals representatives in the Washington, D.C., headquarters office. A small mobile staff of field representatives provides a constant flow of information concerning conditions in VA hospitals, domiciles and regional offices. Other American Legion representatives assist veterans who petition Department of Defense boards for review of less than fully honorable discharges or dismissal from the military. They also assist veterans in obtaining deserved decorations and medals.

Department service officers can provide necessary claims forms. Additional information comes through department publications, National Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation bulletins, memorandums and VA pamphlets. Many departments conduct training for post service officers to gain knowledge and contacts, and all have trained service officers in VA regional offices and hospitals.

With most of today's veteran population composed of those who served during the Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the work of the post service officer continues to be vital. These former servicemembers are likely to not be fully versed in veterans benefits and programs. Meanwhile, older veterans need advice on how to integrate possible benefits into their retirement plans. Dependents should be contacted as soon as feasible after a veteran's death.

Every Congress considers legislative matters of importance to veterans and to The American Legion. Working in cooperation with the post legislative committee, the post service officer can aid the national organization's legislative efforts.

Chaplain

The chaplain need not necessarily be a clergyman, but must be a person capable of moral and intellectual leadership and one who gives dignity and respect to the office. The chaplain should be in close touch with the commander and other post officers, and should attend all meetings of the post executive committee. The leadership in many post activities belongs by right to the chaplain, and when this office is filled by the right person, the post's usefulness to the community greatly increases.

The *Manual of Ceremonies* (**see Section 2**) gives an important place to the chaplain in the conduct of meetings, the observance of patriotic occasions, funeral services and dedication ceremonies. At all these events, the chaplain is the moral leader.

The chaplain should work with the post historian on grave registration work and inspire the post to decorate veteran graves on Memorial Day. Besides officiating at post members' funerals when requested, the chaplain can be of service to their bereaved families. The chaplain may also chair the post's Veterans Administration Voluntary Services (VAVS) Committee, which coordinates volunteer work at nearby VA facilities.

The American Legion Chaplain's Handbook, available online and through department headquarters, offers guidance for the post chaplain and religious emphasis committee.

Sergeant-at-arms

The sergeant-at-arms arranges the meeting hall and assists the post commander and adjutant in preliminary arrangements for meetings, including leading the color detail during presentation and retirement ceremonies. He or she is the expert on flag etiquette and should know proper flag etiquette. The sergeant-at-arms should also play a leading role in the post color guard, burial detail and other pageantry.

The sergeant-at-arms is the logical person to chair a welcome committee, which can have a tremendous influence on the post's image, membership and relationship with members. Every Legionnaire wants to feel part of the group, particularly the new Legionnaire attending his or her first few meetings. The sergeant-at-arms must make certain new members are welcomed, introduced and made to feel they are important to the post. The sergeant-at-arms encourages members to attend meetings and advises the commander on who should be acknowledged.

Historian

The work of post historian is cumulative. It is wise to leave the responsibility to one person if handled well.

There should be close cooperation between the post adjutant and the historian. The former works with records on matters of current interest, the latter on matters of historical interest. The post historian should also keep in touch with the department historian and be prompt in answering inquiries. An annual report should be made to the department historian prior to the department convention.

Copies of printed material regarding the post should be deposited in local and state libraries, as well as in the post and department archives. This will prevent complete loss of records through fire or other catastrophe, as well as provide source material for those looking for information about The American Legion. An outline for a one-year post narrative history and yearbook is provided in the appendix (**see pages 139-149**).

The post historian should attend department conventions and make a point of knowing what historians of nearby posts are doing. The department historian can advise post historians on department and national post history contests, historians associations, and materials to assist in maintaining best practices.

Judge advocate

The primary duty of the judge advocate is to supply professional advice in the conduct of post business or to procure proper counsel. He is the guardian of the constitutional form of post government. Your judge advocate can also supply valuable assistance to other post committees and officers. The judge advocate should maintain contact with local government officials.

The judge advocate commonly has the duty, with others, of auditing post financial accounts. This is done annually, usually before the election of officers, or more frequently at their discretion.

Executive committee

Government and management of the post is entrusted to the executive committee. It should meet regularly or as often as the commander deems necessary. The post executive committee is further charged with hiring employees, authorizing and approving all expenditures, requiring adequate bonds from those with custody of post funds, hearing reports of post committee chairpersons, and providing oversight over post affairs.

Delegation of these functions to the executive committee is in no way intended to usurp the powers of the membership through regular post meetings. Rather, this allows the routine operational affairs of the post to be handled outside of post meetings. Committee reports and other issues of general interest to members should be handled during post meetings.

The key to interesting post meetings is using the executive committee effectively. The post meeting that becomes bogged down in arguments on petty details is interesting only to those engaged in the conflict.

Standing committees

Below are listed some committees commonly found in most American Legion posts. Your post constitution and/or department constitution may require additional committees or have other names for some committees, so the committees listed are not mandatory or all-encompassing for every American Legion post.

New programs are often needed, while old programs should be changed, revitalized or, in some cases, eliminated. Officers should review the post's long-standing programs and activities for relevance to members and the local community. Determine which committees are necessary. Make a list of potential

committee heads and members. Each committee chair needs to know how the work of the committee fits into the overall program of the post, what is expected and when.

Here's the list of commonly found post committees and their typical duties:

Americanism This committee seeks to inspire love of country and good citizenship through patriotic observances, flag etiquette, civic instruction in schools, the Americanization of immigrants, community service, and youth activities such as Boys State, Boy Scouts, Oratorical Contest, School Award Medals and American Legion Baseball.

Children and Youth This committee ensures children of veterans in need of care and protection receive proper and timely services and aid, extends connections to verified organizations and facilities providing services for children and youth, and maintains programs that meet the needs of youth in the local community.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation This committee assists veterans in pursuing claims, understanding their rights and obtaining their benefits. Committee members also visit veterans who are sick, disabled or residing in assisted living facilities, and provide comfort to members' families in illness and bereavement.

National Security This committee engages in community emergency preparedness, promotes public safety, and supports local and national civilian defense projects.

Membership & Post Activities This committee recruits, retains and engages members to give the post the volunteers to create success for The American Legion in the local community.

Public Relations This committee elevates awareness in the veterans community and the community of American Legion advocacy of veterans issues, national security, Americanism and youth. The American Legion is defined in the public eye by the values it demonstrates. The committee accomplishes this in two ways: placing radio and TV advertisements and public service announcements produced by National Headquarters where they can be seen and heard, and developing relationships with editors and journalists in the post's community so they cover programs supporting the Legion's four pillars. For example, the High School Oratorical Contest is the reporter's news peg, but the Legion's support for a "one hundred percent Americanism" is the story. Why and how the Legion is "still serving America" is the question the post's public relations committee should answer in the media. Public relations is a membership multiplier.

Legislative This committee promotes The American Legion's official legislative mandates, disseminates legislative updates, organizes and promotes proactive grassroots lobbying activities, and liaisons with elected officials and their staffs. All activities must be in compliance with Section 2, Article II of the Constitution of The American Legion, which forbids the dissemination of partisan principles and the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public office. However, voter education is a critical element of the electoral process, and posts are permitted to host town hall meetings, put on "meet the candidate" nights and allow candidates to address post meetings, district conferences or state conventions. Candidates may participate as long as invitations are extended to all candidates, affording them equal opportunity to participate. The American Legion cannot endorse or oppose any candidate, even if the candidate is a Legionnaire and post member. A post home should be free of any political materials that would appear to be an endorsement of a particular candidate. Every effort must be made to remain nonpartisan. Note: If in doubt, contact the department for clarification before proceeding.

Finance This committee supervises the receiving, disbursement and accounting of all post funds, prepares annual budget recommendations, and advises the post on all financial policies.

Economic This committee assists veterans in meeting and overcoming problems such as employment, veterans preference, housing, civil service appeals, and employment of handicapped and older workers.

House This committee supervises the operation of the post's physical facilities, such as a clubroom, American Legion center, meeting room, etc. Responsibilities include administration, equipment, and the

hiring and direction of employees (as authorized by the post executive committee), and general rules applicable to the conduct of members while on the post's premises.

Service This committee is key to every successful post, assisting returning veterans in their transition to civilian life. Other concerns include employment, on-the-job training, and educating veterans on their rights and benefits. The committee should maintain contact with members of the armed forces from the post's community.

Other committees

Your post may need additional committees, depending on the programs and activities offered, including:

Sons of The American Legion This committee supervises the Sons of The American Legion squadron in its organization, activities and programs.

American Legion Riders This committee supervises the American Legion Riders chapter in its organization, activities and programs.

Graves Registration and Memorials This committee records, marks and decorates graves of deceased veterans, renders service and comfort to bereaved families, and provides American Legion military funeral honors when requested.

Uniformed Groups This committee organizes, trains, promotes and supervises uniformed groups, such as a burial detail, color guard, chorus or firing squad.

Visiting or VAVS Members of this committee give comfort and assistance to members and their families during illness or bereavement, and visit veterans who are hospitalized or in assisted-living facilities.

Uniformed groups

The American Legion pioneered the modern drum corps through post-level amateur musical drill units, and has been adding to the beauty, excitement and precision of the modern parade since 1921.

Uniformed groups are The American Legion's "display cases," so to speak. At parades, funerals and special events, they advertise the Legion's size, scope and substance to the public at large; they are one of the finest opportunities for post public relations. They afford those involved a sense of accomplishment, and a great deal of satisfaction and enjoyment.

Any post wanting to offer uniformed group activities is encouraged to do so. There are many options from which to choose: an ensemble or band, a color guard or firing squad, a chorus or quartet.

Every year, the national convention puts on color guard and band contests, in the following classes:

Color Guard

Military
Military Open
Open
Advancing and Retiring Colors

Band

Concert Band
Exhibition Concert Band

For details and rules concerning band and color guard competition at the national convention, contact the Convention & Meetings Division at **(317) 630-1313** or go online to **legion.org/convention**.