



DEPARTMENT OF KENTUCKY

Retain -- Recruit -- Revitalize

Guide for Membership and Post Revitalizations

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Overview

This guide provides an overview of Post revitalization programs to include not only the Post as a physical entity and organization, but also the revitalization of the Post membership base through recruiting new members and re-energizing the members that you already have. Overall, it is a guide to assist you in your Post membership programs, providing suggestions for retaining or re-connecting with your current members, ideas for enlisting new members to your Post family, possible ways to reorganize or reinvent your Post to satisfy member needs and to keep up with current goals of The American Legion and new technology.

This Department Guide is meant to supplement the National Post Development & Revitalization Guide that is available for download from the National Internet website at www.legion.org. The National guide provides the most focus on Post revitalization and community involvement, but also discusses individual member involvement and recruitment. Posts should review both publications and use whatever is relevant from each.

Retaining Members

Retain -- Webster's defines retain as: To keep in possession or use; To keep on one's pay or service; To keep in mind or memory; To hold secure or intact. For the benefit of this guide we will refer to retain as keeping the members you already have on your rosters as Post members.

However, does this simply mean that you ensure that your members renew their dues every year? This certainly may be the case with many members, as they may not come into the Post for meetings or social events, or may not even live in Kentucky any more. Even if this is the case, the Post should still reach out to these members periodically to communicate Post issues and to let them know that the Post is here to serve them.

On the other hand, there are the members that do frequent the Post during the month, either through social events or by being actively involved in Post events, meetings, and volunteer opportunities.

Whatever the reason, these members have a personal need to come to the Post that revolves around the need for like company and comradeship, the need to be a "part" of something, the need to help our Veterans and community, the need to give back their learned expertise to help the organization, or the need to volunteer and help others, etc., etc., etc. We need to understand that these people have a strong desire to be part of the Post. If we do not accept their volunteerism or if we tell them "NO" enough, they will go away.

Likewise, these members who really want to be part of the Post can easily be driven away by in-fighting between the officers or members, constant negativity, or constant he-said/she-said drama. American Legion Family members will always weigh the pros and cons of spending their time on something. When the situation gets too stressful, they will stop coming in. Eventually, they may not renew their membership or transfer to a friendlier Post.

What do your members want their Post to be?

This is the question that we should be asking all the time. Well run Posts are run by the membership. Yes, we elect Post officers to run the Post for us, but the membership decides who these officers will be and usually elect officers who agree with their points of view. So again, the membership runs the Post -- There is no place for an autocratic society or dictatorship in any organization. This fact applies whether there is one person or several people trying to control a Post over member wishes.

Membership meetings should be informative and lively, even a little fun. No secrets, back-door politics, and certainly, no nasty behavior or attacks. Members have a right and a need to know what is happening and to have insight on Post decisions. This is especially true of anything involving money, as Post funds belong to the membership. Recognizing what the members want, the programs that they want the Post to be involved in, volunteering for the projects that interest them, and having "ownership" in

the Post goes a very long way to member retention. Ignoring what the members want or need and they will slowly drift away.

There is always the caveat that you cannot please everyone all the time. There are always instances where someone does not agree with a decision or is unhappy. Hopefully, this person will understand that the issue was decided by a majority of the members and that sometimes the good of the organization will prevail over the wants of an individual member. Hard decisions are hard because they do not please everyone, otherwise they would be easy. By presenting all the facts in a logical manner we would hope that everyone would "understand", even if they do not agree.

Look at your current membership

Preliminary Analysis of Your Membership

- What percentage of your members actually visit the Post?
- How many members attend Post meetings?
- Does your Post have active and interested officers?
- If your Post has a bar: *
 - What members frequent the bar?
 - What members do not frequent the bar?
- Do your members participate at Membership events?
** With the understanding that The American Legion does not recognize a Post club room or bar as part of the Post.*

Maybe a membership survey is in order

- Simple questions to assess what is important to your members and what bothers them (if anything)
- Ten to twelve questions (make it fast and easy)
- Make names optional to get true opinions
- Unbiased committee of members to evaluate responses and report back to Post officers.
- Make a plan to address concerns and report an action plan to the membership for "fine tuning" the plan.

Volunteers

- The "80/20 Rule" -- There is a lot of consensus in the private sector that many companies, and even government entities, have what is commonly called the 80/20 rule. In theory, this means that usually about 20-percent of the workforce is doing 80-percent of the work. Volunteer organizations, such as The American Legion, are no different except that often this 80/20 division often becomes more like a 90/10 rule.

For many Posts, getting at least 10% of your members to help the Post or attend a meeting is the norm; sometimes it is the goal. Some members may never come to the Post because of where they live or because of physical restrictions or age. However, calling or writing your remaining members are proven methods to get them more involved with Post activities.

- Members that are always ready to help -- Some members are always volunteering or always ready to accept a Post officer position. This is a good thing! However, where are the rest of you members? Calling or writing these members and asking them personally to help out might result in increased volunteerism, or it could produce explanations as to why a member does not volunteer. Either way, this would be a big step to get more active members into your Post.
- Where did everyone go? -- Communication is again the tool! There must be a reason if a member is not coming to the Post anymore, or even if they do, does not get involved. You need to talk to these members, either verbally, through letters or postcards, or maybe in your newsletters to find out what they like or don't like, why their volunteerism has fallen off. One thing is for sure, if you do not talk to your members they may feel that the Post does not care. Worse, if you do not talk to your members they may leave the Post.

Recruiting Members

Recruit -- Webster's defines recruit as: To fill up the number of new members; To increase or maintain; To seek to enroll; To enlist new members; A fresh or additional supply. For The American Legion, recruiting means to get Veterans with the proper service dates to join The American Legion.

Does this mean that we are done by just signing up a new member and getting their dues? Of course not! Let's be very clear on this issue; signing up a new member is just one part of your duty. Leaving it to chance whether this new member will become actively involved in your Post is a recipe for failure. Yes, there is the possibility that this new member is a self-starter, a go-getter, or an outgoing person who thrives in meeting new people and is outwardly assertive on becoming involved. However, that is usually far from the norm.

The Post should have a membership team that contacts every new member personally encouraging them to come into the Post, to attend meetings, to volunteer for projects, and to act as their friend and go-to person for questions. We are not talking about a few days or one orientation meeting here; we are talking about maybe six months of interaction to ensure that the new member feels like they are part of the Post family and are fully acclimated into the Post philosophy and direction. Once you have the new member engaged, we revert to the retention mode to keep them as active Post members.

How do we recruit "new" members?

Content of Recruiting Programs

- Emphasize the value of your Post and major programs;
- What your Post does for Veterans;
- What your Post does for the community;
- What charity programs that your Post does;
- What Youth and Children Programs your Post is involved in; and
- Physical displays and handouts of The American Legion Four Pillars.

Additional Concerns:

- Are you including the American Legion Auxiliary and Sons of The Legion in your outreach programs?
- Do you have a Legion Riders Program to advertise?

"Low Hanging Fruit"

What is low hanging fruit? This might be defined as someone who used to be a member of The American Legion or someone that is a member, but not assigned to a specific Post (i.e., Post 200 in Kentucky).

The National American Legion provides lists of Veterans who have joined The American Legion through promotional campaigns, mass mailings, and Internet advertising. These members are initially assigned to a Department (State) with a unique Post identifier. This is not a physical Post, but rather an electronic Post with no officers or communication. For Kentucky, this is Post 200. The Post Commander and Adjutant can access these Post 200 membership lists through mylegion.org. These lists are organized by city or zip code and can be formatted several different ways to accommodate your recruiting efforts. Post 200 lists are a constant source for new members that may want to transfer to your Post. They should be printed out for every membership recruitment effort.

Let's also look at someone that used to be a member of your Post, but has decided not to renew their membership. These members already know what we do and what we stand for. The need to explain the benefits of membership and the good things that we do is not needed. However, it may be a tougher job determining why they stopped being a member and convincing them to re-join. Make no mistake, this can be much harder than just getting a new member off the street.

Brand New Members

Prior military individuals are everywhere! Besides counting Veterans from Korea and Vietnam, we have Veterans from our actions in the Middle East where we have been involved for over 25 years. However, unlike previous Veterans, our soldiers and sailors from our conflicts since 1990 may not even know what The American Legion is or what we do. This may be a difficult realization for some Legionnaires to understand, but it is reality! Younger generations have different needs and responsibilities than earlier generations, especially the need to belong to groups or organizations. Add to this the limited marketing of The American Legion at all levels and suddenly we hear "What's The American Legion?"

Where do we find new members?

Like we've already stated, new members are everywhere. We just need to attract them to us so we can explain who and what we are. Below are some examples of proven recruiting methods that you may want to explore:

Recruiting Days at the Post:

- Having a membership recruiting day at your Post is an excellent opportunity for those individuals who want more information about The American Legion. The added benefit is that these people may already want to be a part of something, but don't know how to make it happen. Ah! Part of your job is already done for you. Now all you need to do is convince them that The American Legion is something worthwhile.
- To be successful, you must advertise your Post Membership Day. If you have a street sign, put this up several weeks in advance. Contact local newspapers for free space, focusing on a special Veteran event. You should use social media to its fullest extent, especially because most of our younger generations frequent this form of communication. Make up flyers and post around your community. Finally, making presentations at other community organizations showing what fun you have doing Legion programs is an excellent way for sister organizations to work together.
- It is a good practice to combine your recruitment efforts with Veteran services, such as assisting in Veterans Administration claims, answering questions on Veterans benefits, and possible free flu vaccinations. Your Post Service Officer should be especially helpful in developing these programs.
- Lastly, this is also an excellent opportunity to involve your entire Post Family. Many Veterans who stop by may have spouses and children who could also join your Post. Members from each Post Family organization should be present to assist with their member recruitment and to help out with providing free coffee, sodas, and lunch or sweets. Every Post Family should have handouts available that highlight what their members do for the community and our Veterans, and how each Family supports the overall American Legion Programs.

Setting up Recruitment Tables at local businesses:

- Many local business will support your recruiting efforts by allowing you to set up a table near their store entrance. The table should be "manned" by representatives from each of your Post Family organizations. Ample membership applications and handouts on what The American Legion is should be readily available.
- Additionally, materials highlighting what your Post does in the community and the charities that you support should be visible to anyone walking by. Do you sponsor a Legion baseball team, walk in the community parades, have free Easter Egg hunts, or sponsor a community Veterans memorial? These are all great things that some people may not know about.

- Advertise the event as much as possible. A banner along the front of the table will let everyone know at a distance what you are supporting. Maybe a local radio host can stop by or a local paper might do an article.

Membership Recruitment lasts all year:

It should go without saying that membership recruitment activities should be happening throughout the year. Posts should seize any activity to advertise their organization. Members should have a couple applications in their pockets at all times.

- At a community event -- Pass out Post information
- In a parade -- Have a recruitment sign
- Periodic newspapers announcements and recruiting messages
- Talk about The American Legion -- Anytime & Anywhere

Advertising Post recruiting events

- Local newspapers
- Post sign
- Radio spots
- Internet website
- Free Social Media and free ads
 - Craigslist
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Email blasts
 - LinkedIn
 - Instagram
 - Snapshot
 - Flipboard

Speaking of advertising:

The American Legion Cap is a nationally-recognized symbol of our organization. Never miss the opportunity to proudly wear your Legion cap when you are representing your Post, especially when you are recruiting members. Likewise, other Legion attire such as colorful shirts and jackets are valuable resources to your Post recruitment activity.

Getting "Old" members back

This is the hard one! Trying to convince a previous member to come back to your Post is much harder than recruiting someone new who has no idea of what The American Legion or your Post does. This member might be so unhappy with their previous experience that there is no way they want to come back. It is up to you to show this individual how things have changed, what the Post is doing now, and how they might become involved.

Members leave the Post for many reasons, some of the most common being:

- Not seeing value in membership;
- Not having enough time;
- Moving away from the Post;
- Too much Post infighting or drama;
- Post not being run by the membership majority;
- Lack of funds;
- Unhappy with Post activities; and
- Health reasons

Where do I start? *Communication is the key.* Send out periodic letters, emails and texts to let these people know what is happening at the Post, Make sure your Post Internet website and Facebook page are undated frequently to let everyone know all the good things that are happening at the Post. Most importantly, pick up the telephone and call these people. A personal call to a previous member, sincerely talking to them about their issues is the most important and successful way to get a member to come back to your Post. At the very least, you will understand why they have not renewed their membership and possible opportunities for your Post.

Of course, not every member who has left the Post will be able to return. Moving away, bad health, or restrictions on time may often be non-starters. However, it is important to find out why members have left and try to correct any possible situations that you have control over.

Member cannot afford annual dues -- One of the easily "fixed" issues would be a lack of funds for an active member. Many Posts decide to sometimes pay member's dues temporally when situations beyond their control make this difficult. Of course this is usually for just one year until a member gets back on their feet. In this case, the issue should be brought before the membership *without mentioning the members name* before obligating Post funds.

Member does not have the time

Some members believe that they must be at the Post frequently to support the Post. In reality, the basic Post support is member dues which further the goals of The American Legion and the Post. Going one step further, it is important for members to attend monthly meetings to understand what the Post is doing and also to voice their opinions and votes on Post matters. Beyond this basic involvement with the Post are volunteer opportunities and the socialization aspect with members and member events.

Volunteering is an important topic to discuss at this time, as a member may feel connected with a certain volunteer event. This may encourage that member to come back to the Post and become involved. The member may even want to start a volunteer activity at the Post that is not presently being offered. Talking to the member and finding out what interests them is the key.

All this boils down to the member being involved as much as they want to, depending upon available time and interests. Posts should never project the feeling that members need to spend a certain amount of time at the Post or to expect a member to volunteer when they do not want to.

Members are unhappy about Post direction

The old saying that "You cannot please everyone all of the time" is paramount in every volunteer organization. It is certainly not uncommon to have some members who want to proceed one way from what the majority of members want. This is what democracy is all about--We take votes and the majority rules. We all hope that everyone understands this and does not take Post issues personally. However, some members may feel so slighted or believe that their course of action is so correct that they stop coming to meetings, or worse yet, stop paying their membership dues.

When this happens, the member needs a rational and logical conversation of why such decisions were made and the results achieved from those decisions. They need to be assured that their input matters and that they are valued. You cannot always convince a member to come back, but communication is the key for them to understand the Post's position and the value of their input and support.

Overall negative atmosphere of the Post:

Most members will not continue their membership at a Post that is negative or combative because of infighting between members, personal agendas, politics, or drama. Some will cease coming in during the month and some will not even attend meetings anymore. In the worst cases, members may transfer to another Post or just let their membership lapse. These will be the toughest cases of all, especially if the same conditions still exists.

Hopefully anything less than an optimal member experience has been corrected. In this instance, all you need to do is explain what has happened, the corrective action taken, and convince the member to give your Post another chance.

If conditions at the Post have not improved, your only argument might be to convince the members to come back to help change things for the better. The logic being if enough people want good things to happen, they will happen. If enough people do not step up to help, unwelcome circumstances may continue. It is up to you to convince a member who left the Post to come back and be part of a positive change for the good.

Holding Your Post Revitalization Event

What is a Post Revitalization?

What does your Post do? Do your members get together for your monthly meeting and that is it? Is it all about the Post Club Room or bar? How much Community involvement does your Post have? Do you "market" Post activities and programs or programs of The American Legion? Your first steps in any Post Revitalization is to understand what your Post members want the Post to be. Some Posts want nothing more than a social atmosphere for its members. Some Posts want nothing to do with anything outside of their local community. Other Posts may not really know what they want. Whatever direction your Post takes, it is totally up to your membership.

Obviously the very first action should be to discuss these important issues so that your membership fully supports your Post revitalization efforts. A joint Post meeting between your Legion, Auxiliary, SAL, and Legion Rider members would be an excellent starting point. The meeting should highlight The American Legion Four Pillars and major Legion programs to see what is of interest to your membership and what is possible based upon your members and finances. A Point to understand is that now we are talking about revitalizing the "Post" as a whole and not just the individual Post members.

National Revitalization Guidance

This would be an excellent time to mention The American Legion guide: Post Development & Revitalization; Procedures and Resources that is available for download on this website. This Guide provides several resources for evaluating your Post, your community involvement, and tools for addressing evaluation and revitalization efforts.

Content of your Post Revitalization Effort

Your Post revitalization effort should encompass everything possible, that is taking care of present Post members, attracting new members, and increasing your Post's interaction with your community. Some basic content to include are:

- Recruiting new members
 - Calling Post 200 members
 - Having an open house to attract possible members
 - Showing the community what the Post does
- Helping the Members that you already have (and possible new ones)
 - Flu and pneumonia shots
 - VA Claims assistance
 - Explaining benefits available to Veterans
 - Calling Post members who have been absent from the Post

Planning for the Revitalization Event

- Setting the Date and Time
 - Check for conflicting holidays and events
 - Contacting District and Department officers for support
 - Line up volunteer support
 - Have calling lists ready
 - Free giveaways for attending (maybe Post logo/advertising items)
 - Maybe combine with a Job Fair
- Location of your event
 - Post is always the best location
 - Do not use the bar area if possible (and then limit or cancel alcohol sales)
 - Clean up, sanitize, and make the room bright
- Outside support and Donations
 - Breakfast/break munchies and coffee
 - Lunch meal
 - American Legion giveaways
- Have handouts ready
 - Material for The American Legion, Legion Auxiliary, and SAL
 - Membership applications
 - Officer business cards

- Advertise your event
 - Post publications
 - Post signs
 - Post, District, and Department electronic media
 - Local newspapers

- Line up your volunteers
 - Have representatives available to greet and talk to visitors from each Legion Family organization
 - Volunteers to prepare and serve refreshments
 - Possible tour guides to show the Post to perspective members

Accomplishing Your Revitalizing Event

- Look like a Legionnaire
 - Volunteers should dress nicely
 - Always wear your American Legion caps
 - Smile

- Be on time
 - Arrive early to set up and deal with last minute emergencies
 - Advertise your snacks and meal times (if you are doing this)
 - Advertise when the event will be over

- Be professional
 - No drinking during meeting with the public or perspective members
 - You are inviting the "family" to your Post, so watch your language

- Don't miss the opportunity to talk about your Post's accomplishments, especially if the media is present

- Make sure that every guest leaves with:
 - Some American Legion information
 - Application for membership in the Legion, Auxiliary, or SAL
 - A generic flyer about the Post
 - A copy of your Post newsletter with website and Facebook addresses
 - A smile on their face!

Retaining, Recruiting, and Revitalizing Tools

Tools from the National American Legion Office

There is an abundance of print materials available from the National office, most of them free. The national website (www.legion.org) has many guides on almost every American Legion program. Additionally, guides are available to assist Posts and Legionnaires in their support of our Four Pillars and assistance material for the Internet, public relations efforts, and membership.

Some publications are charged for, such as the Officer's Guide and Manual of Ceremonies and the Adjutant's Manual; however, the cost for these publications is minimal.

As already stated in this guide, membership lists for your Post and Kentucky's Post 200 are available from National through the Internet on www.mylegion.org. Each member can access this website using their own unique password to see their American Legion history and announcements from their Post. Post Commanders and Adjutants have extra access where they can access their Post's (and Post 200) membership lists. These lists are not available to every member because of privacy concerns.

Department Headquarters

Your Department Headquarters, including your Department Officers, are always ready to assist you. They can help with membership concerns, obtaining membership lists, and help with revitalization events.

There are some additional brochures and guides that are available through your Department Internet website at www.kylegion.org, such as this guide and the Department Legion Riders Guide. Additional materials and information are available by researching the Department website and by contacting Department staff directly.

Also on the Department website under the Membership Tab, there are Post membership reports by District, District and Area membership standings, and annual membership goals and dates. Statistics for the SAL are also included under this site. Auxiliary membership statistics can be obtained through the Auxiliary website and through the Department Auxiliary membership Chair.

As always, your Department officers are ready to assist you in your membership and Post recruitment and revitalization actions. Please contact the Department directly through the contacts of the Department Internet website at www.kylegion.org.