



# HOW TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEER DRIVERS

## A message from DAV National Adjutant **BARRY JESINOSKI**

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The DAV Transportation Network is one of the most critical services DAV offers. It's a lifeline for the veterans who rely on it to get no-cost rides to and from their VA medical appointments.

The lifeline of the Transportation Network is volunteers—the drivers and hospital service coordinators—who keep the program operational. It's because of these volunteers' dedication that we've provided tens of millions of rides covering hundreds of millions of miles since we began giving rides in 1987.

It's imperative that we continue providing this service. The resources in this guide are designed to help you find new volunteers, discuss the needs of veterans in your community with the local media and have some talking points you can use when discussing the Transportation Network.

The success of the Transportation Network, like so many other services DAV provides, relies on people like you who are committed to the well-being of fellow veterans and their families. Thank you for your passion to honor those who served. I wish you the best of luck recruiting new volunteers. We're here to support you, so don't hesitate to reach out to us at DAV National Headquarters if we can help in any way.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barry A. Jesinoski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Barry A. Jesinoski  
National Adjutant



**Volunteerism** is a cornerstone of DAV's continuing mission to provide a **lifetime of support** to veterans and their families.

An opportunity to serve the veteran community as a DAV Transportation Network driver is the chance to become a part of one of the nation's largest and most critical voluntary transportation programs serving veterans.

However, there's an ever-present challenge of recruiting and retaining dedicated volunteers.

That is made more challenging when we consider the shift in demographics in the veteran community. So many of our World War II-era volunteers have died, and many baby boomers are delaying retirement. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many of our volunteers to stop driving. It's also challenging because of the commitment required to participate in the program as a driver.

This guide is designed to give you resources that can help you use the media to encourage participation in this important program. Inside you will find:

- ▶ Ideas for recruiting volunteers.
- ▶ Strategies for using your local media to tell your neighbors about the need for volunteer drivers.
- ▶ Talking points for discussing the Transportation Network with potential volunteers and the media.



According to industry experts, you can implement several effective tactics to recruit volunteers.

- ▶ **Simply ask.** Newsletters, emails, recruiting posters and plugs at monthly meetings have their place, but they will never replace the emotional aspect of human-to-human contact.

In their book, “The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer,” authors Tom McKee and Jonathan McKee recount a time when they were recruiting volunteers for a long-term project and had disappointing results after several posters, meetings and mailings. One day over lunch, McKee asked a colleague, “Why didn’t you volunteer for this project? I could see your name on it all the way.”

The response? “If you wanted me, why didn’t you ask? I’d be happy to work with you on this project, but I would never volunteer.”

People like to be asked.

- ▶ **No doesn’t mean “not ever.”** You know better than anyone that people are busy. It’s helpful to start recruiting volunteers as early as possible. And if a potential volunteer says no, don’t consider that a final rejection.

Continue a personal monthly dialogue with your contact while continuing to raise awareness through other avenues. Your volunteers, especially those with whom you have personal contact, will sign on at different phases of their yearly schedule and life circumstances.

- ▶ **Don’t underestimate the power to convene.** Convening authorities, like the local Rotary, women’s organizations, houses of worship, town hall meetings and other civic organizations, are potential pools of volunteers who may be looking to make a difference in their community.

Also, don’t forget DAV meetings. It’s surprising that some members—even those who are regular attendees of their chapters’ meetings—have never been asked to join the Transportation Network. Even some hospital service coordinators don’t regularly attend meetings. Simply going to meetings for your local chapters or other civic entities could yield surprising results.



From left, members of DAV Chapter 10 in Billings, Montana, Bob Scott, John Tiry and Jimmy Kerr, get some airtime on the Larry & The Livin' Large Morning Show to discuss the benefits of the DAV Transportation Network. (Photo courtesy of Ed Saunders)

“Our experience shows few media outlets in Montana will turn down veterans for veterans outreach issues.”

—Ed Saunders,  
Department of Montana Public Information Officer  
and Chapter 10 Adjutant

Many of us think of the media as simply a newspaper we read, an internet news site we access or a television channel we watch to catch up on what is happening in the world.

However, the media can also be a very powerful and useful recruiting tool and a way to raise local awareness about DAV's mission. When it comes to a “good news” story, like assisting with a charity's mission to help veterans get to their hospital appointments, you may find your local media an extremely valuable partner.

## Engaging the media

There is a resource available to you, the DAV and Auxiliary Publicity Guide, which can be found in the Member Resources section on DAV's website. This guide has detailed information regarding how to engage your local press. However, here are some tips you may find useful.

Consider inviting the media out for a feature story and ride-along with a volunteer. To do this, you'll need to work with your public affairs representative at the Department of Veterans Affairs and ensure, through careful coordination, that patients involved would be willing to become part of a news story. You'll also need to coordinate with your VA's Center for Development and Civic Engagement to use Transportation Network vehicles and volunteers for media outreach. Tell the reporter you are available to comment on what the Transportation Network does and the service it provides for veterans in your community.



**“If compassion was the motivating factor behind all of our decisions, would our world not be a completely different place?”**

*—Sheryl Crow*

Strategize your engagement with the press to increase the chances you will receive coverage. For example, if a national political figure is making an appearance in town or a huge sporting event is taking place, it may be difficult to convince the media to cover our story. But if you forecast as best you can around other happenings and are persistent, you will exponentially increase the likelihood of gaining coverage. It’s also helpful to keep in mind that junior reporters are often willing to cover a variety of stories. Find out who these young professionals are and connect with them.



## Reaching out through radio

Engaging the media as an outreach vehicle doesn’t stop with your local newspaper or television station. Radio still has an important function and should definitely be an arrow in your outreach quiver, with 47% of the population still consuming news at least sometimes via radio, according to a 2022 Pew Research Center study. Don’t hesitate to reach out to radio stations, and don’t forget AM radio.

Also, podcasts are becoming a more prevalent way for people to consume media, with nearly 50% of the population having listened to a podcast in 2022, according to Pew. While news isn’t currently a major driver for people to listen to podcasts, Pew’s research reveals that 66% of podcast listeners have heard news on their feeds. This is an area to continue to monitor and, perhaps, explore engaging with.



“When the peace treaty is signed, the war isn’t over for the veterans, or the family. It’s just starting.”

—Karl Marlantes,  
U.S. Marine Corps veteran,  
author and businessman

Whichever media outlets you do contact, let them know about DAV’s mission and encourage them to partner with you to support this important initiative. Explain that you are a resource available to them to discuss the Transportation Network and our need for volunteers who want to give back to their veteran neighbors.



### Reconning the battle space before you engage

Some helpful questions to ask yourself may be:

- ▶ Which reporters in my area tend to report on military- or veteran-related issues?
- ▶ Is there a journalist who consistently covers community-related stories?
- ▶ Do we have a reporter in the area who covers news stories that have a familial, volunteer or civic-minded angle?

Most media outlets will have a website and a Contact Us button where you can engage with local reporters. Consider sending them an email that identifies you as a potential source for a story and invites them out on a day you think may be particularly busy.



## Discussing the DAV Transportation Network

The following resources are offered as tools for your use. Feel free to reformulate them as needed to make them better fit your voice and the circumstances in your community. The key is to feel and convey your authentic emotional connection to the cause. No one knows your program, your community and issues facing your veterans better than you.

The need for volunteers to operate the program and a decline in volunteerism, which could adversely affect veterans, makes the program newsworthy. Don't be afraid to talk candidly about the need for assistance in a positive and affirming way.

- ▶ Many veterans are not able to drive due to medical issues or lack of transportation, and they rely on the services the Transportation Network and its dedicated volunteers provide.
- ▶ Without this service, many veterans would not be able to access their medical benefits, which they have earned through service and sacrifice to preserve our way of life.
- ▶ This service is offered at no cost to those who've served or their families. DAV is a charity that relies on public support.
- ▶ There has been a decline in volunteerism across the country, which directly affects our ability to serve this population of injured and ill veterans. With the deaths of World War II- and Korean War-era volunteers and with baby boomers working longer, organizations like DAV have had a difficult time finding qualified volunteers to help connect veterans to the care they have earned.
- ▶ Volunteer drivers are the key to the success of this program, and they positively affect the lives of the veterans we serve. You don't have to be a veteran to volunteer, and you can volunteer as much or as little as you choose—some volunteers drive just one day a month.
- ▶ To become a DAV Transportation Network volunteer, drivers must be at least 21 years old, have a valid driver's license and valid auto insurance, and need to pass a basic physical through the VA. The VA covers insurance for volunteer drivers.
- ▶ The volunteers who comprise the nationwide DAV Transportation Network help us to provide the best possible care, morale and assistance to our country's heroes. DAV and Ford Motor Co. team up to provide the vehicles. But the program depends foremost on volunteers who recognize the contributions veterans have made.



“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

–Martin Luther King Jr.

It’s also helpful to know approximately how many rides your particular network has given in the past year, how many miles have been driven and approximately how many veterans you are serving. This data is available from the DAV Voluntary Services office at DAV National Headquarters.

Nationwide, volunteerism to support veterans is waning. Whenever we have an opportunity to engage the media in a way that will have a positive outcome for veterans, we should feel confident doing so. In addition to a press release calling attention to the needs of your local program, which you can customize based on your unique situation, we’ve included a release that can be issued to encourage volunteerism and promote the program when a new vehicle is received.

We encourage you to reach out to your local VA public affairs representative to discuss your plans to promote coverage. That person may be able to provide tremendous help through their contacts and expertise. If you would like to make a ride-along possible, it will require the representative’s assistance and the support of your local VA leadership.

Additionally, DAV resources and assistance are always available to augment your outreach and media engagement efforts. Reach out to the DAV Communications Department at [feedback@dav.org](mailto:feedback@dav.org) for more information.

You can download press release templates from the website, [dav.org](http://dav.org).

## Local Program Needs



Contact: **Name, title, phone number and/or email** **Date**

### Lack of volunteer drivers to support veterans causes concerns

With the Greatest Generation of World War II-era veterans fading into history and baby boomers working longer into their retirement years, the local DAV (Disabled American Veterans) Transportation Network is having a difficult time recruiting volunteers to help disabled veterans access the health care they have earned.

DAV volunteer drivers were responsible for helping provide more than **XXXXX** rides to and from **Name of VA facility/office** last year. And while the demand for transportation has grown, especially among aging veterans, DAV officials are concerned local veterans **could go without needed care because of a lack of volunteers.**

“We need people who recognize the service and sacrifice of our heroes and are willing to make a commitment to ensure the promises our country made to veterans are kept,” said **Name**, **DAV Transportation Network volunteer, hospital service coordinator or other title**. “Our program provides a very important service to veterans at no cost to them, but we can’t keep up with the demand if we don’t have people who are willing and able to support it.”

To become a DAV Transportation Network volunteer, drivers must have a valid, state-issued license and be able to pass a basic physical through the VA.

DAV, a national charity, launched the nationwide Transportation Network in 1987, after the federal government terminated its program to subsidize transportation for medical appointments. The service is provided at no cost to veterans receiving care through the VA.

**About DAV:**  
DAV ensures veterans to lead high quality lives with respect and dignity. It is dedicated to a single purpose: leaving our heroes to their rest and ensuring our service. DAV does this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them. Fighting for the interests of America's ignored heroes on Capitol Hill, providing essential resources to veterans and their families and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of heroes deserving the best. DAV is a national organization with 7 million members, was founded in 1920 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1922. Learn more at [www.dav.org](http://www.dav.org).

## New Vehicle Donation



For Immediate Release  
Contact: **Name, title, phone number and/or email** **Date**

### Donated vehicle will help **XXXXX** veterans access health care

DAV (Disabled American Veterans), through its nine-decade partnership with Ford Motor Co. and long working relationship with Veterans Affairs medical centers across the nation, is donating a new asset to the DAV Transportation Network at the **Local VA Medical Center (VAMC) or specific clinic location.**

A new Ford **Vehicle model** will be used by the medical center's volunteer drivers to ensure veterans, who otherwise would not be able to do so, can access their medical care at the VAMC at no cost.

“This vehicle will help us ensure veterans are able to use the care they’ve earned through their service and sacrifice,” said **Name**, **DAV Transportation Network volunteer, hospital service coordinator or other title**. “It’s a fitting way for us to thank them and keep a promise we made when they stood up to defend our freedom.”

The Transportation Network is dependent on volunteer drivers. While the new vehicle will help local veterans access care, according to **Name**, **DAV Transportation Network volunteer**, **XXXXX** additional volunteers are needed. Nationwide, with members of the Greatest Generation fading and many baby boomers working into their retirement years, volunteerism to support veterans is declining.

Interested volunteers can contact **Name**, **hospital service coordinator or other title**, at **phone number including area code and number**.

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# Testimonials From Volunteer Drivers



*Department of West Virginia volunteer drivers*

“I’m retired and decided I wanted to do some kind of volunteer work. I’ve always really respected our veterans and our military. I went to the VA medical center, did a ride-along and decided it looked like fun. I really enjoy being with the vets. It’s my way of saying thank you, and the veterans really appreciate the service we provide.”

–Jim Martin, DAV Transportation Network volunteer, Spokane, Washington

“I didn’t serve, but I wanted a way to recognize the sacrifices of the veterans who did. I feel like I get more from my interactions with them than they benefit from my time. I’ve built relationships with veterans, and I look forward to seeing them when they need me. It’s rewarding, and I can tell it’s a meaningful contribution I can make. The DAV Transportation Network gives me a tangible connection to the veteran community.”

–Patty Davis, DAV transportation coordinator, Zablocki VA Medical Center, Milwaukee

“I like to drive, and I like veterans. I really enjoy the one-on-one conversations I get to have with fellow veterans, because they feel comfortable talking with a fellow veteran. It’s a good organization—we have camaraderie among us. We all take care of each other. I do a lot of volunteer work, and this is, by far, the most fun I’ve had volunteering.”

–Tom Bierbach, DAV Transportation Network volunteer and Navy veteran, Milwaukee

“I thought it was the best way I could provide some service and help out. I’ve been doing it for 10 years. I especially enjoy the interaction with veterans of all eras. I’ve been privileged to talk to veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Middle East. I’m amazed at just how grateful the veterans are. For a lot of them, the service we provide isn’t just a convenience. It’s a necessity because they don’t have any other way of getting it, and Wisconsin doesn’t always have the best climate. They’re very appreciative, and it’s always humbling to me that they’re so grateful for us doing what we do.”

–Ted Mainella, DAV Transportation Network volunteer and Army veteran, Milwaukee