HOW TO RECRUIT VOLUNTEER DRIVERS
The impact our DAV Transportation Network makes on the veteran community cannot be overstated. Many veterans, for a variety of reasons, would not be able to access their much-needed medical appointments without this service. The effect that hospital service coordinators and the volunteers who comprise the Transportation Network have on veterans and families in their local communities is tremendous.

The resources found in this guide are designed to help you find new volunteers, discuss the unique needs of veterans in your community with the local media, and have some talking points for your use when discussing the Transportation Network with potential volunteer drivers, family, friends and neighbors.

We cannot provide the services DAV prides itself on without you. I want to thank you all for the remarkable jobs you do and wish you the best of luck in recruiting new volunteers. Please do not hesitate to contact us at your DAV National Headquarters if we can be of assistance.

A message from DAV National Adjutant

MARC BURGESS
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, the challenge often remains in how to recruit and retain 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 passed on, and many baby boomers are delaying retirement. It’s also challenging because of the commitment required to participate in the program as a driver.

This guide is designed to give you some 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, several effective tactics can be implemented 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, Tom 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 as 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. It’s surprising that some members—even those who actively attend DAV meetings—have never been asked to join. Some hospital service coordinators don’t attend meetings regularly themselves. Attending a meeting for your local chapters or other civic entities could yield surprising results.

“What is the essence of life? To serve others and to do good.”

—Aristotle
“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

The Media

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

However, the media can also be a very powerful recruiting tool and a useful vehicle to raise local awareness about DAV’s mission. When it comes to a “good news” story like helping 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 Members Only section on DAV’s website. This guide has detailed information regarding how to engage your local press. However, here are a few 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 VA public affairs representative and ensure, through careful coordination, that patients involved would be willing to become part of a news story. Tell the reporter you are available to comment on what the Transportation Network does and the service it provides for veterans in your community.

Strategize your engagement with the press to increase the chances you will receive coverage. If a national political figure is making an appearance in town or a huge sporting event is taking place, you’ll be hard-pressed 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. Also, it is 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. Radio is the leading reach platform: 93 percent of us listen to AM/FM radio over the airwaves, which is still higher than TV viewership (85 percent), PC use (50 percent), smartphone use (74 percent) and tablet use (29 percent). Don’t hesitate to reach out to radio stations, and don’t forget AM radio. 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.

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

—Sheryl Crow
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.

“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
Talking Points

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 thus convey your authentic emotional connection to the cause. No one knows your program, 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 impact veterans, makes the program newsworthy. Don’t be afraid to talk candidly about the need for assistance in a positive and affirming way.

► 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.

► Unfortunately, with the passing of the Greatest Generation of World War II-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 impact the lives of the veterans we serve. Most volunteer drivers say they get as much or more in return for the special thanks they give and receive from the people they help.

► This service is offered at no cost to those who served or their families. DAV is a charity that relies on public support.

► 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.

DAV Chapter 92 in Whitestone, N.Y., donates a new vehicle to the James J. Peters VA Medical Center. “I am humbled and inspired by such a gesture of generosity,” said Jean Cooney, who leads voluntary services at the VAMC. “Our veterans will reap the benefits of this van for many years to come.”

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“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.

Additional resources and assistance are always available to augment your outreach and media engagement efforts. Assistant National Communications Director Steven Wilson can be reached at swilson@dav.org.
Testimonials from 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, Wash.

“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