

SECTION 2

District or County Commander's Guide

What Is A District Commander?

If this is your first time as a District Commander, and you are not quite sure what the job entails, don't feel alone! You're not! Every year nearly 800 Legionnaires across the nation are elected to the position of District Commander and very few have experience. As a District Commander you have a unique opportunity to help The American Legion work and in turn to HELP AMERICA WORK. Your term in the office of District Commander can be one of the most rewarding and satisfying experiences of your life . . . if you meet your—

Responsibility

In many ways the District Commander is the most important person in The American Legion. Department officers learn very quickly that when a District Commander has organized the District, is meeting his/her responsibilities, and keeping a constant watch on District activities, the District is on the move. Each Post in The American Legion is a separate and distinct unit of our organization. Each Post functions independently of each other Post. You, as District Commander, have the responsibility for providing the link between individuals, Posts and Department. The Department, in turn, provides the link between the Districts, and your national office ties the 55 Departments together. The part you play in this communications process is vital. Without your leadership, the Posts in your District will have no way of linking their operations to our much larger national network. With your leadership your District can become an important part of an organized national effort. The American Legion was founded with a spirit of fellowship, enthusiasm and mutual respect among concerned friends. It was built on understanding, appreciation, and vocal pride of America and its people. It was built with the awareness that together we can make a difference—together we are “STILL SERVING AMERICA.” The success of The American Legion in today's world begins with you and your desire and ability to link your District to the rest of the organization. Ralph Waldo Emerson once mused that, “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm indicates excitement about an idea. If we add the necessary ingredients of dedication, personal attention, imagination, and perseverance, we have the requirements for a good District Commander.

Organize 'Team'

As District Commander, your first order of business is your “team”—the people with whom you can work and those who can best perform the tasks necessary for a successful year during your term of office.

You must select the cast, set the stage, and it's up to you to: (1) Move those projects that are most important, following a definite timetable; (2) determine both long-range and immediate objectives; (3) organize fully and communicate exactly your ideas and your enthusiasm; and (4) make sure the lines of communication are tightly drawn so the flow of information will be easily available to the public, Post, District, Department, and national.

Organizing The District

The first couple of months following the election of the District Commander can determine the success or failure of the entire administration. This is the time the selection of the key persons who will assist the Commander is completed, a timetable of future events is established, and it's made certain the Posts are getting organized.

The District Commander is normally the elected representative of the Posts in the District, but an obligation to provide guidance and supervision is also implied. Posts are responsible to carry out the objectives and programs of

the Legion and to fully comply with the obligations assumed under the Post, Department and national constitutions. When a Post is inactive, begins to falter or fails, it is then the District Commander must be prepared to give direction and control.

Supervision means organization. Responsibilities must be assigned to District vice Commanders. Other District officers must clearly understand the duties of their office. The most effective way to organize is to use an early meeting to bring together the team that will make the District function.

Prior to that meeting, the District Commander should learn what has caused past successes or failures of programs and objectives of the Posts and the District. District Commanders of previous years should be consulted. The Commander should study all that is possible to find out about the District, and should have clearly defined objectives and assignments to present. This should include assigning District officers the important function of attending regular Post meetings on a rotating basis within the District so one of the officers is present at almost every Post meeting.

A well-prepared agenda will furnish a pattern for all future meetings and go far toward getting the District organization functioning quickly and effectively.

Agenda items should include:

1. Membership potential, goals, target dates, distribution of Posts and the need for more Posts.
2. General discussion of program status throughout the District.
3. Personal objectives of the District Commander.
4. Assignments to officers, chairmen and committees.
5. Initial planning for District meetings.
6. Visitation schedule of Commander and Vice Commanders, and other District officers.

Selection and Use of Committees

No task is more fundamental to a smoothly functioning District than the selection and proper use of committee chairs and committees. Whenever possible, the chair should be someone with personal interests in the program assigned, and should be a person with enough stature to make effective contacts throughout the community with others of like interests. Some consideration must always be given to where the chairs live. It is essential to distribute appointments over the entire District, but it is often more important a particular chair live in a particular spot where the job must be done. Once a District Commander has decided upon the chairs, personal contact should be made with each head to determine a willingness to serve.

A meeting should be arranged where the District Commander can meet with each of the more important chairs and committees to formulate the program for the coming year. The District Commander has an additional obligation to see that each chair and committee is finished with all needed information and materials. All of these preliminary procedures are geared toward each of the District committees being able to build a timetable of events under its supervision that will fit into the overall District program and can be presented as a complete projection for the year at the first District meeting. As the year draws to a close, careful attention should be given to the selection of a nominating committee. This committee will be responsible for selecting qualified persons to carry forward the progress you have made.

Sources of Assistance

Your Department Adjutant will have information or aids available from the Department, National Headquarters, and from outside sources. The other major sources of assistance are within your own District. Don't be too proud to consult with past District officers. In fact, you may wish to establish an advisory committee of Past District Commanders for your District. The experience of this group, when properly sought and utilized will avoid many pitfalls and errors for you.

Value of Reporting

Preparing reports is rarely pleasant, except when results are favorable. But the value of a District Commander is in no small part determined by the ability to report both the favorable and unfavorable situations in the District to Department officers and by the ability to report Department and national actions to the District and Post officers. It is a two-way street, and again emphasizes the importance of the District Commander as a link in a chain. You are

the communications key. Membership results should be checked monthly in each of the Posts. Results will frequently indicate a visit.

Timetable

Section 1 of this guide lists suggested Post programs for every month of the year. Not all of these programs will be handled on a District-wide basis, but such a calendar is still necessary. Build your timetable, listing activities far enough in advance so your Post and District chairs are alerted well in advance. Your timetable should also include report dates.

District Meeting

The organization below the Department level varies from state to state. The meeting referred to in this section is the meeting of the organizational level immediately above the Post level, where the officers wear the blue and white cap. The District meeting is the largest Legion meeting the average Legionnaire ever attends. Not all Legionnaires attend state conventions, and an even smaller percentage attend National Conventions. Therefore, the District meeting becomes primarily the one opportunity to impress the average Legionnaire and to instill within each the knowledge and idealism of our accomplishments and aims.

If the first two months have been spent properly, the organization of a District meeting will not be difficult. Committee chairs will be ready to make intelligent and concise reports on their programs and the Posts will have been properly alerted so these officers, too, can outline their plans both as they fit either individual communities and as they are related to the District program.

Certain procedures are pretty standard, but are nevertheless important. District Commanders should get together with the host Post officers and Auxiliary officers to work out details of the meeting, possible entertainment, and a banquet if there is to be one.

All Posts should be sent notices of the meeting as far in advance as possible. The notices should outline 1) the time the meeting will start, 2) where it will be held, 3) whether or not there will be a luncheon, 4) if there will be a social hour, 5) when and where the banquet will start, 6) where different groups are expected to meet, 7) and any other miscellaneous information that would make for a better informed District membership.

The District Commander can use the "Manual of Ceremonies" (Section 3 of this guide) as the guide for conducting a District meeting in the same way a Post Commander follows the Manual in conducting a good Post meeting.

Notice of the meeting should definitely be sent to all District chairs and those who are expected to report should receive an additional follow-up, probably including a telephone call, to be certain they will be present and ready to report. Elections should be carefully conducted and all candidates given an equal chance to speak.

At every District meeting there will usually be dignitaries of the Legion or the Auxiliary. Be certain you are familiar with the proper method of presenting these people and the proper time for receiving any message they might have. In courtesy to them, to you, and to those attending the meeting, there should never be competing activities to distract from the meeting. Bar activities should be restricted to the social hours. The intent and meaning of the business part of a District meeting is to improve the performance of the Posts and make them more effective for the veterans in the surrounding areas.

Check List for Conferences and Conventions

To a District Commander, careful planning on every detail is most essential.

Time and Place: The timing of your meeting or convention is important so as not to conflict with events in the District that would interfere with attendance.

The site or place of the meeting should be where the greatest number can reach by traveling the shortest distance. Sometimes, a meeting is set at a Post in a far corner of a District hoping it will increase attendance in that area. However, too often this objective fails and results in poor attendance.

Attendance: Just setting a date for a meeting doesn't insure a crowd. The success of a meeting is based on the greatest number of Posts being represented rather than the greatest number of people present, since the District meeting should place its emphasis on getting the job done at the Post level.

The first thing, naturally, should be the official notice to each Post Commander and adjutant. This notice should be in the form of a sincere invitation, rather than just a cold announcement.

This should then be followed by personal contacts by the District Commander and the Vice Commanders. See that every Post Commander is personally invited to attend. Additional reminders are needed and valuable.

The type of leadership provided to a large degree will determine the attendance. Many will come, simply out of loyalty, others because of interest in a certain program, and others because of an obligation.

Every Post should be represented by at least its Commander and adjutant.

Arrangements for Meeting: As soon as the place of the meeting has been determined, the District Commander should then personally contact the Post Commander in that locality to make all the necessary arrangements for the conduct of the District meeting. Don't overlook such details as colors and color guard, podium, microphones, seating and registration procedures.

Details as to any refreshments or social functions should be carefully worked out.

Agenda: Not only is the preparation of an agenda important to the success of the meeting but the execution of the agenda is equally important.

CALL TO ORDER: The District Commander should promptly call the meeting to order at the time set, but before doing so, all officers, guests and color bearers should be in proper position.

ADVANCEMENT OF THE COLORS: Give command for salute with firmness.

PRAYER: At a District meeting, where the Chaplain is possibly not known to all—then it is suggested the District Commander say (for example)—“Charles Smith, our District Chaplain, will offer prayer.” Prayer may be one in “Manual of Ceremonies for Regular Meetings.” (See Section 3 of this guide.)

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: Legionnaires will remove caps.

PREAMBLE: If the Preamble is not on display in the room, give those present an opportunity to get membership cards out so they may join with you.

READING OF MINUTES: Some Districts have the reading of the minutes, others do not. If you do read them, then you will state (for example), “Joan Doe, District Adjutant, will read the minutes of the last District meeting.”

INTRODUCTION OF OFFICERS AND GUESTS: This is most important and often leaves people with a bad taste if the presiding officer fails to give the name correctly, fails to introduce in importance of position, or assigns improper titles.

It is suggested you do not rely upon your memory. Write down on a slip of paper those to be introduced, together with names and titles in the order in which they should be introduced. In District meetings, it is always well to introduce past District Commanders and never overlook past Department Commanders or national executive committeemen. When making introductions, do not ask those introduced for remarks at that time. Later, it may be in order to hear from certain distinguished guests.

Department Officers: If Department officers are present, they should be given special recognition and the opportunity to extend greetings. The District Commander, who will invite such officers to take their place for their remarks, should do this. It is suggested that a District Commander never simply state, “We have Joe Smith, Department Vice Commander with us, and I am wondering if he has anything to say.” Instead, “We are delighted to have our Department Vice Commander, Joe Smith, with us today, and we will be happy to hear from him at this time.”

Department Commander: If the Department Commander is present, he/she should be introduced with respect and dignity and given the floor for such period as may be desired.

ROLL CALL: Sometimes this is appropriate prior to the reading of minutes or the introduction of guests, but often it is found better to do this just before commencement of the business of the meeting. When calling the roll, the person answering for a Post should rise and state their name and position.

REPORTS: Prior to the meeting, the District Commander should inform everyone who is going to be called upon for a report of that fact and should go over what the report should cover. This is important and only fair to

those who will be called upon. Reports to early District meetings should cover plans for carrying out the programs in the District and hints or suggestions as to the part Posts are expected to play in the programs.

It is far better if those making reports will write them out, and this should come as a suggestion from the District Commander. Persons making reports should be called upon by their name, Post number and title of the office for which they are reporting and then requested to come to the front and address the meeting. If the District Commander knows an official or committee chair has no report, then it is better to not call upon that person.

If Posts are requested to report to the meeting, then again, it is important the Post Commander be informed in advance of expectations to report and an outline provided on what the report is expected to cover.

District Commanders should by all means have a personal report to make, and time should be spent in its preparation so the program may be properly presented. It would be well to give special recognition to Posts or officers doing an outstanding job, as an encouragement to them and an incentive to others.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: No meeting should ever be concluded without announcement of coming events, such as Department conferences, special programs or forthcoming observances. At all such meetings, a reminder of membership deadlines and active programs should be announced.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION: Never overlook the opportunity to give or report on Posts that have won special awards or special recognition for some outstanding performance.

CLOSING: District Commanders should never close the meeting without an expression of appreciation to those who have attended, for their interest and support of the conference, and to the host Post for its hospitality.

Hints that help:

1. In conducting a meeting or convention, a presiding officer will command more and greater respect, and have better control over such meeting, by standing whenever the group is addressed or presiding over business.
2. Remember, you, as the presiding officer, are the “boss” of the meeting. When being addressed, demand respect and you will be respected. When anyone wishes to address the chair, have that person stand, give their name and Post number and be properly recognized before you grant permission to address the conference.

Evaluating Post Programs

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the changes that have taken place in the Legion programs is to review its history. For example, in the field of childcare, The American Legion has been an innovator. Many nationwide programs first saw the light of day as a Legion resolution. But Children and Youth programs of today bear little resemblance to the programs of the twenties or the thirties. No longer is the emphasis on establishing orphanages. Now the emphasis is on the whole child and the retention of as near a normal family life as possible. The programs have changed over a period of years, but . . .

Don't be surprised if at your first Post visit the entire program consists of a discussion on whether to enlarge the club parking lot. And don't be too shocked if at the second, you are greeted with, “Well we didn't have any program for tonight, so we'll just turn it over to the District Commander.” Perhaps at the third, someone will report, “We've had the same program with the school since World War II. Now the school officials want to change it. Well, they won't get away with it. I've got an appointment with the school board.”

All of this is business as usual, but today that is not good enough. Your job is to search out and help your Post officers find programs that have meaning today. Opportunities are all around you. The American Legion **National Emergency Fund [NEF] Program** is a good example.

There are new and old veterans eager for a visit from someone who realizes there are problems in readjusting, in retaining a pension, in finding work, or in getting training to make a decent living. Every community needs a good recognition program for its veterans. Through the press, TV and radio, use it as an example for others. Perhaps the Posts could take on the job of building support.

Leading authorities feel the best way to combat increasing drug abuse is in public education. Urge your Posts to find out what your schools are providing; organize a public meeting with an authoritative speaker; and take the lead in developing a community drug education council.

What happens after your delegates return from Boys State? Perhaps they could help organize a Junior Lawman program copied after one now sponsored by the Department of Nebraska. This involves bringing high school juniors into the state patrol-training center for a week of instruction involving all branches of law enforcement.

There is a need for the promotion of old-fashioned patriotism—an activity that remains timely.

You could be surprised and delighted by the enthusiasm generated by properly planned and conducted District promotions.

Analysis Of Post Operations

(Simplified Analysis Form Provided For District/Post Use Following “Post Responsibility Audit” Form)

Abe Lincoln is credited with the remark that “a man’s legs need to be long enough to reach the ground.” **The membership of a Post needs to be big enough to carry on the work of the Post—and it will be.** For a Post’s activities cannot be greater than its membership can support. So, before we talk about the membership of a Post and how big the Post ought to be, we need to ask—and answer—a few other questions.

What does the Post do that would make a veteran want to belong? Is it looking to the future?

What further activities could it reasonably expect to carry out? How many members can the Post expect to handle? How many does it actually want? Maybe it is satisfied with what it already has.

What kind of Post is it or does it want to be? Or just what is the reason for the existence of this particular Post?

The answers for every Post will be different.

While the answers may be different, they can be revealing and will certainly show which Posts are capable of membership growth and which Posts must have improved and modernized programs before a healthy membership growth can be supported.

In any given Post, there is a rather constant percentage of the members who do the bulk of the work. This manpower pool is the one around which practically all Posts build their programs.

The percentage of active members is rather constant, but it does not need to be. Ideas for increasing the number and quality of active Legionnaires are available in Department and national planning manuals. Use this material as a base for your own presentation to make your Post more effective.

Limits of Authority - - - Methods of Securing Information

Many Posts resent what they infer to be interference in the operation of their Post. At the same time, the Department is counting upon the District Commander to have detailed knowledge and understanding of each Post in the District. This conflict can usually be resolved by use of proper methods of working with the Posts both toward obtaining information and toward improving Post operation. A sample Post Analysis Sheet appears later in this section. This particular sheet is quite similar to the one used by many of our Departments. Experience in the field has shown the actual sheet can be left in the briefcase while the information is being gathered.

Perhaps the most effective method yet devised is for the District Commander to be prepared with several key questions on programs or activities; they may be your own pet interests. Give these to all District officers to use during Post visitations. If a meeting with Post officers can be arranged, these key questions can be the start of a good discussion, allowing the District Commander to obtain all of the information needed and at the same time offer numerous suggestions for improvements. It has been conclusively proven there is no value in handing an analysis sheet to one or more Post officers and asking them to complete it without consultation with the District Commander or whoever is having the form completed.

Use of Information Obtained

As important as it is for the District Commander to know the internal operation of each Post, it is equally important this information is put to proper use. Certainly it has no value if the District Commander simply obtains this information for information’s sake. First, the information should be put to work to assist the Post in improving its overall programs and procedures. Second, the information must be passed on to the Department as part of that vast amount of knowledge that makes for a growing Department. Third, District officers can be better informed.

Today, too often The American Legion is guilty of focusing on the needs of the organization rather than on the needs of the veterans or the community. American Legion Posts need to wholeheartedly adopt an approach geared to the ideal of satisfying the needs of potential Legionnaires and communities, thus causing The American Legion to be a vehicle for service, and this would make for easier acceptance. The logical conclusion is that the Posts would become more flexible. There would be a variety of types of Posts—the possibilities are endless if the primary thought behind continuing or forming a new Post is to provide service.

Many like a Post that has a good clubroom. They like the sociability that develops around a good bar, but this doesn't appeal to a lot of veterans. Some of them are leaders in our communities, who are needed in The American Legion. A clubroom can add to a Post, but think of the many Posts where the meetings are held in the bar room or members must go through the bar to get to the meeting room. It doesn't matter how good a salesman you have on your membership team, the market is limited. Sure, the first sale may be made, but you probably aren't gaining a continuing or active member.

There need to be people within our organization whose primary responsibility is analyzing the Post structure, particularly those located in metropolitan and urban areas. Their purpose would not be to make the individual contacts, but rather helping Posts toward the filling of present or developed needs of the veteran or the community.

We must further build a task force of people capable of making contact on the highest level within the community and developing with community leaders a marketable American Legion for the area. "What can this Post and its membership do to better serve the local veterans and the community?" and then did something about it. The Post Responsibility Audit, which follows, is an attempt to answer such questions. This tool will amaze you with its ability to determine the quality of a Post operation and its relationship to membership growth.

Post Responsibility Audit (PRA)

(Simplified Audit Form Provided For District/Post Use Follows)

A "PRA" anticipates an organization will participate, through its members, in meaningful activities within the community where its members reside. But it also means one thing more—and this is important—it means you should also be able to measure the results of its activities.

The American Legion has developed programs primarily in response to pressure. These pressures can take many forms—it may mean a drop in membership, acceptance by communities, being available to all veterans, changing economic factors, or a new generation of veterans. These are all conditions or pressures that directly affect The American Legion. There are many more. Unfortunately, the Post response has been one of reaction rather than one of action. As individuals, and in our personal life, we do plan ahead—some with more success than others—but when a person gets active in a Post, "blindness" with "tunnel-vision" may also occur. Then you see general statements like, "Be Active, promote community service" and Post members usually react rather than act ahead of any emergency.

Perhaps this is because no one has spelled out the one-two-three items to show a Post is doing its share, or another Post is not doing its share. And perhaps the reason for this is that as movement is made up the scale from Post to District, to Department, to National, it becomes increasingly hard to get action and, as Legionnaires, there is trouble getting a proactive/proper response except to a crisis.

There are no precise standards already developed that gives a qualitative as well as a quantitative analysis of a Post, but a start has to be made and perhaps the accompanying charge can be used as a barometer which actually measures the effectiveness of a Post.

This whole presentation has been put together not necessarily to indicate how you could quickly rate your Posts, although this could be a very valuable tool. The primary purpose is to indicate how by evaluating what the Post is doing you can show whether it is fulfilling a useful function, whether it is an organization attracting veterans, and whether it is truly a community asset.

If you honestly evaluate your Posts, you are going to be surprised. More important, the evaluation will indicate where improvement is most needed.

Perhaps the social aspects have been underplayed, although it would be easy to cover all such activities under the 5th item, "Post is a Community Center" or the 8th item, "Is a Friendly Place to Be." It's entirely possible if this type of audit is used, there will have to be increased emphasis on a planned social recreational program. In the

meantime, do not lose sight of the very fundamental question, “Is this Post doing the things that justify its continues existence in the community or for your veterans?”

A score of 24 probably should produce a Post that’s doing a respectable job of hanging on to old members. It’s doubtful many would be coming out to meetings, and it’s more doubtful it would be attracting the necessary new blood to make the Post grow.

Most average Posts, with a little effort, can be changed to become outstanding Posts. By improving each item listed on the chart, this improvement should come about. One area where a better performance would be most easily seen would be in attendance at Post meetings. A second would be the enthusiasm displayed by the members. A third would be a brightening of the membership picture.

Evaluate what the Post is doing...use the following form to audit Post activities. First, run a beginning audit, with periodic follow-ups for comparison, such as each quarter, to see whether the Post has made any improvements in specifically identified areas.

Post Responsibility Audit form

Rating Schedule

- 0 - No Participation
- 1 - Poor
- 2 - Below Average
- 3 - Average
- 4 - Above Average
- 5 - Excellent

Rate each category below with a score from 0 to 5

		0	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Follow principles of Preamble.	π	π	π	π	π	π
2.	Have good youth programs.	π	π	π	π	π	π
3.	Members are interested and active.	π	π	π	π	π	π
4.	Is a real asset to the community.	π	π	π	π	π	π
5.	Post is a community center.	π	π	π	π	π	π
6.	Veterans needing help are helped.	π	π	π	π	π	π
7.	Has businesslike operation.	π	π	π	π	π	π
8.	Is a friendly place to be.	π	π	π	π	π	π
9.	Is well thought of by the community.	π	π	π	π	π	π
10.	Is well thought of by veterans.	π	π	π	π	π	π

TOTAL POST SCORE _____

DATE OF AUDIT _____

Overall Rating (Assessment) From Post Total

- 0 - 4 Dead
- 5 - 14 Poor
- 15 - 24 Below Average
- 25 - 34 Average
- 35 - 44 Above Average
- 45-50 Excellent

Post Analysis form

THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF

POST _____ NO. _____ LOCATION _____
 Date of Visit _____ by _____ Title _____
 Name _____
 of Commander _____ Adjutant _____

<u>COMMITTEES:</u>	Committee Appointed		Committee Functioning	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Americanism.....	π	π	π	π
Membership.....	π	π	π	π
Children & Youth.....	π	π	π	π
Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation.....	π	π	π	π
Jobs for Veterans.....	π	π	π	π
Boys State.....	π	π	π	π
Legion Baseball.....	π	π	π	π
Oratorical.....	π	π	π	π
Energy.....	π	π	π	π
Other Committees.....	π	π	π	π

MEMBERSHIP: Members Members Post Vietnam
 Goal _____ to date _____ Last Year _____ Veterans Joined? _____

General Conduct of meeting; how conducted in your opinion? _____

Total _____ How often does
 Attendance _____ Post Meet? _____ Dates _____

How often are executive meetings held? _____

General Comment: In your opinion, what can be done to assist this Post? _____

Signed (Post Officer) _____ Title _____

Signed (Dept. Rep.) _____ Title _____

The Value of Organized Posts

Each District Commander will have under the District jurisdiction Posts ranging from the highly successful to dormant ones. Your success is going to depend to a large extent upon how effectively you can get the greatest number of Legion Posts to cooperate during your year in office.

When a Post has a completely successful operation, it needs a minimum of supervision. But the District Commander will still want to be familiar with the procedures followed by the Post, so ideas and programs used there can be presented to the less successful Posts in the District's jurisdiction. On many occasions, new Post officers are eager to do a job but lack the background.

The District Commander has several options as to how best to help the Post. You may want to call a Post Officers' seminar early in the Legion year, at which time the District chairs and officers can be utilized to present the program for the coming year. Use regular District conventions for the same purpose, but here time limitations prohibit an effective presentation. Maintain a list of phone numbers of all District and county (if any) and Post officers to reach them quickly in an emergency. District officers should make Post visits. Using electronic *e-mail* is another fast way to reach key officers.

On other occasions, it is going to be necessary the District Commander go directly to a Post and sit down with whatever officers available and offer some type of procedure the District Commander knows will work. Here is an outline of a proven plan for organizing the individual Posts. This outline can be used in the District seminars, or it can be used in meeting with individual Posts.

Step Up To A Better Post

As a new Commander, first looking at the overall operation of a Post of The American Legion; you may feel you are facing an insurmountable wall. You probably are, unless, step by step, the wall is climbed through organization and leadership.

Step I—Obtain Post records and get new material from Department headquarters so the Commander and adjutant can become familiar with the policies and traditions of the Post, District, Department and national.

Step II—Call an early meeting of your newly elected officers. Invite the outgoing Commander and adjutant and other influential Legionnaires to meet with you.

A suggested agenda should include:

- a. Budget
 1. Old, and possibly new sources of income
 2. Estimated expenditures
 3. Possible methods of financing selected programs with other than Post funds
- b. Assignments and outline of duties of elected officers
- c. Discussion of individual programs and committees in Post organization chart, Section 1 to determine the following:
 1. Qualifications and suggestions for committee chairs and members (See Section 1)
 2. Established programs
 3. Possible new programs (use available handbooks and Department material as guides)
 4. Schedule programs (see Program Reminders—Section 1)
 5. A program of recognition and service for all veterans.
- d. Discussion programs unique to your particular Post
- e. Initiate study of Post and community for possible additional programs. Make Post analysis—See the previous page of this section.

Step III—Activate Committees

- a. Select chairperson and members
- b. Make personal contact with each chair to determine willingness to serve
- c. Arrange meeting of committees to formulate program

- d. Instruct chairmen as to programs, material available, Post reports, etc.
- e. Build timetable for each committee to fit into the overall Post calendar
- f. Add a young member

Step IV—Coordinate with the Auxiliary. Many programs depend on Auxiliary support to be successful.

Step V—The Post Meeting

- 1. The first Post meeting tends to set a pattern for the entire year
- 2. Work closely with adjutant, officers and committee heads
- 3. Run a formal meeting—follow the ritual in Manual of Ceremonies
- 4. Post business should be attended to as briefly as possible—Use executive committee members to resolve

Post business

- 5. Department and National material should be digested in advance and items of interest reported to the membership
- 6. Committee reports should be brief and to the point
- 7. Consider qualified speakers at some or all meetings for briefing on some phase of Legion program
- 8. Don't neglect the social side
- 9. Announce main business of next meeting
- 10. Have the "Welcome Committee" working

Step VI—Public Relations Committee Meeting

- a. Ways and means
- b. Formulate instruction to Post officers and committee chairs on standard procedure for keeping PR chair and editor of your paper or bulletin informed

Step VII—Plan for a better informed membership

- a. Talks at Post meetings
- b. Give all a job
- c. Encourage enrollment/completion of The American Legion Extension Institute
- d. Pass on information
- e. Have a monthly Post newspaper or bulletin
- f. Acquaint active members with veteran benefits

Step VIII—Appoint coordinating committee for patriotic observances. America wants and needs old-fashioned patriotism

- a. Work with standing committees. Include younger members
- b. Work with community, particularly in recognition of our active military personnel, as well as all veterans.
- c. Uniformed groups

Step IX—Give proper credit

- a. Awards & Citations
- b. Thank you notes
- c. Credit at meetings

Step X—The voice of the Legionnaire and the Post is only heard by active participation in meetings, whether District, Department or National.

- a. Plan election of delegates as part of the Post timetable
- b. Attend District, Department and National Conventions and conferences
- c. Present sound resolutions of concern to The American Legion
- d. Report back to the Post

Step XI—Follow standard procedures and schedule for the year around. Keep Post meetings planned three months ahead, social activities six months.

Step XII—It is never too early to evaluate possible Post officers for next year.

Reactivating Dead Posts

A community with no Post of The American Legion and a community with a dormant or dead Post show an almost identical void—a void characterized by the complete lack of any activities in the various fields of concern of The American Legion. Actually, the community or neighborhood with a dormant Post frequently is a greater problem to those responsible for American Legion programs. Many times there is an adjutant, Commander, or both on record, and the District or Department officers continue to attempt the revitalization of the Post through these listed officers. Obviously, these are people who lack more than a token interest or do not have leadership ability. If this were not true, the Post would be functioning. District officers are usually wasting their time if these are the only contacts that can be made. The solution lies in reaching out beyond these so-called officers to find a new nucleus for a Post. In doing so, the situation is exactly the same as if a new Post were to be organized.

Remember! One or two key people can change a Post completely.

New Posts

The formation of a new Post or the rebirth of a dormant one is not difficult if certain basic steps are followed. Determine first that The American Legion is **NOT** serving a particular community or neighborhood where there are sufficient veterans to support an active and growing Post. Someone of stature from the District or the Department must visit the area and find out where these community and veterans' needs exist. This may take the form of an actual survey with the necessary contacts being made to find out where The American Legion might serve in connection with the schools and school programs, drug abuse/teenage suicide prevention, scouting, service for disabled or aging veterans, or the need of the community for an additional ladies' volunteer group such as the American Legion Auxiliary. **Such a survey should certainly consider the recreational and social facilities of the community.**

Often while this survey is in progress, giant strides can be made toward solving the second step, which is the recruitment of eligible veterans who have the ability and willingness to provide a good nucleus around which an American Legion Post can be built. The superintendent or principal of the local school might suggest the names of those who would be interested. Federal employees, particularly of the Post Office, offer a fertile source of potential members in a new Post. The local Scout Executive may also have in mind some veterans who would see the formation of a Legion Post as a means of expanding the Scouting program. Methods now exist whereby it is easy to determine names and addresses of Legionnaires belonging to Posts in other communities or other states who live within the boundaries where a new Post is desired. Those active in Little Leagues or other pre-Legion Baseball-age programs are frequently most interested in assuring that there is a continuing baseball program and can be very instrumental in developing the necessary number to start a Post. Other organizations, such as Lions or Kiwanis, may be needing the cooperation of a Legion Service Officer to round out a program. Banks and other businesses are very often interested in being represented in such a venture, particularly if the bank or business is headed by a Legionnaire from another Post, but has many employees living in the desired area.

Sometimes the District officers will still not have a key person to form a new Post. This is the time to make a list. Start with the banks, then the insurance offices and real estate offices. These are fertile fields for finding that key person. Or, visit the school principals and/or city and local government offices.

Visits can be paid to each agency listed, explaining what is being attempted and why it is felt an American Legion Post will be an asset to the neighborhood or community. At the same time, a request should be made at each stop for the names of veterans who might possibly be interested in getting on the organizational ground floor of a new American Legion Post. Almost without exception this method will come up with the one, two, or three key people who can take the lead, locally, in forming the Post. **Additional members can come from the friends and acquaintances in a chain reaction type of operation.**

In making the first contacts with business firms or a prospective new member, it is not necessary to spend considerable time with a detailed explanation of the Legion. This can usually come later; but a copy of The American Legion Magazine is a simple, dignified item that makes the selling job easier. If the proper people can be found, a very minimum number is required to insure the success of a new Post. These people will do most of the recruiting from among their own friends, business associates, and acquaintances. In fact, the job of finding the initial veterans can frequently be simplified by using friends of Legionnaires in adjacent Posts or from the District officers.

Frequently several arbitrary decisions have to be made in starting a new Post. A temporary name can be selected; initial dues can be set; and, most important, three or four reasons why a new Post is needed can be spelled out.

One of the most important reasons is the Post is being organized to make the community or neighborhood a better place in which to live and to assist veterans and the families of the area, but this reason should be spelled out in terms of programs which have meaning to the local residents.

Once the bare minimum necessary to start a Post is recruited, a first organizational meeting should be held to elect a temporary chairman and secretary. There then exists an organization that can set the date for a second meeting where the procedures outlined in Section 4 can be followed to organize a Post. This group can make sure proper publicity is given to the second meeting, that there is perhaps a Service Officer present, and there are in attendance those Legionnaires who have accepted the responsibility of assisting the new Post during its formative period and the first crucial months of its existence.

The work of dedicated Legionnaires who unselfishly devote time and effort to assuring the success of a new Post should not go unrecognized. The National Membership and Post Activities Committee issues "Pioneer Award" citations which a new Post can award at the time it receives a permanent charter to that individual or Post which has been most instrumental in its success. Details are available through Department headquarters. The Department and the Districts should certainly establish an award system for those most active in a new Post program.

Although the great majority of Posts are of the typical "community-type," drawing their membership from a cross-section of the population and carrying on such standard American Legion activities as they are capable of, there is room in the Legion for a great variety of specialized Posts. There are a number of highly successful luncheon-type Posts, made up primarily of business and professional members. There are Posts which limit their membership to employees of a particular business or industry. There are doctors' Posts, nurses' Posts, Posts made up entirely of church members, federal employees, veterans of a particular military outfit, ex-patients of a specific VA Hospital, and persons who have been stationed in or lived in China. Any area of interest or activity with which a group of veterans can identify themselves can provide the reason for an American Legion Post as well as the means of organizing it.

However, regardless of the type of Post, what has previously been written here still holds true. First, there must be some legitimate, recognizable need which can be served by an American Legion Post. Then, there must be found or brought together a nucleus of those eligible, who can be interested in taking the initiative to form a Post. And, finally, there must be help and stimulation from knowledgeable Legionnaires who are in a position to advise and inform the nucleus.

Step-by-Step Procedures

In the formation of a new American Legion Post, the first and absolutely essential requirement is a positive attitude. There can be no "if we form a Post." Instead, it's "when we form a Post." Remember, you'll be providing a genuine service to the community and its veterans. The following steps can serve as a guide:

1. Determine the city, town, neighborhood or other identifiable area where there are veterans without a readily available Post.
2. Make a firm decision that a new Post will be formed to serve the selected area.
3. At this point, clear with the Department (State) Headquarters of The American Legion, and if necessary the District Commander. (Maybe someone else is already working in the area.)
4. Find out from the Department the minimum number required for a Post Charter.
5. At the same time, get the following from the Department: an Application for Temporary Charter, Post Adjutant's Manual, membership applications, etc.
6. Select two or three projects which the new Post will be able to carry out and which will meet local needs or local aspirations.
7. Contact key people in the community and get their approval for a new Post and their suggestions for

possible leaders and members. Excellent sources of information are the mayor, school superintendent/teachers, bank managers, real estate agents, insurance men, barbers, bartenders, cafe operators, police officers, fire Department officials, etc.

8. Pick the key individual who can serve as the presiding person during organization. Look for leadership talent, enthusiasm and community stature.

9. Pick a name for a Post. **(A Post may not be named for any living person.)**

10. Have the Department (State) Headquarters assign a number to the Post.

11. Establish Post dues even before the first organizational meeting. (Average is about \$25 today, but keep dues in line with neighboring Posts.)

12. Designate an active secretary-treasurer to serve during the organizational period.

13. Open bank account for Post. (Two signatures should be required on all checks.)

14. Start signing members. (Be familiar with eligibility requirements.)

15. Set time and place of organizational meeting. (See Section 4 under "New Posts")

16. Get signatures of required number on the application for Temporary Charter.

17. Notify all members in writing of time and place of organizational meeting.

18. Publicize formation of Post and organizational meeting through local press, electronic media, notices on shopping center bulletin boards, etc.

19. Check to make sure you have signatures of all members on charter application and the form is fully made out with necessary copies.

20. Do not overwhelm members and prospective officers with literature or too much information. One step at a time does it.

21. Select one or two needed community projects. Emphasize the help The American Legion can give in meeting problems of veterans.

Initiation and Installation

Be sure this is a first-class social event. It should be carefully planned with top Department and District representatives present to properly initiate and install members and officers.

1. Publicize meeting.
2. Temporary officers still preside.
3. Key Legionnaires responsible for the Post should be present.
4. Initiate new members.
5. Install officers.

Direct Renewal Notices

Beginning in July, direct dues renewal notices are mailed from National Headquarters to present members for the next year's dues. The member pays dues directly to the Post. Each year a Post data card will be mailed to the Post from Department Headquarters asking for the amount of the Post dues and the address to which the member is to mail dues. As closely as possible Posts should use a permanent mailing address, either a Post office box or the address of the Post home. Do not use the name of the Adjutant or other individual unless no other address is available. Difficulties arise if the individual suddenly vacates the office, moves, or dies.

Some Posts have members who should not be sent a renewal notice. To take care of this, send a letter to Department Headquarters listing those members' names, addresses, and card numbers, signed by a Post official giving the Post number, and they will never receive a renewal notice again. Thereafter, the code letter "c" will appear in a column after the member's zip code in the Post membership register. Only one amount for Post dues can be printed for each Post. For example, National Headquarters cannot print "\$20.00 until January 1, \$25.00 after January 1."

Posts not participating in the Department program may be included in the next billing by filling out a Post data card and sending it to Department Headquarters. Through Department participation, additional notices are

available. Scheduled renewal mailings are usually at no cost to Departments or Posts...the Headquarters Post is an exception (in order to avoid a charge, they must meet an established renewal %).

All delinquent members in The American Legion will receive a renewal notice in March; if still delinquent, an additional renewal may be sent for receipt in early May.

Paid-Up-For-Life Membership Plan

Each summer, when American Legion Posts receive their membership cards for the coming year, there will be an increasing number of Legionnaires whose dues are already paid for the following year and for every year thereafter as long as they live. They are Legionnaires who have voluntarily chosen to become Paid-Up-For-Life members under the National plan.

Must Be In Good Standing

A Legionnaire must be in good standing to become a Paid-Up-For-Life member . . . to be in good standing, the member must have a valid membership card for the current Legion year.

Most Buy At Dues-Paying Time

The average Legionnaire is most apt to decide to become a Paid-Up-For-Life member at the time when dues are usually paid for the coming year.

Post Commanders, Adjutants, and membership workers are asked to make sure their members know that with one payment they can take care of dues for all future years.

Not A Discount Membership

The National Constitution & By-Laws of The American Legion is very clear that "there shall be no form or class of membership except an active membership, and dues shall be paid annually or for life."

Post Receives Dues Portion Annually

That part of the total dues now being retained by the Post will be returned every year for all Paid-Up-For-Life members.

For example, if the dues of the Post are \$25.00, and of this amount \$18.00 is sent to the Department to cover National and Department dues, the \$7.00 now being kept by the Post will come back for current dues, and every year thereafter the Post will get its same share. It doesn't make any difference what happens to National or Department dues in the future; the Post will always get its \$7.00 share.

Many Posts are purchasing Paid-Up-For-Life membership for their longtime members, and in calculating the cost to remit, they may leave out their share of the dues . . . this will reduce the amount to submit with the application.

To go back to the example above, for a 70-year-old veteran, the cost of a Paid-Up-For-Life membership, based on \$25.00 dues, is \$290. However, if the Post decides to forego its share of the dues (\$7.00), the cost would go down to \$209, which is based on \$18.00 annual dues (\$18 Xs 11.61...see fee schedule on the next page).

The application forms for Paid-Up-For-Life memberships can be ordered from your Department Headquarters, or from National Headquarters.

The member fills out the application and turns it over to the Post Adjutant along with the appropriate payment, just the same as in paying annual dues.

The Post Adjutant endorses the application, certifies the Post's current dues, and that the member is in good standing. The application and payment is then sent to the Department Headquarters, and from there to National for final processing.

Membership Card

Each Paid-Up-For-Life member receives a permanent plastic card, as well as an annual paper **membership card, directly from National, to verify continuing membership in The American Legion. The annual card will be mailed in July of each year.** *Note: Sending the annual card is a means to keep track of address changes, and even deaths.*

Upon request, a replacement plastic or paper card can be provided at no additional charge to the Paid-Up-For-Life member.

Cost

The cost of a Paid-Up-For-Life membership, which is based upon the member's age at the time of application and the current annual dues of the Post, can be found on the rate schedule.

Any applicant may pay by check, MasterCard, Visa, Discover or American Express.

Note: Only Kansas does not participate in the National plan. They operate their own plan for their respective members. For more information about this other plan, the members and Post can contact their Department Headquarters.

Time Payment Plan

Members of The American Legion may use the Time Payment Plan to purchase a National Paid-Up-For-Life membership. No interest and no service charge will be added to the fee.

Time Payment Plan instructions/established rules for application:

- 1) You must be a member in good standing. This means the member must have a paid membership card for the current Legion year.
- 2) The total Paid-Up-For-Life membership fee has to be paid within twelve (12) months from the date of application.
- 3) No payment for six (6) consecutive months will cause your account to be closed.
- 4) On the application, please check you wish to use the Time Payment Plan.
- 5) When you submit the application to your Post for certification, and initial remittance must accompany the application. The payment should be at least ten percent (10%) of the total fee.
- 6) National Headquarters will provide coupons and envelopes so you may make the monthly payments. The payment due each month should be at least ten percent (10%) of the total fee.
- 7) Your permanent Paid-Up-For-Life membership card will only be issued after the total fee is paid in full. If you need assistance or have any questions, please contact your Post Adjutant or Finance Officer, or write: The American Legion, National Paid-Up-For-Life Plan, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206.

YOU MUST BE A MEMBER IN GOOD STANDING TO APPLY FOR THIS TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP. GOOD STANDING MEANS THE MEMBER MUST HAVE A VALID MEMBERSHIP CARD FOR THE CURRENT LEGION YEAR.

**The American Legion
PAID-UP-FOR-LIFE
Membership Rate Chart - effective January 1, 2004**

DUES	AGE GROUP													
	24 & Under	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85 & Over
\$20	\$697	\$663	\$626	\$585	\$540	\$492	\$441	\$388	\$334	\$282	\$232	\$186	\$145	\$118
\$21	\$732	\$696	\$657	\$614	\$567	\$517	\$463	\$407	\$351	\$296	\$244	\$195	\$152	\$123
\$22	\$766	\$729	\$688	\$644	\$594	\$542	\$485	\$427	\$367	\$310	\$255	\$204	\$159	\$129
\$23	\$801	\$762	\$719	\$673	\$621	\$566	\$507	\$446	\$384	\$324	\$267	\$213	\$166	\$135
\$24	\$836	\$795	\$751	\$702	\$648	\$591	\$529	\$466	\$401	\$338	\$279	\$223	\$174	\$141
\$25	\$871	\$829	\$782	\$731	\$676	\$616	\$552	\$485	\$418	\$352	\$290	\$232	\$181	\$147
\$26	\$906	\$862	\$813	\$761	\$703	\$640	\$574	\$504	\$434	\$366	\$302	\$241	\$188	\$153
\$27	\$941	\$895	\$845	\$790	\$730	\$665	\$596	\$524	\$451	\$380	\$313	\$251	\$195	\$159
\$28	\$976	\$928	\$876	\$819	\$757	\$689	\$618	\$543	\$468	\$394	\$325	\$260	\$202	\$165
\$29	\$1,010	\$961	\$907	\$848	\$784	\$714	\$640	\$563	\$484	\$408	\$337	\$269	\$210	\$171
\$30	\$1,045	\$994	\$938	\$878	\$811	\$739	\$662	\$582	\$501	\$422	\$348	\$278	\$217	\$176
\$31	\$1,080	\$1,027	\$970	\$907	\$838	\$763	\$684	\$601	\$518	\$436	\$360	\$288	\$224	\$182
\$32	\$1,115	\$1,060	\$1,001	\$936	\$865	\$788	\$706	\$621	\$534	\$451	\$372	\$297	\$231	\$188
\$33	\$1,150	\$1,094	\$1,032	\$965	\$892	\$812	\$728	\$640	\$551	\$465	\$383	\$306	\$239	\$194
\$34	\$1,185	\$1,127	\$1,064	\$995	\$919	\$837	\$750	\$660	\$568	\$479	\$395	\$316	\$246	\$200
\$35	\$1,219	\$1,160	\$1,095	\$1,024	\$946	\$862	\$772	\$679	\$585	\$493	\$406	\$325	\$253	\$206
\$36	\$1,254	\$1,193	\$1,126	\$1,053	\$973	\$886	\$794	\$698	\$601	\$507	\$418	\$334	\$260	\$212
\$37	\$1,289	\$1,226	\$1,157	\$1,082	\$1,000	\$911	\$816	\$718	\$618	\$521	\$430	\$343	\$268	\$218
\$38	\$1,324	\$1,259	\$1,189	\$1,112	\$1,027	\$936	\$838	\$737	\$635	\$535	\$441	\$353	\$275	\$223
\$39	\$1,359	\$1,292	\$1,220	\$1,141	\$1,054	\$960	\$860	\$757	\$651	\$549	\$453	\$362	\$282	\$229
\$40	\$1,394	\$1,326	\$1,251	\$1,170	\$1,081	\$985	\$882	\$776	\$668	\$563	\$464	\$371	\$289	\$235
Other *	\$34.84	\$33.14	\$31.28	\$29.25	\$27.02	\$24.62	\$22.06	\$19.40	\$16.70	\$14.08	\$11.61	\$9.28	\$7.23	\$5.88

* If the Post dues are not shown on the chart, compute the cost by multiplying the actual dues by the amount in the "Other" line, using the one at the bottom of your age column. **For example**, age 62 and annual dues of \$27.50 (multiply \$27.50 x \$16.70 = \$459 [rounded to the nearest dollar]). If you use this method to compute the cost, double-check your multiplication to verify the fee...this will avoid unnecessary correspondence and delay.

Consolidated Post Reports (CPR)

Post Adjutants are the key to how well The American Legion as a whole will be able to report to the American people its actual accomplishments for the past year.

Each Post is sent a CPR report form as the reporting year comes to a close. This is a three-part, snap-out form. The third copy is to be retained by the Post for its files and the first two copies go to Department headquarters.

Please be sure all reports from Posts in your District are sent to Department headquarters on or before the June 15 deadline, or sooner if your Department has set an earlier date. The CPR form covers participation in the basic programs—Americanism, Children & Youth, Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation, Economics, and National Security. But the report goes further than the major program areas, asking for information such as Post involvement in community service, legislative endeavors, public relations efforts, etc. The report also inquires whether the Post sponsors a uniformed group, or distributes a regular publication to the membership, and the number of funeral honors for deceased members.

Information from Consolidated Post Reports is frequently shared with Members of Congress. This information provides Members of Congress with a snapshot of the valuable community service provided by The American

Legion family. This report demonstrates community involvement that has been the hallmark of The American Legion's commitment and service to country.

Don't be discouraged if the Post doesn't have something to report in every blank on the report form. Very few Posts carry on every Legion program. Many outstanding American Legion Posts devote their energies and resources to just two or three programs or activities, which more than justify their existence.

Include Details in Narrative

Please urge Posts to confine answers to the allotted spaces. If they wish to go into a subject in further detail, include such information in a descriptive narrative, which may be attached to the report form. The narrative can cover in greater detail a Post's accomplishments in program areas...you can also include photos. This will enable your Department Americanism and Children & Youth Committees to consider the work of a Post in determining its possible qualification for national recognition.

By mid-August, National Headquarters expects to have a completed tabulation of all reports broken down and printed according to Departments. The statistical totals will provide the foundation for The American Legion's annual report to the Congress, required in accordance with the Legion's federal charter.

Once the Post has completed the annual report, you may be surprised at how much the Post has accomplished. In addition to becoming the basis for good local news releases, the Consolidated Report also helps in the preparation of membership promotional material. And there's always the possibility your reports will result in National recognition for one or more of your outstanding programs.

The American Legion asks your cooperation in getting reports from Posts in your District.

"Project Stay Active"

Americans are on the move and Legionnaires are no exception. The Membership Input Services Section processes approximately 30 to 32 thousand address changes per month.

National Headquarters has set up "Project Stay Active" to help local Posts maintain contact with these members who move into your area.

Utilizing the computer, National prints out a summary of the veteran's membership on a 3 x 5 card. Each card will have listed on it: both the new and old address, the Department the member belongs to, the Post number, the number of continuous years, and the date the card was printed. If the member is a Life Member, it will be noted as well.

The cards are printed in zip code order and mailed to Department Adjutants for distribution to the Post most accessible to the member. This Post is then asked to contact and welcome the member into the area. This would be an opportune time to offer assistance in establishing service and to invite the member to visit your Post.

In many cases, the Legionnaire may wish to transfer membership to a Post in the community. As may be expected, some of these Legionnaires are involved in temporary moves, some may have a Life Membership "back home," and others may have sentimental feelings toward their hometown Post. However, many of them will be receptive to an offer to transfer to your Post when asked.

"Project Stay Active" has been in operation for several years and has proved beneficial to the Post, the Legionnaires, and their families.

Departments actively participating in "Project Stay Active" are generally distributing the cards each month through the District or County Commander. These Departments always have a reserve of prospects to "Get Involved" in The American Legion.