

Department of Washington

AMVETS



Communications Manual

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Introduction

A Communications Director is responsible for managing and directing an organization's internal and external communications. Directors of communications supervise public relations, create communication strategies, and may serve as the key spokesperson and media contact for the organization.

The director of communications usually reports directly to the Commander and or Executive Director of the organization.

Communications directors are public relations specialists for organizations. They are the go-to guys for external and internal communications. As the company's strategists in the organizations branding and image, the main task is making AMVETS look great in the eyes of the people. Public perception is very important for AMVETS because any negative news about the firm will have a detrimental impact.

Since the media is the main carrier of news and developments, it is part of the job of communications directors to establish strong relationships with members of the press. This involves inviting radio, television and newspaper reporters to the AMVETS different events and granting them interviews when they so request it. They also screen the press releases that will be sent out to the various media outfits.

Communications directors understand that they have to build good rapport with the local communities. They also initiate different programs that would benefit veterans and their families that may include: (*list what we do here*—also include JROTC, ROTC and scholarships).

Communications directors spearhead these strategies with the purpose of putting the organization best foot forward. They have to see to it that AMVETS is committed social responsibility of keeping the interests not only of the organization but of the environment and the community at the forefront of its operations.

Since image and public perception is very important in operating a successful organization, communications directors work right away to quell any issue that would put the firm in a bad light. Social media makes news spread very rapidly such that if it is not addressed, it could potentially damage the organizations reputation and bring down the business.

An organization has to keep its members in the loop about the events going on in the organization. This is important to get their cooperation and give them a sense of belongingness to the organization. Thus, communications directors often maintain publications like newsletters and circulate emails to keep everyone informed. They also organize activities within the organization to maintain the cohesion and team spirit of everyone in the company.

The primary purpose of a communications manager is to effectively inform and promote an organization, and its mission. Communication is how a company distinguishes itself from other VSOs. As an advocate of an organization, a communications director must have strong communications and people skills, be an organized strategist, able to adjust to any kind of [situation] and resilient to stress, Creativity and out-of-this world writing and editing skills are other tools of the trade. You have to be able to come up with new ideas and inventive ways to promote an organization so people will pay attention and understand what the organization is all about, also emphasizing the importance of time

management. It's a very fast-pace environment; if you don't manage your time wisely, you may miss an opportunity, additionally; you should know when the most optimal time is to send out your information

You need a strong vision and desire for personal growth to rock it out in this position; it takes a lot of self-motivation to be in this role, constantly developing new ideas and keeping up with technology.

Whatever you do in your job as a communications officer—whether it's writing a news release, editing a newsletter, or dealing with a reporting—always aim to improve the organization's identity and enhance its image.

This Communications Manual will guide you through the communication maze as it applies to post and department efforts.

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You are the Link

As the Communication Director, you are an indispensable link between AMVETS and the news media in your locale. You have information about stories of local interest; stories that affect the daily lives of those in the community.

Newspaper editors like to hear from groups such as ours. They realize the value to the community but don't always have a reporter

You become, as it were, that extra reporter working to get your story to the newspaper in an accurate and timely manner. Read your local paper to see which reporter or editors deal with issues that affect veterans, or which ones handle community events. Knowing who to talk to at a newspaper (and at a radio or television station) is important in placing a story or getting coverage of an event.

Your success in this area also depends on how the information is presented. It's important to maintain a continuous relationship with the media so that they come to regard you as a trusted resource.

Once you have been selected as the Communication Director, the members of your post should be informed so that they know to report all news items to you. When considering these items, think like an editor and evaluate their worth. Don't be afraid to think that something is not newsworthy.

By submitting only newsworthy items, even infrequently, you will build a reputation as someone who knows what makes news and what doesn't. Above all; never try to exert pressure to have a story used. If it's a good story, the paper will publish it. The same holds true with radio and television coverage. If your event or activity is newsworthy, the station usually will send someone to cover it.

But first things first, just as it is important for post members to know who the Communication Director is, so too should the local media. Start off by visiting the daily and weekly newspapers in your area, as well as the radio and TV stations. Call ahead and make an appointment to see the program director at each station and the city editors at the papers.

Try to understand the mission and character of the newspaper where you want stories and opinions to appear. In your dealings with these "gatekeepers," keep in mind that their time is valuable, so it is important to be prepared. Journalists respond positively to professionalism, persistence and good ideas.

When you make your first call, have something in hand such as a fact sheet about the post or a list of current activities. Explain that you often have news items and ask where they can be sent or who to call with the information.

See if the city editor or the program director will introduce you to the people with whom you'll actually be working.

You should also inquire about any specific needs or requirements such as deadlines, photograph formats and story lengths. The paper, for example, may have a policy against taking stories over the phone. Packaging your information to meet these requirements not only makes story placement easier but also enhances media relationships.

Structure your program after considering:

- Your post's long and short-range goals and objectives
- What people or groups need to know about each objective for it to be achieved
- How you are not communicating with each group
- What else can be done to reach them
- How to gauge when each objective is reached
- Your budget

What Makes News?

There are many definitions of what constitutes news. Perhaps the most accurate news is what the media says it is. That being the case, work with editors to determine what story ideas are best suited to their particular medium. Here are some ideas you might suggest:

- Election of post officers
- Committee appointments
- Social or charitable events
- Induction of new members
- Special meetings
- Auxiliary events
- Civic programs
- Involvement with local issues
- AMVETS department policy

Copies of all statements issued by the department commander are distributed to post levels and should be available on request. It is a good practice to provide the media with copies of these statements as background information. You can also quote from these statements or have the post commander announce to the media that he supports the policy of State of Washington commander.

“Letters to the Editor” are some of the most popular features in any publication. Use this forum to state a position on an important issue or to correct mistakes in previous stories. A newspaper constitutes a historical record, so getting the facts straight is important—any information that is incorrect makes you incredible in their eyes. Letters can also be used to express post reaction to local news events (even those that may not have recently appeared in the paper). Statements should be kept **short** and be signed in the name of the department commander only.

Other things to keep in mind when you release stories or statements:

- Check first with the department commander
- Comment only on nonpolitical issues or issues on which AMVETS has issued an official statement
- Explain the post's position without preaching
- Consider the community good
- Speak out only when necessary

Preparing Releases

You've acquainted yourself with the local media representatives. Now it's time to release a story. They are always looking for good-news stories. News stories should be written crisply and, where possible, answer the following questions:

- *What?* The event that happened
- *Where?* Where it happened
- *When?* The date and time of day
- *Who?* Who is involved, with full name, current address, rank or title
- *Why?* The reasons behind the event
- *How?* The details of the event

Your release of information may be written or phoned in, depending on the requirements of your outlet, but a written release is generally preferred. Here are some guidelines on preparation (see attached example):

- Type your release on standard 8 ½ x 11 inch paper on one side only
- In the top right corner of the release, list yourself (or the commander) as the contact as well as the address and phone number where you or he can be reached by the media should they have questions
- In the top left corner, indicate the date on which you want the information published or broadcast, e.g., *For Immediate Release* or *For Release on Tuesday,, March 24, 2020*
- Directly below this line and center on the page, type the story's headline in all caps—Keep it short, e.g., AMVETS ELECTS NEW POST COMMANDER
- Begin your release with a "dateline," which identifies where the story originates and when., e.g., TACOMA, WA, March 24, 2020—AMVETS Post 1
- In the first few paragraphs, incorporate as many of the basic facts. i.e., who, what, where, etc.
- Follow Associated Press writing style (in Word, under References and then Citations & Bibliography, have the Style set at APP).
- Spell out abbreviations the first time they appear.
- At the end of the release, identify AMVETS (American Veterans) is one of the nation's largest and most-inclusive congressionally chartered veterans' service organization.
- Try to keep the story to one page—if it runs more than one page, type more at the bottom of the page, except the last, which is designated with a ###
- **Never ask an editor to send you clippings of the story after it appears in the paper—buy the newspaper!**
- For radio and television stories, make the sentences short—leave out all obscure words and expressions
- Send your release to all news media at the same time
- **Never send a newspaper clipping to a station and ask it to do a news story**
- Finally, don't get discouraged if your release isn't picked up—space in a newspaper is at a premium and sometimes other news will take precedence

Copies of releases and sent to posts in the interest of keeping each department up-to-date and transparent on news developments and policy.

Special Events

There are always special events you can take advantage of to garner publicity for your post or department. For instance, in addition to sending out a story on the election of a new officer, you might phone the newspapers, radio and TV stations to see if they would want to interview him or her. Other events to consider include:

- Conducting a mass swearing-in of new members
- Inviting a community group to an open meeting, where a special program has been arranged
- Holding public ceremonies to present honors and awards
- Arranging for your commander to address civic groups
- Sponsoring an event such as a charity golf tournament, BBQ, parade, etc.

You also may want to establish a “speakers bureau” and offer the local community the expertise that’s available in your post. Notices in local media or chamber of commerce publications can help publicize your bureau.

Holding a news conference (where the media is called together to hear an important announcement or statement) demands as much thought as putting together a special event. Some of the best ideas for securing mediate coverage are:

- Give media members plenty of advance notice—a three-day notice is generally sufficient
- Send news releases/media advisory to news directors as well as public service directors
- Schedule your conference or event between 9AM and 2PM—times when most media staff are available
- Phone assignment editors the day prior to the conference/event with a “friendly reminder”
- Phone radio and television stations the morning of the event to verify that you are on their schedules
- Hold news conferences onsite or at a location that’s relevant
- Be conscious of visuals during news conference; arrange to have your logo in the background
- Thank the media periodically for a job well done

If there is any doubt about whether the information you want to disseminate is newsworthy enough, don’t hold a full-blown news conference. It may be better instead to have a spokesperson “available” to talk on the subject or even to send out a news release.

When planning photo coverage for a future event, give the paper all the pertinent facts about the event, including the time the picture is to be taken. A ceremony might start at 7PM for example, but the newsworthy event might not occur until 9PM. Be sure to also give the name of the person the photographer can contact.

The photographer may request additional information, for example, the kind of lighting that’s available (fluorescent or incandescent), or the location (inside or out).

When the photographer arrives, be ready to assist hi in identifying the people in the photos. Be sure to give the photographer ample room to work and cooperate with him in staging photos as quickly as possible. Most photographers have tight schedules to keep. Never expect the photographer to furnish copies of his pictures for your use. Generally speaking, most newspapers can make copies available for purchase.

Frequently, the newspaper will not have a photographer available for your event. In any case, you should take your own pictures of the vent or arrange for a post member to take them. When you get read to submit the photos to the newspaper, keep in mind these guidelines:

- Never send poorly exposed or out-of-focus photos.
- Submit hi-resolution jpg files (preferred delivery method) or 8x10 inch black and white gloss or color photos—find out your outlet’s requirements.
- Always include a caption/cut line with each photo. Include the complete names and titles of those appearing in the picture from left to right, and identify what is occurring.
- **Never give the same photo to competing newspapers.**
- News photos for television should be the matte-finish (non-glossy) variety l a horizontal format. Each photograph should carry a complete caption.

AMVETS National Headquarters prefers digital submissions, but PLEASE send whatever you can.

Deadlines for National are:

- November 15th for winter issue
- February 15th for spring issue
- May 15th for summer issue
- August 15th for fall issue

National Headquarters reserve the rights to edit or condense all articles. Submission of an article does not guarantee its publication.

The Big Campaign

Promotion is a fine art. Those who are successful at it generally got that way by paying attention to the 10 essential areas. Taken together, these areas form the basic framework on which to build a solid campaign. The “product” being promoted can be anything from a politician running for office to an organization touting the benefits of membership. In every instance, the considerations are the same. You need a clear-cut objective, thorough research, the cooperation of other groups and though leaders, knowledge of the publics involved, timing, pacing, a slogan, visibility devices and, perhaps most important of all, evaluation. Let’s look at these areas:

- *Objective.* This is the starting point for any campaign, it must be specific, simply stated and agreed to by all concerned. The statement can be as simple as We want to increase the size of our post by 42 members before the end of the quarter. Once everyone is in agreement with the objective, write it down and give everyone a copy.

- *Research.* After deciding on your objective, you need to do a little bit of research. Take the goal of recruiting new members. Obviously, not every veteran in your city or town will be interested in becoming a member of AMVETS. But there are those who will. Who are they? Where do you find them? What do they do? Those are all questions to be answered before embarking on anything else. And that's where research comes in. A survey—one that profiles a typical AMVETS member—can give you something to go when you start asking your appeals. Questionnaires sent to existing members and those involved in recruitment is one method.
- *Publics.* A common assumption that people fall into one all-encompassing category called the general public. Not, so, at least when you examine what the general public really is. For one thing it isn't just one public but many. In fact, a person can be a member of several publics—all at the same time. A veteran, for example, can be a parent, a spouse, a student, and so on. What you have to do is zero in on aspects of AMVETS that are likely to appeal to him or her.
- *Opinion Molders.* Say you're going after student-veterans in the 25-35 age group. The question here is who do those in this particular category listen to or look up to. Then you enlist these people in your campaign
- *Cooperation.* Help is whenever you can find it. And in a promotion campaign, it pays to solicit cooperation from a number of sources. Places to start might be your service foundation and auxiliary, the commanders of local military bases, and other civic groups in your area.
- *Visibility Devices.* These are the tools of the campaign—what you use to put in “on the map.” They range from radio and television public service announcements to newspaper advertising and news releases. Other means to establish visibility are speeches by your officers, state tours by the department or national command and local activities in the community, i.e., antique auctions, bowling tournaments, etc. Plan on using as many of these things as possible, but stagger them for maximum impact.
- *Timing.* Any promotion must have a definite beginning and a definite end (see *Objective*).
- *Pacing.* To maintain visibility, the campaign must “ebb and flow.” Draw up a planning calendar to reflect when certain promotion activities are to take place. You may, for example, want to send out your radio spots to coincide with the National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans in February. Again, the idea is not to expend all of your resources in any one month but rather to make effective use of them throughout the campaign.
- *Slogan.* Every campaign must have one, and it must be some that captures the essence of what the campaign is all about. The slogan should be short and something that people can easily remember.
- *Evaluation.* This is the most important—and difficult—element of the campaign. You want to know whether you reached anyone. Did you change attitudes about veterans? Did you improve the identity of AMVETS and what it does? Did you gain any new members? Whatever the objective of your campaign is, you should always try to determine how close you came to achieving it.

Conventions & Meetings

When your department or post begins its planning for any sizable function, particularly one where the media is likely to attend, there are some public relation type of things worth considering.

To begin with, if your meeting includes a meal, and you've invited media to it, you should reserve a table for them and have it marked as such. It's also a good idea to have members of your post or department seated there to serve as hosts and to “hold” the table for those press you anticipate attending.

Where meal tickets are involved, it pays to have a supply on hand for reporters who will be eating as well as for unexpected arrivals. If you're working out of a hotel, let people know in advance what room to go to or who to see for their tickets. Failure to do this can prove embarrassing, especially where you have people seated at a table with no tickets when the waiter or waitress comes around to collect them before the meal is served. Press kits are becoming a thing of the past. However, you may still wish to include a standing kind of press kit for important conferences and meetings. The kit itself should be as functional as possible.

Inexpensive two-pocket portfolios, which can be obtained from an office supply store, are your best bet. The pockets can hold any number of items related to the event and to your post or department: new releases, AMVETS fact sheet, photographs (5x7 inch black and whites) and biographies of your "newsmakers," a copy of the meeting program, even the latest issue of your newsletter.

Finally, to the front of the portfolio, affix a plain white address label on which is typed the words Press Kit, the name of your organization, the function and the date. You also should consider setting up a pressroom to serve as both the resource center for the media and a work area. Such an area is an asset to any convention or similar size meeting. Such an area can take the form of an actual room, or it can be conveniently located in a hotel lobby. In either instance, the pressroom should serve as a place where reporters and film crews covering your meeting can get the information they need and act on it.

Regardless of what you opt for, the important thing is to have the pressroom staffed at all times. If you are not able to be on hand, have someone there who's familiar enough with the meeting agenda to answer questions.

Space requirements will vary with the size of the meeting. So it's a good idea to see the area or room beforehand. Check that a phone is nearby, that there are electrical outlets, and that you can get sufficient tables and chairs from the hotel.

Be prepared to bring at least one computer from your office, together with some basic office supplies. Include name tags and a sign-in book/sheet to help you keep track of reports in attendance.

Among the handouts to have available are press kits, press releases generated at the meeting, copies of speeches and any materials related to local projects or programs.

Arrange these items neatly on covered tables that are easily accessible. So that people recognize this as your press operation for the meeting, display a sign to that effect (on an easel if possible) in the immediate area or outside the room. It also pays to have a chalk board close by to post messages and record story assignments. In the rush of things, it is all too easy to forget what interviews have been scheduled and when.

If your meeting budget allows you to serve hot coffee in the morning and a selection of soft drinks in the afternoon, they're amenities well worth the expense. But the most organized, best equipped pressroom in the world is not substitute for responsiveness. Helping that reporter to get his or her story is what it's all about.

The Commander's Visit

Official visits of the AMVETS national, department and post commanders should be coordinated to run smoothly. Sometimes, though, even the best laid plans can come unraveled, but the key is still one of adherence to the schedule—with flexibility.

When the commander arrives in a city or visits a post, arrangements should be made to have photographs taken of the arrival. This gives him or her as well as the welcoming delegation an opportunity to appear in pictures that have meaning.

Meetings with local government officials should be set up well in advance. In large metropolitan areas, photographic coverage sometimes will be provided by the city's public affairs department. In smaller towns, the AMETS state department or local post, whoever is playing host, should have either someone from staff or a commercial photographer take the pictures at these sessions.

Advance new releases may be sent from the Communications Department to all media in locales scheduled for visits. The releases should contain information on the places to be visited, the dates and times of each visit and the commander's purpose in visiting. If you have not received a copy of a press release for a commander's visit, do not hesitate to contact the Communications Department.

As far as appearances on local talk shows go, advance planning again is the key. Contact people you know at the radio and television stations to get the commander on the air, but do it prior to his visit. In such cases, the commander should be briefed on the types of questions he may be asked or the areas planned for discussion. Remember: the best surprise is no surprise.

That's particularly true when it comes to attire. Post officials should always alert the commander's office in advance of his visit on what kind of attire he will be required to bring to wear to different functions.

Looking Good in Print (and Online)

Most AMVETS posts and departments produce printed materials, ranging from newsletters to brochures to booklets, all dispensing information with varying degrees of effectiveness. AMVETS is also expanding online outreach with Facebook pages and websites. You might argue that the name of the game is to get the "word" out, but that there is no time to fool around with graphics.

A newsletter is a newsletter. But why are some better looking than others? Or, why do people pick up one publication to read and not another. Obviously, content has a lot to do with it. But so does packaging. What follows are some ways that you can package or dress up your publication so that they stand a better chance of being read—and do a better job of selling AMVETS.

You don't have to be a graphics expert to do this. Very often, the whole process of layout and design is nothing more than being aware of what's available and how to use it. Knowing what constitutes good and bad visual communication can help you recognize the difference in your own publications—and do something about it.

Let's begin with size. Here we concentrate on the type of publication a post might pass out in a shopping center or mail to a prospective member. The most practical sizes are 4x9 inches and 5 ½ x 8 ½ inches.

The 4x9 will fit into the standard number 10 business envelope, while the 5 ½ x 8 ½ can go in a 6x9 inches envelope.

This is an important consideration, particularly if you're going to be mailing out large quantities of the piece. In addition to keeping your postage costs down, these standard sizes can also save you money on paper because less waste is involved in trimming the publication to size.

Nothing in publications work generates more discussion than the use or misuse of "white space." White space can cause problems between designers and clients. Design theory promotes the use of white space for elegance and ensuring a quality user experience. Sadly, many people consider white space wasted space. They think it could be used to have more information or other visual elements.

White space is a great tool to balance design elements and better organize content to improve the visual communication experience. It is important to hold the readers' attention—to much on a page is busy and information gets lost.

Font and color are also important. Limit the color in the fonts, along with underlines, italics and bold or you could lose the readers' attention—again, the information gets lost. Only use bold and italic with important information you might want to stand out. Try to limit underlines—as it's used on the computer to indicate a link.

Font size and style—Font size should be 10, 11 or 12 points—white space is okay! Avoid using any font larger than 12 points in letters or communications. Use sans serif fonts like Calibri and Arial (there are others, I only listed a couple). Serif fonts like Times Roman have decorative lines and tails which make it hard for a reader to read the information. Sans Serif fonts are more modern and easier to read.

Readability is important. Try to keep the reading level at 6th grade. Use simple words and not fancy words—this helps keep the attention of the reader to focus on the content and absorb the information.

AMVETS Logo

Our AMVETS logo is our brand. Our logo shapes who we are and identifies us from other organizations. The National AMVETS website has policies in place to ensure the integrity and recognition of our logo. The main things to know is not to distort the logo, size it according to the shape. Do not add anything around it—let it stand on its own. For more information to the [National AMVETS website](http://amvets.org/download-logos) see (amvets.org/download-logos) for further information.

Copyright

Assume information, graphics and/or pictures that are on the web are copyrighted. Just because you find something on the web does not mean that is copyright free. Even in Wikipedia, pictures and information might be copyrighted. You can contact the person for a particular website and ask if you can use the information or picture. Let them know what you are using it for—most times, they will allow you permission. Keep the permissions in a place where you can pull it out if you have to.

There are some free sights on the web—just make sure you know that they are free to use. It could cost us money if we are infringing on something that is copyrighted—so be careful!