

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Media Guide



In Service to America

The VVA Media Guide was produced by the Vietnam Veterans of America Communications Department. We invite you to submit your suggested edits/updates to mporter@vva.org

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Introduction

The Importance of Press Relations

Whether trying to increase attendance at an event or publicize something worthwhile that a Vietnam Veterans of America chapter, state council, or region is doing, press relations are invaluable to getting the word out.

This guide is a basic overview of how to get your information into the print, broadcast, and electronic media. Section 1 of this guide defines “newsworthy”—if it isn't news, why are you bothering the news media? Section 2 tells you how to lay the groundwork for getting media coverage through conducting basic press relations, and Section 3 is a manual on writing news releases.

Section 4 describes the follow-up process—the difference between sending out unused news releases and getting your story used. Section 5 presents the flip side of press relations—handling calls *from* the media and requests for interviews. Section 6 tells you how to prepare and submit photographs to make your story more appealing.

Public service announcements are the focus of Section 7, and Section 8 covers writing, editing, and printing chapter newsletters. Section 9 is a discussion of using electronic media—web sites, blogs, social media, and such. Section 10 covers the tricky topic of holding a press conference.

The more recognizable VVA and its chapters are to the media and public, the easier it is to get our information into the media.

Section 1

Defining "Newsworthy"

The key to getting publicity is to think like an editor or program director. What is your story's hook? What is interesting about your story to those outside your chapter or state council? How can you take something you consider to be important and convince an editor that it is newsworthy?

The editor's reaction to your news will depend on how he or she perceives your news will impact an audience. If your news item tugs at the heartstrings, that's good. If it benefits the audience in some way, or causes the audience to want to participate or act, that's very good. And if your news item applies to a current event, that's great. Information sent to the editor or reporter should be interesting, significant, and timely.

Know your market. Select the newspapers or stations that fit the audience you want to reach—adults, seniors, veterans, non-veterans, etc. Consider the region that the newspaper or station serves, and the particular interest, focus, and format of that media outlet. At times, contacting a smaller, local station may be more appropriate than contacting one of the larger national networks.

Don't send out releases on everything happening in your chapter or state council. This "shotgun" approach, hoping that the quantity of releases will ensure at least one being used, puts some editors to sleep and irritates others. The problem with this method is that when your organization is doing something incredibly worthwhile, the editor or program director may miss it, because experience tells them you've got nothing serious to offer.

Section 2

Laying the Groundwork

Press relations involves a process. First, you must lay the groundwork. With any luck, you're taking over the job of press person from somebody willing to share his or her contacts and make some introductions for you.

If not, select the newspaper and broadcast editors and reporters whom you'd like to have cover your news, call them, and ask if you can drop by for a short, introductory visit.

Take along a copy of *The VVA Veteran* and your state or chapter newsletters, your business card, and any additional information you feel will help to explain who you are and what your VVA chapter or state council do. The object is to familiarize the press so when you approach them with a news story, they are up to speed on Vietnam Veterans of America.

If you're selective in what you send, and you have determined its applicability to a media outlet's audience, your organization will earn a reputation as a source of newsworthy information. Any editor or program director will then give your next press release an extra moment or two of consideration.

Increase the odds of getting publicity by "piggybacking" on current issues being pushed by the media. When you view breaking news on a topic your chapter or state council is involved with, make some calls, especially to the outlet that's already covering it.

If the morning paper is doing a series on homelessness in general, let them know about your current or planned efforts for

homeless veterans, and feed them some material from the VVA National Office on the big picture.

If there's a story on VA appropriations, offer some input on services at the nearest VA facility and possible effects of changes in funding. Be creative.

Once you've established that your chapter or state council is a good resource for the local veterans' slant on news stories, reporters may start contacting you when they're putting these stories together. Sometimes they'll think of stories focusing on your activities, and sometimes they may accept story ideas you originate. Section 5 explores how to handle press calls and interviews.

CAUTIONARY NOTES—the reporter is not your friend. Neither is the reporter your enemy. Reporters have a job to do. They must turn information into interesting stories. Some press relations people try too hard to impress reporters with all they know.

Don't confide personal details or the "real poop" on problems in your chapter or state council unless you want them quoted in print or used as a voice-over on the evening news.

Likewise, "off the record" is a slippery beast at best. What you don't say can't be quoted. Speaking for attribution about a topic opens the door for what you say off the record. If you're determined to say something "for background," establish that you won't be quoted before you say it, and then be judicious.

Never, *never* try closing the barn door by murmuring, "That was off the record," *after* you blurted out something you regret.

Section 3

News Releases

The news release is the most basic way of getting the word out on an event you are trying to publicize. There are three requirements when preparing and sending out a news release: It must follow a standard format; it must be newsworthy; and it must reach the right person at the right time.

Structure

The structure of a release is simple because it is written in "inverted pyramid" style. The release should be written in paragraphs of descending order of importance. Editors who don't find something of interest in the first few lines usually won't read on.

The lead paragraph (called "the lead") is the most important part of the news release. In one or two paragraphs, it must arouse the interest of the editor. It must carry the basic message. If the lead is well written, it will encourage the hasty reader to read on. If the important elements appear at the beginning, the story will remain coherent if one or more later paragraphs are deleted

Six basic questions must be answered in the first two paragraphs: *Who? What? When? Where? Why?* and *How?* The questions *Why?* and *How?* should be in the second paragraph. For example:

First paragraph.

Who: Your organization.

What: A homeless stand down.

When: The date of the event.

Where: The location of the event.

Second paragraph.

How: Giving haircuts, offering counseling, and providing meals.

Why: To help those who served their country.

This structure makes the news release a simple and effective way of communicating the information you want publicized.

News writing is simple and concise. It is meant to be read quickly. Sentences and paragraphs should be short. Identify acronyms when using them for the first time. For example, VVA should be spelled out as Vietnam Veterans of America at its first reference. This eliminates confusion for the editor. Remember, while you may be the expert on your topic, editors are not. They rely on the information you give them.

Format

Use the accepted standard method of formatting your release to ensure its readability. The release should be on 8½ x 11-inch paper, with the copy single-spaced and printed on one side of the paper only.

Type the release accurately. Misspellings and typos reflect poorly on the organization and create a negative impression of the release.

The margins should be wide, 1½ inches on each side, to allow editors to make corrections or insertions. Always leave about two inches of space below the last line. To show where the release ends, center the symbols, "###," below the text.

A news release should be limited to one page. If it runs for more than one page, insert the word "more" at the bottom center of each page until the last one. Paper copies of releases with multiple pages should be stapled.

The heading should include the name and address of the organization and the daytime and evening phone numbers of the person to contact for additional information.

The release should be dated to let the editor know that the information is current. Include the date you would like the information to be released.

The most typical is "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," which lets the editor know he or she can release the information any time after receiving it. These words should appear two spaces above the release's headline.

If you are timing your release for a specific event, you can designate the date of the event as the time when the information is to be used. For example, "FOR RELEASE: Friday, January 18."

Under the release date should appear an all-caps headline that summarizes the news release. It should be short, concise, and written in active, present tense. Here are a couple of examples:

**VIETNAM VETERANS RESPOND TO PRESIDENT'S
ANNOUNCEMENT**

or

GOLF TOURNEY BENEFITS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

In the first headline, notice how it didn't say, "RESPONDED," or "HAS RESPONDED." Avoid the past tense; it gives the impression that the news item isn't timely.

See an example of a news release on the next page.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Release

June 15, 2012

No. 12-13

Contact:
Mokie Porter
301-585-4000, Ext. 146

**Vietnam Veterans of America To Hold National Leadership Conference
August 7-11 in Irving, Texas**

(Washington, D.C.) – Vietnam Veterans of America will hold its Biennial National Leadership Conference in Irving, Texas, August 7-11, 2012. Hundreds of Vietnam veteran leaders will come together at the Omni Hotel to take part in seminars, meetings, and other activities, including the Saturday Awards Banquet. The Opening Ceremonies will be held Wednesday morning, August 8. Steve Kroft, the renowned “Sixty Minutes” television correspondent who served as an Army journalist in the Vietnam War, will deliver the Keynote Speech.

VVA’s supporting organization, the Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America (AVVA) is, for the first time, co-sponsoring the conference. “We’re very pleased that AVVA and VVA are working together on this always stimulating event,” said VVA President John Rowan. “All members of both organizations are now able to take part in all of the Leadership Conference activities, something that will greatly benefit all of us.”

The biennial Leadership Conference brings together VVA and AVVA leaders from across the country. They will take part in three-and-a-half days of activities, including a wide selection of seminars. The subjects range from the elements of leadership--parliamentary procedures, the duties of the officers and board of directors, the management of chapters and state councils, and media outreach--to updates on veterans healthcare, successful membership recruitment and retention tools, and effective grassroots advocacy.

Section 4

Follow-up

After writing the perfect release with the perfect headline, which includes all of the pertinent information in the heading, you are now ready to send it to the news media.

The media thrive on late-breaking information. Editors want to know about events when they happen, not a week later. If it is not possible to distribute the information immediately, make sure there are no references to specific dates in the release. The announcement of a new chapter president, for example, would not say that he was elected two weeks ago. It would say a new chapter president was elected recently.

Pre-event releases should be sent to editors and reporters at least four or five days ahead of time. If a major event is planned, editors appreciate as much advance information as possible so that they can plan their "menu" or "budget."

As for distributing your news release, start with the assumption that it should be e-mailed to every contact you want to receive it. There's no postal charge, so feel free to hit both the editor and a friendly reporter at the same outlet. Include your release in the text of the e-mail and also attach it as a separate document.

After sending the release to a media outlet, make a follow-up call to ensure that it wasn't overlooked. Bear in mind that editors and program directors are busy. When you call, be brief and to the point. Identify yourself, your organization, and the nature of the story you sent. Ask if they have any questions, and answer them if they do. If they are interested, conversation will take place naturally, but if they aren't, it doesn't hurt to ask about the kind

of information that might interest them. All this is easier if you've invested some time in building press relations. (See Section 2.)

As a general guide, get your releases to the newsroom by noon. Morning papers go to press in the evening. This late closing enables the paper to cover news up to late afternoon, but you can't expect consideration of your releases if they come in late.

Ideal days for the distribution of news releases are Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Avoid sending out your releases on Friday.

Weekly papers should receive your news a week before publication date. Only occasionally will a hot piece of news be accepted up to the day before publication.

Small newspapers may run a release as written; bigger ones generally will not. Television and radio have very little direct use for press releases. All of the media outlets may use part of what you sent, and that's fine.

Ideally, an editor will send a reporter or a broadcast crew to take over your story. They will be on a tight deadline, so you'll need to be responsive. Section 5 describes the handling of press calls and interviews.

Section 5

Press Calls and Interviews

While much of your work in media relations consists of going after the press and getting its attention, the payoff comes when they start calling you. Press calls and interviews are usually a follow-up to your story suggestion or news release.

Requests for information could be a result of something larger that the media is covering, from Agent Orange issues to the local Memorial Day parade.

When members of the media call, they are on a tight deadline and will expect you to provide them with accurate information in a short amount of time.

Press Calls

Calls from the press provide an opportunity to make your organization look good and encourage the media to come to you again when they need information. Being recognized as an "expert" on the issues raises the profile of your chapter or state council and makes your job as a press relations representative much easier. The media will recognize subsequent news releases and PSAs, giving them more consideration based on their source.

If a member of the media calls, and you don't know the answer to his or her question, say politely that you're not sure of the answer, but you'll find out, and get back to him/her as soon as possible. They'll understand—they don't expect you to know everything.

In addition to timeliness, another major factor in responding to the media is accuracy. You must be accurate in your responses.

Once your response is in print or on the air, it can never be taken back. Inaccuracies hurt the credibility of your organization and make the media outlet look bad for publishing erroneous information. This doesn't create good will with the people you depend on to get the word out on your organization.

When responding, stay upbeat. It doesn't do you or your organization any good to argue with reporters. Most likely they will only publish your combative words in a way that will make you look bad. If you stay upbeat and positive, they can only print your positive responses. Don't give them any reason to include anything negative about your organization. Reporters want news; they aren't usually interested in either flattering or damaging you.

Interviews

An interview is a bit more complicated than a simple media call. Preparation is key. You will be more confident if you know what to expect. For an interview, you must do your homework. Know what message you want to get across so you can stay on topic during the interview. Many people learn the hard way that they should have done more to prepare themselves to present their point of view to the public through the media. It is difficult enough to remember everything about your organization when you aren't under pressure. It is even more difficult during a stressful situation like an interview. A good reporter will do his or her homework before interviewing you.

Remember that you are in control if approached for an interview. You can determine the time, location, and the length of the interview. You can request in advance the topics to be covered; set your own pace for answering questions; and challenge questionable facts and assumptions

Listen carefully to each question. Don't ever be afraid to pause

and take a moment to carefully consider your answer. Always speak directly and to the point. Be clear and concise. Don't use too many abbreviations, acronyms, or jargon. Always maintain a polite but professional tone.

Never, ever endorse anything or anyone while speaking for VVA, and never be afraid to say these exact words: "I'm going to have to get back to you on that" OR "I'm going to have to do a little research on that and get back to you" Always remember that "Off the Record" does NOT exist; Anything can be edited to look like anything. Never say anything you don't want to hear on the air or read in print.

Questions that are off the subject may be a signal that the interviewer doesn't understand the topic. You may want to offer a quick overview.

You can plan for interviews, prepare for them, and even practice to counter the reporter's advantage. Anticipate important questions. Have answers ready for questions you have anticipated, including, if possible, memorable quotes or phrases that present your answers in an interesting way.

If a question makes you angry, count to ten before answering. Avoid an argument with a reporter. Your argumentativeness, not his or hers, may show up in print or on the air. Also resist any effort by the reporter to put words in your mouth. If you get a question you don't want to answer, you can say you'd rather not comment on that, but it can be more effective to respond by taking the topic in a direction you want to discuss. Answer the question you wish you'd been asked.

Your job during an interview is to give information to a reporter. More than likely, it will be on a subject you want the journalist to write about or to broadcast. The interviewer may have the

advantage of experience and may conduct as many interviews in one week as you have given in your lifetime. Your advantage is knowledge. Very seldom will you be interviewed by a reporter who knows anywhere near as much about your subject as you do.

What to Wear for the Camera?

A dark or evenly toned blue usually works best. If you will be shooting in a studio and are worried about blending into the background, ask in advance what colors or shades would be ideal. Wear your VVA logo in a tasteful manner. Avoid hats and clothing with patterns and bright colors such as red, green, and yellow. Avoid wearing white.

Section 6

Photographs

Following some basic rules for news photography increases the chance of your photographs being published.

Look at the composition of your photo. Is it an interesting image? Does it capture the emotions of the event, the place, and the people involved?

Take photographs of people involved in an activity. Generally, posed photographs of large groups don't reproduce very well. The faces tend to be too small to be recognizable, and they are boring.

Be aware of what's in the background of your image. If it's not what you want in your photograph, take the photo from another angle or reposition your subjects.

No matter what kind of camera you use, backlit situations will cast shadows over the front of your subject, taking away any detail.

When using a flash, don't aim it directly at your subjects. You can avoid "red eyes" in your subjects when using the flash by adjusting the camera angle, bouncing the flash off of another surface, or by having your subjects avoid looking directly into the camera.

Be wary when using the flash when shooting photographs that include mirrors and shiny surfaces, as they will reflect the glare of the flash. Be aware of any light reflected off of eyeglasses, and reposition yourself or your subjects to avoid glare.

Whether you send your press releases by e-mail, the postal system, or you hand-deliver them, your photos should go at the same time. For a news release issued ahead of an event, you may want shots of members planning or working on something.

We're in the digital age, which can give you good (or even great) pictures almost instantly. Images should be 1,500 pixels wide, taken on a 4.1 megapixel or better camera, using the highest quality JPEG setting (fine).

Most publications will accept only JPEG or TIFF formats. Attaching a photo (or especially more than one photo) to the e-mail you use for sending out your press release presents both the problem of the file being too large and the risk of the photo file being corrupted. It is safer to download the images to a CD, Jaz, or Zip disk. Include a hard-copy printout.

If you use a film camera, you'll probably want to scan your photos and load them onto a computer disk. For 35-mm cameras, ISO 200 is a good film for outside shots. ISO 400 is a good choice for both general and low-light situations. Submit prints on photographic paper that is 4 x 6 inches or larger. Do not submit photocopies, ink jet, or laser prints.

Obtain written permission from all recognizable people in your photographs. Take into consideration any confidentiality regulations and release forms an organization might require when you take photographs.

After taking the photographs and reviewing them, pick a very small number of the best shots. Resist the urge to improve them with programs such as Photoshop. Editors don't want doctored pictures. Provide the photographer's name, the date the photograph was taken, and a brief description, which should identify the people in each photo.

Section 7

Public Service Announcements

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defines the public service announcement (PSA) as "an unpaid announcement that promotes the programs of government or voluntary agencies or that serves the public interest." Though a cumbersome definition, it communicates two important things: It's free, and VVA is eligible.

Although regulations impacting public service announcements have been eased by the FCC in recent years, the majority of radio and television stations still provide free broadcast time.

There are a couple of factors to consider when trying to get your PSA aired on a broadcast outlet. First, it must be timely and of high technical quality to stand a chance of being used.

Second, since PSAs are free, they are rarely used during periods of peak listening, because the station can run revenue-producing advertisements at these times. So, a PSA on the need for veterans to vote may only be heard at 5:00 a.m. or late Sunday night, when there is a smaller audience and, subsequently, fewer ads.

There are several formats you can use when producing a PSA. If you are putting together television and radio announcements, you have from 10 to 60 seconds to deliver your message.

Television stations accept pre-recorded 15-, 30-, or 60-second announcements; you can contact the station's public affairs department to find out what length and format they require.

Some stations will allow you to tape your message in their

studios. Another option is a "live copy" 10- to 15-second announcement read live on the air by a news anchor, disc jockey, or other designated person.

This live copy" announcement should be typed on your letterhead, with a contact person, phone number where he or she can be reached, the length of copy (10-second, 30-second, etc.), the date, and how long you would like it run.

You can indicate how long you would like it run by typing, "Air: (now through end date)." If you are mailing your announcement to several radio and television stations, you can type both a 10- and a 30-second PSA on the same page.

PSAs should be written in conversational style with active verbs. Mention the name of your chapter or state council. Double-space your copy. If you're sending a pre-recorded message, the disc is normally not returned, but you can send the station a self-addressed, stamped envelope and a request to have it mailed back. Allow for at least 6 to 10 weeks lead time when submitting your PSA.

Here are a few tips to remember as you compose the copy for your PSA:

Get your audience's attention immediately with a "grabber."

Promise a benefit, whether tangible or emotional, to show how the listener will be affected.

Give reasons why the listener should do what you want.

Tell the listener where to go, what to do, and when to do it by saying "write in," "call in," or simply "consider" the information. If you want to send them to your web site, include the web address.

In writing the copy, you must adhere to word-count limitations. A general guideline is that a 10-second spot will have approximately 20 words; a 20-second spot needs 50 words; and a 30-second spot takes 75.

It is important to include a cover letter with your PSA if this is the first time you're approaching the station for public service time. A cover letter is still a good idea for subsequent times. Always use your letterhead for the cover letter. Include the date, your name, and your job title.

The cover letter should get to the point by stating what you have in the first paragraph. Are you starting a new program or a new project? State how many people in your area will be affected.

In the second paragraph, ask for help in getting the word out. The closing paragraph should reinforce the importance of getting the word out about your project or program. If you have additional background information or brochures, state that you have attached them.

Also state that you will follow up the cover letter with a phone call in a few days, and then don't forget to call them.

The most important factor in successfully placing a PSA is the need for quality. The biggest grievance public service directors have with the efforts of nonprofit organizations is inconsistency in quality. The announcement must compete not only with other public service spots in its content and clarity, but also with commercial ads. It must be good enough to fit between two commercial advertisements.

If you do successfully place your PSA, it is a good idea to recognize the outlet that took your message and gave it the time

or space needed to reach the public. There are many highly visible plaques and certificates from nonprofits throughout the hallways of these outlets recognizing their community efforts. Sending a certificate or plaque has helped make the names of many nonprofit organizations household names.

See below for an example of a PSA

Contact: Joe Veteran
Phone: 675-555-9333
Length: 30 seconds

September 15, 2012
Air: Now through October 17

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

The Coppertown Chapter of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is holding its annual Help Homeless Vets Rummage Sale Saturday, October 25th. You won't want to miss the bargains on clothing, books, pottery, and music CDs.

Proceeds go to winterizing homeless veterans, and it's held at the Police Academy, at Mason and Carbuncle Streets in Coppertown, 9 A.M. to six P.M. Remember, VVA's Help Homeless Vets Rummage Sale ... Saturday, October 25th at the Police Academy.

Section 8

Chapter Newsletters

Editing a chapter newsletter is a serious responsibility, because clear and timely communication is essential to an organization's purpose and survival. The newsletter is the communication tool of the chapter, serving as a line of communication between chapter leaders and their members. The editor doesn't work independently, but is guided by the members and leaders.

The editor's basic task is to publish an interesting newsletter, usually with little help. More than that, a good editor will be a main factor in establishing and maintaining communication between chapter leaders and members. Publishing a newsletter requires a lot of time on a computer, but even more important is the time spent away from the desk—asking questions, listening to what people say, testing ideas, thinking about the people at both ends of the communication process. In deciding what to publish, the editor must know what will interest the readers, what they should know, and how much to give them.

Chapter newsletters may have items such as problems confronting the chapter, accomplishments of the chapter, governmental trends (local or national), membership growth, news about members, reports on meetings, general news affecting veterans, suggestions that will help members, and appeals for support of chapter activities.

To get news, the editor must become a reporter—this means finding out what's going on—watching, asking questions, and asking people to help. Another source of news is the outside media, whether it's a show on television dealing with veterans' issues, a radio program, a web site, magazines, or an article in a newspaper.

Contributions from readers must be handled carefully. People can be offended if their ideas are rejected or altered, but it may be necessary to do just that. The person who submitted the information should be told tactfully why it was rejected or altered. The editor should retain control of the newsletter's content. What goes into a newsletter should be newsworthy.

As for the format of the newsletter, most are printed on 8½ x 11-inch paper or are transmitted electronically. The number of pages depends on how much content you have. For print versions, the pages can be printed on one side or both sides. The newsletter can be two pages stapled together, or it can be one sheet of paper folded into four pages and printed on all sides. These formats are the simplest and most economical for a chapter's tight budget.

Your chapter's newsletter should be identifiable at a glance. Use a distinctive heading at the top of the first page. It should have the name of the newsletter, the name of the organization, and the address. The name should be short. Use large type for the name. The heading should also include the volume number, the number of the newsletter, and the date.

There are no exact rules for the arrangement of the material or layout of the newsletter, but the more important subjects should receive the most space. As in a newspaper, the most important items should go on the front page, each to be continued elsewhere in the publication.

The actual layout consists of location and size of headlines, location and size of illustrations, columns of print, boxes, departments, and the information required by the post office if the newsletter is mailed without an envelope. There are excellent software programs for making newsletters, but some skill with a

basic Word-type program may be all you need.

Here are some design suggestions:

1. **Break up copy as much as possible.**
 - a. Keep articles relatively short for maximum interest.
 - b. Break up longer articles with subheads and illustrations.
 - c. If you can, divide copy into two or three columns on a page instead of spreading the copy across the entire page.

2. **Be consistent.**
 - a. Use the same margins for each page.
 - b. Use only one or two headline faces—don't combine too many different typefaces in a newsletter.

3. **Keep the design simple**
 - a. Don't clutter your newsletter. (Underlining adds clutter)

4. **Working with two-page spreads.**
 - a. Try to balance out the pages. Don't put illustrations on one page and all type on the facing page.
 - b. Offset one bold illustration with another on the other page.
 - c. Remember that pictures must be balanced—a big black spot on one page must be balanced by something of similar weight on the other page, like a bold headline.

5. **Be careful with paper selection.**
 - a. Don't use flimsy paper. It may be cheap, but it looks cheap, too.
 - b. If you use colored paper, stick to pale pastels.

Requirements for news writing and headline content in the newsletter are the same as in the press releases. Refer to Section 3 for tips.

Every kind of printing process you could ever want is available in large cities. Even in the smallest town, there is likely to be at least one printer. Photocopying may be all you need for a small newsletter with a limited distribution; otherwise, you'll need a printer. The classified phone directory will list all the possibilities.

Photocopying—including collating and stapling—may be done on most office photocopiers. While most machines print 8½ x 11-inch sheets, some can print paper up to 11 x 17 inches. One drawback to photocopying is that you will lose some clarity in reproducing photographs.

Desktop publishing allows you to create a professional-looking newsletter and graphically illustrated material on a personal computer in your home office. Computer software allows you to plug in photographs and crop them to size; use different type fonts and sizes; vary column widths; shade or screen back graphics; add borders around copy; and produce CDs for professional printers to use in printing large quantities.

For less than \$5,000, you can buy all the components necessary to produce high-quality newsletters and graphics: a personal computer; word processing program; graphics program; page-making software; and a laser printer.

For maximum quality, you can take your CD to a commercial service that will print multiple copies of your newsletter on high-speed laser printers that provide extremely high resolution.

When you are choosing prospective printers, meet with them, and tell them what you want to do. Look at samples of their work. Find out what their services cost. Different printers offer different combinations of services, so it's important that you interview several printers and get several bids. The objective is to pick one who will do the job regularly without submitting bids on every

issue of your newsletter.

Mailing requirements are another important consideration when putting together your newsletter. You can mail it first-, second-, or third-class. First class is fastest and most expensive. There are reduced rates if the mail is presorted by zip code. Second class is ordinarily for newspapers and magazines, but a newsletter can qualify if it is set in type and printed and if it is published at least four times a year on specified dates. Third class may be used for small mailings of identical pieces.

Postal regulations change frequently. Contact the U.S. Postal Service for the latest specifications. A mailing permit is necessary; and certain information must be included in the newsletter, especially on the mailing panel or envelope.

To explore the costs, rules, and regulations, put together a sample copy of your newsletter, and tell the post office clerk how it will be produced, how many you plan to mail, how often it is to be published, and special rates for nonprofits.

Section 9

Electronic Media

You can do a great press relations job without ever straying beyond print and broadcast journalism. Still, there's an ever-increasing slice of the public that gets most of its news from computer screens. Many of the rules and suggestions in the preceding chapters apply to electronic media as well, though news web sites, chapter or state council web sites, and blogs are more directly accessible, and some have a significant following.

This section won't go into the rapidly changing technological side of electronic media—that's the route to quick obsolescence. Instead, the purpose of Section 9 is to open your eyes to electronic media if they aren't open already, and to expand your range if you've already slipped into that world.

News Web Sites

The majority of online journalism is an expansion of professional media through the use of web versions of their print and broadcast material. Deadline pressure—the fear of being scooped by the competition—may improve your access for placing your story on these web sites. You can usually determine somewhere on the web site how they need your material submitted. Keep in mind that if you send your press release to the *Tootertown Daily Thunderstorm*, you'll need to e-mail your release to tootstorm.com separately.

Newspapers have branched into new mediums because of the Internet. Most have websites with video, photographs, and blogs. Readers may post comments on an article, expressing their opinions without approval of an editor. Web-based publications provide additional outlets with widespread audiences, offering another avenue to get your story into professional outlets.

Chapter/State Council Web Sites

If your chapter or state council has a web site—or if you've got the technical skills available and somebody with the time and interest to put one together and keep it current—you can put your press releases, your newsletter, your public service announcements, and other information you want posted onto your corner of the World Wide Web, with all the access to being Googled that implies. Web sites need to look good, and they need old material pruned as soon as it is of no use. They need pictures—the same ones discussed in Section 6—and they especially need to be laid out well, with an avoidance of clutter and the provision of easy access to whatever goes on your site. Material such as press releases and testimony should be dated, but otherwise, it's good to avoid little labels such as "Last updated February 2, 2004."

Blogs

The emergence of participatory journalism (or "citizen journalism") has created a news form in which amateur and professional reporters produce their own stories inside or outside professional media outlets. A blog (an abridgment of the term "web log") is a website, which is regularly updated by the blogger with postings of such as opinion pieces, news reports, videos, and commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video." While many bloggers simply record their personal views on topics ranging from sesame noodles to Agent Orange, those engaged in participatory journalism see themselves as being outside the mainstream media, providing an alternate channel.

Some bloggers, who see themselves outflanking the powers that be and communicating news directly to the public, develop sites where you can present your issues, though you may have even less control of the forum than with conventional media.

Electronic Mailing Lists

There are two kinds of electronic mailing lists: the professional services you can pay to distribute your news preleases to wide or more specific audiences; and the ones you compile yourself. Both have their uses and their drawbacks.

The professional services, such as PR Newswire (www.prnewswire.com), provide electronic distribution, targeting, and broadcast services to thousands of corporate, association, non-profit, and other customers. What they provide is instantaneous distribution of press releases to whatever range of media outlets they cover.

However, it is still up to you to do the follow-up that might save your release from being one of hundreds of emails received on a given day, and professional services cost money. You can search for information on the professional services by typing "electronic mailing lists" into a search engine.

Even if you can afford one of the professional services, compile your own list of phone numbers and e-mail addresses, at least for the contacts you rely on most.

Use the phone book, call the papers and stations, look on their web sites. Ask by phone or in person for e-mail addresses, and put them into a list you keep as a computer file. If you can get access to a copy of such a publication as the *News Media Yellow Book*, a personnel directory of national news media organizations, you can get phone numbers and e-mail addresses for specific editors and reporters; the \$400+ price may be steep if you're not a large chapter or state council, but you may find it in a public library or a friend's office.

Don't forget to keep expanding your list—sharing it with other organizations in exchange for their list is a useful idea—and update it regularly.

Section 10

Social Media

In Section 9, we mentioned, “there’s an ever-increasing slice of the public that gets most of its news from computer screens.” In addition, there is an ever-increasing slice of the population that interacts on computer screens via social media websites. The increasing use by individuals of social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn means that there is yet another useful, more time-efficient medium which your chapter or state council can use to share pertinent information.

Facebook

Facebook, launched in February 2004, is a social media platform that enables users to create a personal profile; add other users as friends; exchange messages; join common-interest user groups; and categorize their friends into lists such as “People From Work” or “Close Friends.” Facebook currently has over 900 million active users worldwide, making it easily the most used and most visited social networking site in the world.

Once you set up an official Facebook page for your state council or chapter, you can invite your friends (either online or in person) to “like” the page. Once liked, they will automatically receive word whenever you update your page, whether you update your status, create an event, or send out a mass message.

Facebook users can create “Like Pages” which allow fans of an individual, organization, product, service, or concept to join a Facebook fan club. Like Pages look and behave much like a user’s personal profile, with some significant differences. Public Profiles are integrated with Facebook’s advertising system, allowing Public Profile owners to advertise to Facebook’s users. Owners can send updates to their fans, which show up on their home page.

In addition, they can create events (a way for members to let friends/followers know about upcoming events in their community and to organize social gatherings); send out mass messages; upload photos/videos; "like" other groups on Facebook; and provide links to other websites. They also have access to insights and analytics of their fan base. While an individual with a personal profile can acquire up to 5,000 friends, a "Like Page" can have an unlimited number of "Likers."

The truth is this: Facebook is no longer just a site that your kids and grandkids use to talk to each other online. It's become arguably the biggest, best online networking platform in the world. As a special-interest group, Facebook has the ability to get your word out quicker to the people who matter the most to you, allowing you to be more efficient in how you approach spreading your message.

Twitter

Launched in July 2006, Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets." Twitter currently has over 140 million active users worldwide. Twitter is, for all intents and purposes, a more compact Facebook. It is also a much faster medium to use for transporting messages in bulk. Just to understand how big of an impact huge events on Twitter can have, consider this: during the last minutes of Super Bowl XLVI between the New England Patriots and the New York Giants, there were 10,245 tweets sent out *per second*. Twitter's speed enables its users to react to events even as they are happening, and while you may not get 10,000+ tweets per second, Twitter does help if you are attempting to create an instant viral effect.

Another key difference is that while Facebook may be considered

more of a social site, Twitter is far more interest-based. You are more likely to gain a following on Twitter in support of your chapter or state council's cause than you are on Facebook. Building a large following with a business purpose in mind is easier to achieve on Twitter.

Twitter is almost like a mini-Facebook. You are limited in the number of characters you can use per status update, but they offer very similar features. It's in *how* they relay information and *who* they relay it to that differentiates Twitter from Facebook. For that reason, your chapter or state council could benefit from both.

LinkedIn

We mentioned in the last section that Facebook is more social-based and Twitter is more interest-based. LinkedIn, launched in May 2003, is definitely the more professionally based of the three. With over 161 million active subscribers worldwide, LinkedIn allows registered users to maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship. These contacts are known as *Connections*.

Simply put, the more connections you have, the stronger your network is. Connections enable your chapter or state council to build its network, view the resumes of its followers, and post photos and links. LinkedIn has also enabled an "applications platform" that allows other online services to be embedded within a member's profile page. Next, there are "groups," which support a limited form of discussion area, moderated by the group owners and managers. Groups also keep their members informed through emails with updates to the group, including most talked about discussions within your professional circles. And finally, LinkedIn allows users to research companies with which they may be interested in working. When typing the name of a given company in the search box, statistics about the company are

provided. These may include the ratio of female to male, the percentage of the most common titles/positions held within the company, the location of the company's headquarters and offices, or a list of present and former employees.

LinkedIn has established its own reputation as a *de facto* tool for professional networking. While you may not be looking to add new employees, you could definitely benefit from using LinkedIn to help further build your professional network.

In a constantly changing world where technology is slowly but surely entrenching itself into our everyday lives, it is important to keep up with the new technologies, including social media sites. Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn might gain more attention from teenagers. But they can still be of service to your chapter or state council in helping spread its message. So if you already use these social media platforms, continue to do so.

Glossary of Social Media Terms

Facebook: a social networking service that enables users to post articles, pictures, and links to be viewed by a following of other users who “like” the page.

Like button (Facebook): a feature of Facebook that enables users to indicate that they “like” or agree with posted content, such as status updates, comments, photos, links, and advertisements.

Status (Facebook): a text-based message posted for the user’s friends/followers to read; allows for friends/followers to comment back.

Comment (Facebook): a text-based response to a status or another comment.

Twitter: a social networking/microblogging service that enables users to send text-based posts, pictures, and links or 140 characters or less publically to a following of other users.

Tweet (Twitter): a post on Twitter; Twitter’s equivalent of a “status” on Facebook; all tweets are limited to a maximum of 140 characters.

Followers (Twitter): individuals, organizations, or corporations that are subscribed to a particular Twitter feed; tweets from the feeds they are following will automatically be displayed on the followers’ home pages.

YouTube: a video sharing website that enables users to upload, view, and share homemade videos; they can also view, rate, and comment on videos uploaded by other users, or even their own videos.

Channel (YouTube): a YouTube user's "home," which displays recent activity, uploaded videos, favorite videos, subscribers, video views, and other basic information.

Subscriber (YouTube): a fellow YouTube user who is "following" another person's channel; subscribers will be notified of any new videos uploaded by the channel they are subscribed to.

Blog (noun): short for *web log*; a personal journal published online that consists of posts about a subject of interest to the blogger; usually blogs have only one author and only deal with one subject, but this is not always the case.

Blog (verb): to maintain or add content to a blog.

RSS feed: *really simple syndication*; various web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works—blog entries, news headlines, audio, video, etc.—in a standardized format; users benefit by being able to syndicate their content automatically, allowing users to subscribe to content and read it as they please.

RSS reader: *feed aggregator*; web application which aggregates syndicated web content, such as headlines, blogs, podcasts, and vlogs in a single location for easy viewing.

Podcast: a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio or video files subscribed to and downloaded through web syndication.

Vlog: a video blog.

Flickr: an image and video hosting service that enables users to upload, view, and share images and videos embedded in blog postings and social media.

Embedding: inserting media (photos, videos, etc.) into a text-based document to form a compound document.

Compound Document: a document consisting of both text and media.

App: software applications designed to run on smartphones and computer tablets.

App Store: a digital application distributor that enables service users to browse and download applications.

LinkedIn: a business-related social networking site used for professional networking (as opposed to Facebook's social networking); enables users to search for contacts, jobs, people, and business opportunities as well as post photos, résumés, profiles, etc.

-The Social Media section was authored by Aidan Edelman.

Section 10

Holding a Press Conference

The press conference—with one or more speakers at a podium or a table up in front of a crowd of reporters and photographers—is the heaviest weapon in your arsenal. Be stingy with it. A press conference is a lot of work and depends on solid relationships with the media.

A successful press conference can result in major news coverage, just as a failure can leave your chapter or state council disappointed and embarrassed. A moderate success can be much more work for the same results you can accomplish with press releases and phone calls.

A press conference provides an opportunity to get coverage for your issue on television, radio, and in newspapers. In a press conference, you decide what information is presented, how it is presented, to whom it is presented, and who presents it. To hold a press conference, you contact the media, pick a time and place, make a presentation, and respond to reporters' questions.

Press conferences can be efficient methods of publicizing your news, but they must be strategic and well organized. If you hold press conferences too frequently and without solid news for reporters, they will stop coming.

Before you plan a press conference, be clear about your goals. Some good reasons for holding a press conference include:

To get widespread media coverage.

To send a message to a decision-maker about what you want.

To get more people involved in your organization.

To show the strength of your group.

Whatever your goals, remember that you must have something newsworthy to announce, reveal, or talk about at your press conference.

The important steps for setting up a press conference include:

A clearly stated reason for holding a press conference—the news you are going to reveal has not been covered in the press, or there is an emergency, or an important new issue.

Decide on the message you want to deliver through the media. Outline your demands to a decision maker (someone who has the power to give you what you want). Include information about what people can do to help and the date, time, and place of your next action.

Determine the location of the press conference. Find an appropriate place that is convenient and has the facilities you need. Dramatize your position by choosing a good backdrop. If you decide to hold the press conference indoors, be ready to provide technical assistance for reporters, such as phones, microphones, and lighting. If you plan to hold the conference outdoors, have alternative arrangements in case of bad weather.

Set the date and time of the press conference, taking into account reporters' deadlines. Usually the best days of the week to get news coverage are Tuesday through Thursday. Press conferences work best in the mornings and early afternoons so reporters can meet their deadlines. Check to see that there are no competing news events already scheduled at the time of your conference.

Invite the media. Send a press conference advisory to appropriate local media outlets at least a week before the press conference, if possible. Follow up with phone calls two days before the press conference to make sure that everyone received the advisory. Call reporters the day before to remind them about the event.

Invite guests. Make phone calls and send written invitations to prospective guests you want to have at the press conference, such as other members of your group, allies, and friendly politicians. Prepare your speaker with 30-second answers for radio or TV, and quotable, simple messages for print reporters. Help your speaker practice with a video camera or tape recorder.

Choose a moderator or facilitator for the press conference if there is more than one spokesperson. You will need somebody to control the process and keep reporters on the subject. If someone goes off subject, the moderator can return the focus.

Prepare background materials. Plan to distribute a copy of written statements or a press release. You can prepare a packet of factsheets, charts, or graphs, but keep them simple.

Practice roles with the members of your group. It's important that everybody involved understands his or her role in the event. Think about what will happen all the way through the press conference and how it will look to reporters. The key question to ask is "What if?" (What if reporters ask a non-spokesperson member a question? What if your opponents show up and heckle?)

Prepare visual aids if they will help. Charts, big maps, pictures or other props help get your message across, but fewer is better and they must be readable. Slide shows are difficult for TV, radio, and print reporters to use.

Prepare your spokesperson to deliver your message.

Generally, it's good to have just one or two speakers during a press conference so people don't talk on top of each other or mix the message. Rehearse with the speaker. Make statements brief and clear. The spokesperson should be experienced in the subject and able to respond to questions. The more speakers you have, the more difficult it will be to get a coherent message across, especially if they represent different organizations.

Let the press know that the speaker is available for interviews after the conference. Prepare your speaker with 30-second answers for TV and radio and simple quotable messages for print reporters.

Making your statement

Think through how you can get your message across through the statement and the set up of the press conference. You can maximize your impact depending on whether you expect TV, radio, or print reporters to come. Each media type has special requirements and impacts. Ideally, you'll get reporters from a mix of media types.

Television, visual impact: Think, "How can we set up the conference to give TV reporters and newspaper photographers a good picture?"

Seat speakers at the front close together so they all fit in the picture.

Seat the audience close to the speakers so they are in the picture.

Display posters or banners with your group's name, issue, and demands written on them.

Bring props such as gas masks or POW/MIA flags.

Where and when possible, have action in the background during the conference with movement and lots of people and signs to dramatize your message. If not, a visual backdrop is useful for TV and photographers if it is not too complicated or detailed.

Radio, audio impact: Ask yourself: “What sounds would be of interest to radio reporters?” “What can we do to make things technically suitable for broadcast?”

Radio reporters need uncluttered sound with good acoustics and a minimum of background noise.

Have a designated, well-prepared spokesperson so everyone is not talking at once.

Have a prepared statement so the main points can be made clearly. Remember it sounds better if it doesn’t sound like you’re reading it. Practice making a statement from notes.

Only the designated spokesperson should speak to the media during the press conference.

If you’re holding the press conference at a rally or event with a lot of people and noise, set up a quiet space away from the action for interviews.

Radio is the best reason for avoiding a lot of charts and other visual material.

Print media: verbal impact: Ask yourself: “What would we want if we were newspaper reporters?”

Provide a press packet with background material.

Hand out copies of press statements.

Use simple, powerful, quotable lines when speaking.

Don't say anything you can't back up with facts. If something is not a proven fact, but you are sure it is true, preface the statement by saying, "in my opinion" or "we believe"

Don't bring up anything you are not prepared to discuss. If you are asked questions that you don't want to talk about, say, "We're not ready to discuss that matter at this time," or "Our group has not taken a position on that."

Regardless of the medium you chose, be ready to welcome reporters at least 15 minutes before the beginning of the conference. They usually need time to set up their equipment. Meet everyone at the door and ask them to sign a guest book. You may need their addresses for the next event. Give them your background material and a copy of the press statement.

Start the press conference on time and certainly not later than ten minutes after the scheduled time.

Running the press conference: The moderator welcomes everyone and briefly introduces the speaker. Remember that statements shouldn't be longer than 10-15 minutes. After the speakers are finished, ask for questions. Make your answers simple, brief, and pointed. A little bit of humor livens up the conference, provided it is tasteful, appropriate, and does not offend the audience. Good visual aids make the story more interesting, so be creative. After the important things are said, conclude the meeting. A good press conference should not be dragged out. Thank everyone for coming and offer additional information they can get from your office. Most importantly, thank them for keeping the readers, listeners, and community informed about this important issue.

After the conference, be sure to hand out press kits. A press kit is your background material: fact sheets, news release, text of the statement, and visual materials, such as photographs. It can help reporters create and produce their stories. If you prefer, you can make these available at the registration table prior to the conference.

Ten Steps For a Successful News Conference:

Step 1: Plan ahead. Decide what you want to do and how you want to do it.

Step 2: Decide on the message you want to get out.

Step 3: Prepare props, posters, banners, and a press kit.

Step 4: Organize a list of reporters to contact.

Step 5: Write and send out a news advisory by email and fax.

Step 6: Write the statement you plan to make at the press conference.

Step 7: Finalize all details. Write a news release.

Step 8: Call reporters to remind them about the conference.

Step 9: Arrive early to situate speakers and to organize materials.

Step 10: After the conference is over, hand-deliver copies of your news release and statements to reporters who didn't show up.

See an example on the next page:

Press Conference Advisory

To: News Editors and Assignment Editors

From: Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 1350

Event: Press Conference for Chapter's Welcome Home Program, 10:00 AM,
Tuesday, July 16, Seagull Community Center, Room 303.

Subject: Chapter President Joe Moose will inaugurate Chapter 1350's
Welcome Home Program, providing support services to newly discharged Iraq