LEGION FAMILY OPEN HOUSE

Purpose: The reason for holding an American Legion Family Open House is two-fold: to build awareness and grow membership. The desired outcome is to increase awareness of the American Legion Family, including the American Legion, Sons of the American Legion, and the American Legion Auxiliary. Units and posts can attract eligible members by providing a greater understanding of these organizations, their activities, and contributions to the community.

Positioning: You will have the best results if the open house includes the entire American Legion Family. While an open house could be held for a single organization such as the Auxiliary, an event supporting all American Legion family members holds greater opportunity for growing membership. For example, if a veteran decides to join the American Legion, that’s a perfect time to recruit their sons for the SAL or wives, daughters, etc. for the Auxiliary. This is the time to position the Post/meeting place as a family-friendly place, where members are kind and welcoming, and where veterans are shown respect and appreciated for their service. Demonstrating diversity in all facets (i.e. age, race, branches of service) will help attendees feel more welcome. There will not be a second chance to make a first impression. An open house provides the perfect opportunity to showcase the many ways in which the Legion family supports veterans, active military, and the youth in your community. Give thought to the key Post/Unit activities that support the Legion mission, and consider how they might best be positioned during the open house (i.e. posters depicting the American Legion baseball team, students who attended Boys/ALA Girls State speaking about their experience, a brief speech by a scholarship recipient, a video with a veteran’s testimonial about how the Post helped him find gainful employment).

The format of the open house may be as simple as opening the doors of your meeting space and serving cookies/coffee to guests while members talk about Legion Family activities and view the facilities. Keep in mind that guests will be attending with a simple question in mind, i.e. “What is this organization and how do I benefit by joining?”

Guests: All current Legion Family members, family members of TAL, SAL or Auxiliary members, all former military personnel from your area, family members of active military personnel, National Guard members from your area, local city officials, members of the press, etc.

Timing: Limit the open house to two hours. Hold it on a weekend afternoon or any week evening after normal work hours. Try to schedule it at the beginning of the membership year.

Representation: Include representatives from each of your organizations. Include officers—especially those responsible for membership and members at large, if possible. It is important that the individuals representing your Post are friendly and make attendees feel welcome. They should also be knowledgeable about Legion Family programs and membership benefits so they can answer any questions. Try to include junior members or
Boys State and ALA Girls State citizens and give them a role to play—even if it’s serving refreshments or handing out brochures. You may wish to have a guest speaker who delivers a very short speech about being a member. You’ll find the best results if the environment feels relaxed and simply provides an environment for sharing the many positive things being done by Legion Family members. Involvement and engagement are critical to the success of the open house. For example, you may ask junior members to make posters that feature some of your key activities—like ALA Girls State and Boys State, American Legion Baseball, Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies, VA Hospital support, etc. Auxiliary members may prepare a few simple refreshments. SAL members might set up tables or spruce up the building to make it clean and inviting. Involved members will be inclined to spread the word about the open house and invite people they know to attend.

Before the Open House:

- Reserve space on the designated date for your meeting place or hall and solicit volunteers that will be available to assist with set-up, etc.
- Send invitations or determine other methods to build awareness and encourage attendance. Evite and Facebook can be very effective tools for spreading the word about your open house. Ask your web site or Facebook page administrator to create suitable invitations for use on Evite or a similar online venue.
- Develop and implement your Public Relations plan. This may include contacting the local newspaper, radio or TV station. It should include the use of social media and word of mouth. Utilize the ALA’s national website for marketing ideas and PR templates. See the PR Guide and Tips for Volunteer Recruitment at https://www.alaforveterans.org/Resources/Marketing---Promotional-Materials/.
  On this site you will find templates for press releases and news articles. Invite your local newspaper staff to attend and take photos. Contact your local Chamber of Commerce or city offices to promote the event via community bulletin boards, calendars, or city signs.
- Ask for volunteers to make and serve a few simple refreshments. Coffee, tea and cookies will usually suffice.
- Solicit help with display materials—posters, photos, signage, etc. This is an especially good way to involve junior members.
- Determine who will be the key representatives from each organization and involve them in developing a few talking points that members can share.
  - The American Legion/SAL/Auxiliary was started in .......... for the purpose of ........
  - Our Post supports our community by .......
  - Our community seems to especially love (list one or two key activities)...
  - We’re also really proud of .......
  - You can be a member if you meet the following criteria........
  - If you don’t meet those criteria, here are a few other ways you can be involved with our Legion Family .......

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters | 8945 N. Meridian St. | Indianapolis, IN 46260 | Phone (317) 569-4500 | Fax (317) 569-4502
www.ALAforVeterans.org
- Secure an adequate supply of membership application forms and any brochures that might prove useful during your discussions. Have the following brochures on hand:
  - American Legion Auxiliary at a Glance
  - American Legion Auxiliary ALA Girls State
  - Scholarship Opportunities
  - Your American Legion Family
- Secure nametags, markers, and any other needed supplies.

**During the Open House:** Position someone near the front door to welcome guests and help anyone needing assistance. This person should introduce him/her self and provide a legible nametag for all guests. Consider using a guest book or raffle drawing (i.e. for a flag or similar prize) to capture names and addresses for later follow up. The greeter may also introduce or direct guests to other Legion Family representatives to show them around and begin conversations about the Legion Family. A representative might show them posters or photo albums or other items of interest that facilitate dialogue about the mission of the Legion Family.

Individuals join organizations for a variety of reasons. While sharing information about the Legion Family is important, it is even more important to ask questions that help understand what piqued the guest’s interest in attending the open house. Listen carefully to gain an understanding of how each guest might benefit from membership in the Legion Family. And most importantly, ask them to join!

**After the Open House:** Consider posting a few good photos on Facebook or your website that depict a welcoming scene during the open house. Send a note of thanks to all who participated, whether as a guest or as a representative. Solicit feedback from representatives for anything that might improve results if /when you hold another open house. Send membership cards and welcome pack information to all new members. Have an officer make a personal call to welcome new members and invite them to get involved in some fashion right away.

When handled in a thoughtful and professional manner, an open house can serve as a very effective tool for growing membership within the American Legion family.