

# Department of Maryland Strategic Plan for Sustained Membership Growth

*Mission Statement: To increase membership and post development by creating a culture of growth.*

*Background: Department of Maryland instituted a 5 year plan for membership growth in 2010. The plan has had its successes and areas for improvement, however it did create a greater internal focus on the issues and methods to achieve, then sustain, membership growth.*

## **OVERALL OBJECTIVE:** Grow Membership Reference Resolution 64

To obtain the goal of growing our membership progressively over the next 5 years and beyond, utilizing the following strategies:

1. Create Brand Awareness
2. Communication
3. Training/Education/Leadership Development
4. Post Development & Revitalization
5. Membership Recruiting & Retention.

## **Priorities:**

### **Create Brand Awareness and Communications**

Target members & non-members to create awareness of who we are and what we do. Reference Resolution 52

Tactics:

- A. (In Progress – 5<sup>th</sup> Year) Establishing a highly trained and motivated PR Committee to promote The American Legion and its Programs statewide through newspapers, TV Stations, Radio, Internet Blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Committee to promote and coordinate:
  - a. Who we Are and What we Do (Document created in 2008-2009; update Annually to get the talking points and messages in the hands of those talking about the Legion)
  - b. Educate and Encourage Posts to establish special ways to present Membership longevity awards, and to make the presentation open and then publicize afterwards

- c. Internet membership recruitment. Explore methods to receive new members online to the Department and Posts
  - d. Utilize billboards to advertise The American Legion, and provide the Department online join tool to reap the benefits of the money spent on the advertising
  - e. Print business cards and bumper stickers with same type information and have prospective members joining online to expand the appeal to the younger Veterans.
  - f. Expand Public Relations training in both County/District Commanders Class and Legion College
  - g. Leverage the media contacts spreadsheet to more effectively target the local media
  - h. Synchronizing and coordinating the messages, efforts, and activities of the Public Relations Committee, Membership Committee, and other Commissions/Committees
  - i. Utilize PSAs to get messages out to the public
    - 1) Ensure that all levels of our Department's organization is aware of Public Service Announcements that are available and instruct them how to use them.
    - 2) Encourage Posts to form a working relationship with local media outlets
- B. Public Relations Committee and Department Officers visit and meet with editors and managers at media outlets to tell our story and ask for assistance in getting the message out to the communities
- C. Continue to educate and encourage Posts, Counties, and Districts on the importance of strong Public Relations at all levels in order to maximize the flow of positive information about The American Legion to the media, while minimizing the negative labeling of the organization.
- D. Encourage use of certificates and awards for positive support of The American Legion
- E. Encourage Posts to increase use of Department Membership trailer in local festivals and carnivals to get our people and our message out in face to face meetings at these events.
- F. Increase the Department Newspaper, "Freestate Warrior", from 3 issues to 4 issues to enhance the ability to get the messages and vital information out to all the members of the Department
- G. Publish the summary of Consolidated reports in a format similar to Who we are and What we Do, however gear it towards being able to utilize it with media outlets and also with community leaders
- H. Encourage Posts, Counties, and District leaders to use the summaries to visit local government, county government, and Chamber of Commerce meetings. First, to thank the leaders that are supporting the Legion programs, then to ask for support in a targeted way from local and County leaders

- I. Continue to increase size of email collections to better utilize this medium for communications of critical pieces of information (realizing the limitations and possible overkill inherent in such immediate push type communicaitons)
- J. Continue the department Officers visitation schedule and synchronization of the message through monthly Department Officers meetings and emails
- K. Continue to utilize the VA mobile van resource, and educate and encourage more Posts to utilize this valuable resource
- L. Continue to utilize the Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulations resources, and educate and encourage more Posts to utilize these valuable resource
- M. Continue to redesign the website for better information flow and ease of use
  - a. Added Google calendars for ease of access
  - b. Added picture gallery on main page
  - c. Add more pages to cover some Commissions/Committees under represented on the sight
  - d. Review each page to determine if it is portraying the message we want to send, and providing the consumer what they need from the page.
- N. Encourage each Post to establish a media/public relation team
- O. Communicate The American Legion's story and why we need every Veteran to join in the cause to the Military Communities within the Department. Develop stronger relationships with these communities:
  - a. Ft. Meade
  - b. Ft Detrick
  - c. Aberdeen proving Grounds
  - d. Joint Base Andrews
  - e. Patuxent Naval Air Station
  - f. Maryland National Guard (Army and Air)
  - g. Army Reserve Centers
  - h. Coast Guard Yard
  - i. Naval Reserve Station
  - j. Marine Reserve Center
- P. Promote use of the American Legion School Awards by posts for increased awareness of The American Legion, and the opportunity to get our personnel in front of assemblies at Elementary, Middle, and High Schools.
- Q. Promote use of JROTC and ROTC awards to cover all programs throughout the Department for increased awareness of The American Legion, and the opportunity to get our personnel in front of assemblies at awards assemblies for the units

**Increase Training/Education/Leadership Development** - Improving knowledge of The American Legion by implementing educational tools and encouraging leadership development at all levels. Reference

Resolutions 50, 52

Tactics:

- A. Improve Coordination of Department Officers' duties and activities to maximize coverage, while economizing this vital resource
  - a. Reinforcing the duties as described in Constitution and By-laws
  - b. Update and Revise the standing visitation schedule to get better Departmental coverage
  - c. Continue to conduct monthly Department Officer meetings of top officers to be better informed of the issues within the Department (established in 2010)
  - d. Continue to reach out, mentor, and follow up with Posts that are not conducting their operations in a prudent manner, as evidenced by reviews of the County Commanders Inspection Reports mandated by Department Constitution and Bylaws
  - e. Delegate and spread duties across all the Department Vice Commanders to better utilize the talents and these valuable resources, at the same time developing and preparing them for greater responsibilities.
- B. Establish a Legion College/Department Training Committee.
  - a. Review all opportunities for improvement in education and leader development
    - 1) Establish new curriculum for Department Legion College at Department Convention
    - 2) Establish a mid-winter training session to double the opportunities for education and development
      - i. Utilize LEAD training to enhance the learning experience
      - ii. Location(s) of this training (regionally), and number of sessions
  - b. Review County and District Commanders Class
  - c. Maximize the use of technology in delivery of training (record training sessions and make available on DVD or online for those not able to attend)
- C. Promote all Legionnaires taking The American Legion Extension Institute, but target participation from Post, County, District, and Department leadership. (offer incentives for successful completion)
- D. Establish an in processing or educational guide/meeting for prospective officers of the Department
  - a. Policies and Procedures of the Department
    - 1) American Legion protocol
    - 2) Department operations
    - 3) Sexual Harassment/Assault Policy
    - 4) Equal opportunity policy
  - b. Media Relations and Public Speaking training
    - 1) Keeping speech about policies and not peoples/parties
    - 2) How to handle being interviewed by the press
- E. National Legion College
  - a. Send out applications and letters to all Posts via mailings and DEC via email
  - b. Post the application on the Department website

- c. Establish a selection committee to review applications returned to determine best qualified list
- d. Develop a plan to utilize and encourage growth of legionnaires with this experience

**Post Creation, Development & Revitalization**- Develop new posts, revitalize or consolidate existing posts to promote growth within The American Legion. Reference Resolutions 48, 49, 52

Tactics:

- A. Identify areas of concern or of opportunity to create, develop, or revitalize a Post
  - a. Revitalize posts as identified.
    - 1) Encourage Post to do a self-assessment using the Post/Community Audit and County Commanders inspection reports
    - 2) Encourage identified post(s) to use Mylegion.org to assist in increasing membership
    - 3) Utilize revitalization teams to target areas where assistance is needed (negotiate the type of assistance with National organization to limit the friction from past experiences)
    - 4) Revoke charters from Posts no longer operating as Posts
  - b. Encourage the development of new posts where revitalization efforts have not been successful.
    - 1) Set a goal of one new Post a year starting in year 2, to give time to promote plan
    - 2) Contact County Commanders for input to develop a new post in their area.
    - 3) Develop a team of 2-3 interested Legionnaires to form new posts.
    - 4) Determine why existing Posts failed.
    - 5) Contact department for delinquent and holding Post list.
    - 6) Encourage innovative thinking about Post creation (online Posts, Social media Post, or Post creation by younger Veterans revolving around common interests)
- B. Establish and maintain a 100% Post visitation goal for District and Department officers
- C. Utilize results from visitations and County Inspection Reports to identify what needs to be done and where
- D. Establish a research committee to recommend a plan for redistricting to account for changing demographic and geographic conditions, allowing better management and promotion of Legion programs and membership
- E. Improve community awareness of Posts by being active in your community.
  - a. Create and maintain a public relations position at Posts.
  - b. Inform the local media of Posts accomplishments.
  - c. Project a positive image.
  - d. Department to make available the CPR's summary report to the posts, to utilize this information for dissemination to the local community, to increase the positive image of the American Legion.

- e. Visit local government, county government, and Chambers of Commerce to promote the Posts impact in the community
- F. Encourage every Post to welcome all members and guests.
  - a. Be a friendly Post. (set up a greeting welcoming committee.
  - b. Encourage Posts to conduct new member initiation ceremonies.
- G. Identify and utilize the proper membership tools at all levels to achieve growth.
  - a. Encourage Post & Counties to enroll in MyLegion.org
  - b. Encourage all District/County/Post Commanders and Membership Chairpersons attend all available training

**Membership Recruiting & Retention** - Increase membership by developing a comprehensive recruiting and membership retention strategy. Reference Resolutions 48, 49, 51

Tactics:

- A. Establish membership teams at all levels.
  - a. Membership Committee composition develops continuity and builds on successes, while improving on failures of previous years. Membership Committee has a chairperson that can develop this continuity
  - b. Department 1<sup>st</sup> vice Commander oversees the membership committee.
  - c. Assign Department 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander to coordinate with the 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander in promotion of membership; both increasing awareness and oversight, but preparing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Commander for their key role the following year
  - d. Expand the size and scope of the Membership Committee. Encouraging better participation in District membership objectives.
  - e. Synchronizing and coordinating the messages, efforts, and activities of the Public Relations Committee, Membership Committee, and other Commissions/Committees (including the Department Service Office)
  - f. Continue to expand the role of the membership training committee, and encourage all Districts to host training sessions
- B. Develop a retention strategy at every level of the organization. **RETENTION MUST BE THE FIRST PRIORITY TO INCREASE OUR MEMBERSHIP.**
  - a. Improve our customer friendly approach in all aspects and at all levels
  - b. Keep the lines of communication open.
  - c. Reach-out to the delinquent members.
  - d. Department Task Force to develop the guidelines for the post membership teams.
  - e. Establish permanent membership chairperson for post continuity.
  - f. Develop an elevator speech that everyone can utilize for retention and recruitment.
  - g. Assign the duties of renewing membership in Department Headquarters Post to membership committee

- C. Review membership awards program and institute changes as needed
  - a. Lottery system for all Posts making a certain goal to promote a wider competition base
  - b. Adding a second prize for the current membership Post incentives
  - c. Continue the membership challenge coin program
- D. Develop and implement a strategy for transferring members from the Department headquarters post into traditional posts.
  - a. The Department conducts County mini revitalizations to encourage Posts to transfer Post 297 members.
  - b. Transferred members from the holding post are counted immediately towards Post membership goals.
  - c. Assign the duties of assisting Posts with transferring membership in Department Headquarters Post to membership committee
- E. Increase emphasis on traditional recruitment. (*Just ask*, make personal contacts)
- F. Internet membership recruitment. Explore methods to receive new members online to the Department and Posts
  - a. Utilize billboards to advertise The American Legion, and provide the Department online join tool to reap the benefits of the money spent on the advertising
  - b. Print business cards with same type information and have prospective members joining online to expand the appeal to the younger Veterans
- G. Promote awareness of the following American, Children & Youth Activities
  - a. Operation Comfort Warrior (OCW)
  - b. Heroes to Hometown (H2H)
  - c. Family Support Network
  - d. Temporary Financial Assistance
  - e. Reconnect
  - f. Boys State
  - g. Legion Baseball
  - h. High School Oratorical Scholarship Contest
  - i. Youth Camps
  - j. Jr Shooting Sports
- H. Department reconnects with The Adjutant General and increase involvement with all military members in the communities
  - a. Encourage Posts and the Legion Family to develop scholarships geared toward their local military communities, similar to the manner a Post works with a high school in their area
  - b. Present Military Certificates of Commendation to members of units in the Posts community

- I. Encourage all levels to develop a working relationship with their military senior leaders to offer an opportunity to join The American Legion to all eligible members of the Active Military, The National Guard & Reserve Components. Encourage County and Post to contact Military Installations in their area and form a working relationship to increase awareness of the American Legion
- J. Identify Student Veterans groups at the universities and colleges throughout the Department and reach out to these organizations
  - a. Discuss benefits availability
  - b. Claims processing
  - c. VA Education benefits
  - d. What a Service Officer can do for them
- K. Continue to enhance the membership renewal process.
  - a. Encourage Post to submit the transmittals in a timely manner.
  - b. Encourage Post to enroll in Mylegion.org
- L. Having successfully completed the VA claims process, Department Service Officers are encouraged to invite eligible veterans to join The American Legion or renew their membership.
  - a. Encourage Service Officers to provide membership eligibility information **after** the Veteran's claim has been processed.
  - b. Promote Service Officers outreach to Universities and other communities of Veterans for assistance with VA benefits
- M. Offer participants in The American Legion programs, and their families, the opportunity to support such programs through membership in The American Legion Family, if eligible. If we do not ask at the programs and encourage joining to a group we are already in contact with, we are missing a great opportunity.