

E-NEWSLETTER TOOL KIT



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

DAV.ORG

A message from DAV National Adjutant **MARC BURGESS**



As you are well aware, we have entered the “information age.” The way we communicate with one another and activate as an organization has evolved, and the evolution will continue. Where once we relied on paper to receive and proliferate information, the advent of digital means has made it more effective and financially viable to leverage technology in ways that help us achieve our mission.

This guide was developed based on feedback we received from chapter and department leaders who had succeeded in producing digital newsletters as well as others who wanted to know how they could likewise save money and enhance their outreach efforts.

No mandate requires our member-leaders to produce print or digital newsletters. However, chapters and departments that have made an effort to reach out to their members through this type of service have resoundingly reported success. Because of the ability to forward these messages at no cost to recipients, they have found the tool useful in furthering their goals. They’ve seen new members join, increased attendance at meetings and more participation in special events. Most importantly, they’ve seen the lives of veterans and their families improve from learning about services and benefits they’ve earned. This resource can help us respond when necessary to legislation that impacts our benefits and may be as valuable to Benefit Protection Team leaders as it is to commanders and adjutants.

A properly executed newsletter can create an active dialogue between members and leaders. I would encourage you to network with your fellow chapter leaders who are using technology in this way. I would bet they would tell you that, beyond just saving donated funds, the return on the investment of time has made the effort worthwhile.

This is also an opportunity to credit Local Veterans Assistance Program hours. Regardless of who in your entity is involved in the production of your digital newsletter, please ensure they are getting the credit they deserve through that program.

Thank you for your many requests that prompted the development of this resource. We also appreciate feedback from the field as to how we can continue to improve this guide. We hope it makes a difference in your work to ensure our promises are kept to the men and women who’ve served.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marc Burgess". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.



INTRODUCTION

This tool kit is designed to provide you with the basic tools and resources to start your own chapter or department e-newsletter.

E-newsletters have proven to be more effective in reaching and engaging members who are not able to attend meetings. This more versatile format also affords you the opportunity to share the newsletter on your social media sites and reach prospective members and volunteers. It will also save your chapter or department money, as e-newsletters cost less than printed newsletters.

The primary goal of this tool kit is to make it easier on chapters and departments to reach and engage current and prospective members with information critical to veterans issues and news from around their community.

In this tool kit, you'll find information on how to obtain a list of your members' email addresses, select and use a template that works for you, and distribute your newsletter and relevant content to your readers.



Sending e-newsletters from your own email address can cause your account to be marked as

junk mail.

AVOID THIS PROBLEM and ensure proper delivery of your e-newsletter by trying one of these online vendors:

Constant Contact 



Obtaining a list of your members' email addresses

Acquiring a list of email addresses for your members is a must, and the easiest way to accomplish this is to contact DAV's National Membership Department and request an electronic spreadsheet with all of your members' contact information, including email addresses. The commander or adjutant can get this list by directly emailing the National Membership Department at membershippublic@dav.org.

Distributing your newsletter

It's not uncommon to encounter delivery problems when trying to send e-newsletters from your own email address. Using traditional email to reach scores of members may result in your email address being blocked from reaching your intended recipients. Based on feedback from members who have enjoyed success and explored different vendors, online services offered through Constant Contact (constantcontact.com) are strongly recommended.

Constant Contact offers a free, 60-day trial including help from one of their experts, to teach you how to maneuver the website, and different newsletter templates. However, the free service is limited in the number of emails and graphics you can use. It is recommended that you use the free service while learning the site and deciding how you want your newsletter to look. Once you have signed up on the main page and entered your information, you will receive a phone call from your assigned Constant Contact representative to help you get started. You can learn more by visiting their website and viewing a product tutorial at constantcontact.com/help/product-tutorials.

Once you're signed up, you can use the Constant Contact website for all of your outreach needs, including storage of your members' email addresses. For example, Chapter 10 in Fairfax, Va., stores roughly 1,300 member emails, and their annual cost is approximately \$336 per year. The chapter previously spent \$700 to put together and mail one paper newsletter. The cost of the electronic service is based on the number of emails you store—not the number of emails you send. As such, storing fewer emails costs less and maintaining more addresses costs more. To get the most out of your investment, don't forget to purge any bad email addresses and add new ones for any new members or newly active members.

Constant Contact also offers a reduced rate to nonprofits when you pay for 12 months of service in advance.

MailChimp is an online vendor that provides services similar to Constant Contact. Explore both and determine which one best suits your needs.



Setup email account for e-newsletter

We strongly suggest that you create an email account dedicated solely to your e-newsletter. Doing so provides numerous benefits and ensures the continuity of the service. When you set up your account, it will require a source email address and a reply email address. If you do not have a chapter or department email account that can handle the traffic, set up a separate email address specifically for the e-newsletter. Many different vendors—such as Google (Gmail), Yahoo!, AOL, Zoho and Microsoft (Outlook)—provide email addresses and services either free or for little cost or obligation. Your e-newsletter account login information should be accessible to the individual responsible for managing and distributing the product, as well as a very limited number of key leaders within the department, chapter or unit.

You should develop a written or verbal policy that safeguards the account but ensures limited access (no more than four total) for continuity purposes. This is best handled by an officer or member appointed to this position. He or she should change the password in a secure way (i.e., includes capital letters, lowercase letters, symbols and numbers). Then, he or she should share the updated password with at least one but no more than three elected officers who should not share it with anyone else.

Anyone who handles contact information for DAV members must understand their obligation to ensure the account is used for sanctioned purposes



Create a **new email** dedicated to the newsletter only.

only. Login information and other proprietary information concerning DAV members should not be retained after a member no longer needs it for an official capacity. Proprietary information should be treated like “property of the order” and should be surrendered to successors for the good of the order.

Lists of chapter and department members who have email addresses on file are available to elected officers through the DAV Membership Department by emailing membership@dav.org or calling 888-236-8313. Once you have received your list, you can upload your members’ names and addresses into the service. The importance of having the list electronically is so you can copy the names and email addresses directly from the spreadsheet and paste them into the program, which will eliminate the need to manually input every name and email address and will create a file you can access for future use.

The importance of safeguarding this information cannot be understated. Any vendor we might recommend will not share your list or compromise your data. Anyone with access to this information needs to understand it is proprietary in nature and should not be used in any capacity at any time or in any way that does not conform with authorized and official DAV business.

With that said, let’s get into the nuts and bolts of developing your entity’s product!

Choosing your template

Creating a template for your newsletter can be one of the more challenging aspects of starting your newsletter. Constant Contact has templates you can use. These templates can be changed; you can add graphics and color schemes as well as change the layout. In time, your template may evolve, just be mindful of any changes in DAV's mission statement, colors, logo, etc. Do not use the old red, white and blue DAV banner, for example. Feel free to contact the National Communications Department through feedback@dav.org for graphics that fit the format you need based on your newsletter vendor requirements.

Content for your newsletter

Try to use articles that are relevant to your local readers. Keep the articles to a few paragraphs in length and include links for them to follow and read more on their own. This keeps articles short and allows you to include more information. ***Forget everything you may have seen or read about printed newsletters.*** Do not try to mimic a printed newsletter. They are generally weighed down with too much information and long messages, which can turn readers away. The great thing about using electronic newsletters is that you can use links to articles, websites or even flyers.

Articles about VA health care, VA benefits, volunteering, legislative alerts and local events are usually the most engaging articles. Promote your own initiatives with articles and links—your events are a great opportunity to collect new email addresses and expand the reach of your e-newsletter. The national DAV website and your local VA medical center's website have a great deal of information, so leverage them in your newsletter. DAV CAN (Commander's Action Network) is another great resource, and local employment events are great highlights you can provide your local community.

Each and every DAV or DAVA department and their chapters and units should be aware, the practice of soliciting contributions via e-newsletter is strictly prohibited as in accordance with Article 15, Sections 15.2, 15.3 and 15.4 of the National Bylaws.

It's recommended to provide links, particularly for the chapter, department and national DAV websites, in a side panel or in a permanent location in the newsletter. You could also include DAV CAN, DAV employment, DAV Auxiliary, eBenefits, MyHealtheVet and the Veterans Crisis Hotline, along with links to your chapter email account, Facebook and Twitter, if applicable.

Remember, you don't need to "reinvent the wheel." Feel free to copy what others have done.

For more information, contact Assistant National Communications Director Bryan Lett at blett@dav.org or 859-442-2067.