

**DAV LANGUAGE GUIDE**  
**Communicating Our Mission,  
Services and Positive Impact**



# A Message From Our National Adjutant

For more than 100 years, DAV has provided life-changing support to veterans of all generations and their families. We help to deliver the resources veterans need to ensure we keep the promises our nation made to them. But in an over-communicated world, how we communicate about the organization is vital to our success and our mission as it continues into the next century and beyond.

DAV is many things to many different people. We are a charity, a service provider, a volunteer network, and a community of veterans and their advocates. Our success in branding our organization depends on the consistency of the experience we provide to our customers—the veterans we serve; the policymakers we advise; the members we inspire and the public who supports us as volunteers; voters and donors.

The messages and guidelines provided on the following pages are based on research to ensure their effectiveness in resonating with our key audiences. By integrating these messages and imagery into our external communications efforts, together we can help increase understanding of DAV's mission, services and positive impact on veterans' lives.

You will notice, if you haven't previously, that we've updated our tagline. We have received a good deal of feedback since we first adopted the logo in 2013. This shift is based on testing and feedback from our members.

The streamlined tagline, replacing "Fulfilling Our Promises to the Men and Women Who Served," more efficiently connects uninitiated audiences with our mission and answers a portion of our acronym.

We don't consider this a substantive shift. Materials or clothing that include the previous version of the tagline aren't obsolete. But over time the new tagline will replace previous versions.

As we've surpassed our centennial mark, looking ahead to the next 100 years of DAV, we need to continually look for ways to improve how we communicate DAV.

We've made a lot of progress in the years since we rebranded. Those include billions of annual impressions and a sea change in terms of how we've been rewarded through our public service announcement campaigns and other outreach.

The more you use the language and resources herein, the more consistent and effective you will be in communicating about and representing DAV and building our brand. You can go back to this resource to help guide the development of all external communications materials and to prepare to represent the organization before addressing the media, making speeches, or engaging in organizational and community activities.



Thank you for all you do for DAV.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry A. Jesinoski". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Barry A. Jesinoski  
National Adjutant

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# 1

## PURPOSE

The **language and messages in this guide** build on DAV's centurylong legacy and offer a foundation for its employees, chapter leaders and members to communicate effectively and consistently about DAV.

Using this language will help sharpen how we connect with key audiences about the great work we do every day and will increase understanding of DAV and our mission, services and positive impact. The following should help guide the development of all external communications materials, including brochures, direct mail campaigns, membership drives, videos, advertisements, media interviews and any other materials intended for veterans, members, donors and the general public. This important tool will help you apply keywords and phrases to a variety of situations and ensure we are communicating in a consistent voice that will enhance DAV's brand.

# 2

## ABOUT DAV

DAV's work is vast, so some people may be unclear about who we are and the breadth of our impact. We need to clarify our mission and better explain what we do for veterans and various segments of the public. In this section, we have provided **guidelines for effectively communicating DAV's story**.



### — DAV (DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS)

**DAV is our official name.** When needed and as appropriate to communicate with new audiences, you may use **DAV (Disabled American Veterans)** in the first reference, then DAV throughout the communication. Avoid using “the DAV” unless it precedes a DAV program or sub-entity like “the DAV Charitable Service Trust.”

### TAGLINE

**To better accentuate who DAV serves, use this tagline as appropriate.**

### MISSION STATEMENT

**DAV's mission defines what we do, why and how we do it, and how we change lives.**



DAV is dedicated to a single purpose: keeping our promise to America's veterans. We accomplish this by ensuring that veterans and their families can access the full range of benefits available to them, fighting for the interests of America's injured heroes on Capitol Hill, providing employment resources to veterans and their families, and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

### ELEVATOR SPEECH

**The elevator speech is a way to quickly communicate DAV's message and positive impact in approximately 30 seconds.**



DAV is a nonprofit that provides a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations, their families and survivors. Every year, our no-cost services help more than 1 million veterans access the benefits and health care they've earned while connecting them with meaningful employment and representing their voice on Capitol Hill. As the nation's most resourceful patriotic charity, we've focused on keeping the promise to America's veterans for more than 100 years.

## ORGANIZATION DESCRIPTION

When you have an opportunity to tell a deeper story about DAV and our work, here's a broader description for reference. Throughout this guide, general statistics are used because annual data changes frequently. Consult with the most recent DAV annual report for more up-to-date information or contact DAV National Headquarters if precise, recent figures are needed.



DAV (Disabled American Veterans) is a nonprofit that provides a lifetime of support for veterans of all generations and their families, helping more than 1 million veterans in positive, life-changing ways each year. The organization typically provides more than 600,000 rides annually to veterans needing transportation to their medical appointments and assists veterans with hundreds of thousands of benefits claims. DAV's services are offered at no cost or obligation to veterans, their families and survivors.

DAV is also a leader in connecting veterans with meaningful employment, hosting career fairs and providing resources to ensure they can enjoy the American dream that their sacrifices have made possible.

With nearly 1,300 chapters and more than 1 million members across the country, DAV empowers veterans and their families by providing valuable resources and ensuring our nation keeps the promises made to them. To learn more, visit [DAV.org](http://DAV.org).

## REFRAMING “DISABILITIES”

**It's important to broaden the way we talk about disabilities to be more inclusive of all veterans.**



Serving disabled veterans is DAV's legacy and helps distinguish our mission from that of other veterans service organizations. However, research shows that many people, including veterans and supporters, associate the word “disability” with extreme examples of injuries and illness (loss of limbs, severe traumatic brain injuries, etc.) and, for this reason, may not turn to DAV. This is why we have developed specific and intentional communications practices that allow us to talk about disabilities and the great work DAV does by portraying strength in the word “disabled,” without limiting our reach and creating misconceptions about our mission.

# 3

## DAV MESSAGE PLATFORM

Delivering consistent messages in a unified voice is critical to strengthening our brand. The following message platform will help you make more detailed points about key facets of our programs and services through simplified, uplifting and actionable language that reinforces DAV's positive impact on veterans' lives.



### A LIFETIME OF SUPPORT

- ▶ DAV's free, professional assistance helps veterans and their families get the health care, disability, employment, education and financial benefits they earned.
- ▶ In a typical year, DAV helps veterans file hundreds of thousands of claims for VA benefits and stays with them through every step of the process.
- ▶ Disabling injuries are often part of military service and can impact veterans at any stage of life, so DAV is there with support whenever they need it.
- ▶ DAV has been serving veterans for more than 100 years.



### LIFE-CHANGING SERVICES

- ▶ Each year, DAV assists more than 1 million veterans in positive, life-changing ways by helping them access the benefits and health care they earned.
- ▶ DAV helps veterans achieve personal victories—great and small.
- ▶ DAV's benefits advocates,\* who are veterans themselves, know how to navigate the VA system, help veterans obtain benefits and connect them to support they need.
- ▶ DAV's veterans advocates, on military bases across the country, provide face-to-face support to help those leaving active duty access their benefits and successfully integrate back to civilian life.
- ▶ DAV hosts career fairs across the country and online that connect veterans with employers, tools, resources and opportunities that help thousands secure meaningful employment.

*\*"Benefits advocates" is the public-facing language used for service officers.*





### **LIFE-CHANGING SERVICES, CONTINUED**

- ▶ With over 1,200 chapters and over 100 service offices across the country, DAV provides a national network of local support for veterans and their families.
- ▶ DAV volunteers are often located on-site at VA medical centers, where they provide more than a million volunteer hours per year, visiting veterans and assisting families in need.
- ▶ Each year, DAV volunteers no-cost rides to help veterans get to and from medical appointments at no cost to the veteran.
- ▶ We provide emergency grants to ill and injured veterans living in areas damaged by natural disasters.
- ▶ DAV connects homeless and at-risk veterans with care, benefits and employment opportunities.



### **COMPASSION FOR ALL VETERANS**

- ▶ No matter their age or stage of life, all veterans are important.
- ▶ Much like the bonds established during military service, DAV connects veterans of all generations, providing them with a new support system and mentorship after service.
- ▶ DAV understands the needs of veterans because DAV's leadership, benefits advocates and 1 million members are veterans themselves.
- ▶ DAV offers special assistance to the most vulnerable and overlooked veterans, including those experiencing PTSD and homelessness.
- ▶ DAV supports equitable benefits for women, minority, LGBT and other underserved veteran populations.
- ▶ DAV supports those with visible and invisible wounds from military service. We know that, with the right support, veterans can overcome any challenge.
- ▶ DAV recognizes that veterans' families may not have served, but they often sacrificed and should be supported as well.





## ADVOCATING FOR VETERANS EVERYWHERE

- ▶ DAV believes America's more than 4.7 million disabled veterans should have access to meaningful benefits and programs that address their service-connected illnesses and injuries.
- ▶ For more than 100 years, DAV has been a strong and influential advocate for veterans' rights and benefits.
- ▶ DAV fights on Capitol Hill for the rights of veterans, informing the public and lawmakers of the challenges veterans face and rallying Americans to join the cause.
- ▶ With more than 1 million members, DAV's powerful voice ensures that veterans are heard at the local, state and federal levels.
- ▶ DAV advocates for productive solutions with the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- ▶ Through DAV's efforts, legislation continues to be passed that protects veterans' benefits and rights, from addressing inequities and barriers that women veterans face accessing VA services to ensuring comprehensive assistance for family caregivers.

# 4

## COMMUNICATING WITH KEY AUDIENCES

DAV has a variety of key audiences. Research shows that some messages resonate more strongly with certain audiences. Below are examples of how to further tailor our communications with key audiences.

### KEY AUDIENCES

- ★ Veterans
- ★ Members
- ★ Potential members
- ★ Recently discharged veterans
- ★ Volunteers
- ★ Donors
- ★ Prospective donors

For select outreach

- ★ General public
- ★ Media and public service directors
- ★ Policymakers (national and local)



### VETERANS AND MEMBERS

This audience appreciates the concept of “veterans helping veterans.”



- ▶ DAV understands the needs of veterans because DAV’s leadership and 1 million members are veterans themselves.
- ▶ DAV raises public awareness about veterans’ struggles with the visible and invisible wounds of war and ensures their sacrifices are never forgotten.
- ▶ DAV helps transitioning service members access the benefits they’ve earned and connects them with employment.
- ▶ DAV fights on Capitol Hill for veterans’ rights to ensure their voices are heard by policymakers.

## POTENTIAL MEMBERS AND RECENTLY DISCHARGED VETERANS

This audience likes to hear about **personal comeback stories, victories veterans achieve and the services DAV provides to help veterans.**



- ▶ DAV helps veterans achieve personal victories—great and small. For example, when Jason, a Marine Corps veteran suffering from PTSD, became disconnected from his family and friends and eventually became homeless, DAV helped him access the care he earned and employment he needed to help him get back on his feet.
- ▶ DAV offers special assistance to the most vulnerable and overlooked veterans, including homeless veterans and those experiencing PTSD.
- ▶ DAV supports equitable benefits for women and minority veterans.
- ▶ DAV Service Officers help veterans get the benefits they earned. Last year, DAV helped veterans file more than 137,000 claims for benefits.

## VOLUNTEERS

This audience responds to messages that speak to **repaying veterans for their sacrifices.** Avoid any language that would make the public believe that being a veteran is a requirement to do one's patriotic duty.



- ▶ Supporting DAV as a volunteer is one small way to repay disabled veterans for the sacrifices and pain they've endured to protect our freedoms.
- ▶ DAV typically provides more than 600,000 rides each year at no cost to help veterans get to medical appointments. We are in constant need of more volunteers for this and other programs.
- ▶ DAV volunteers give nearly 2.5 million hours per year assisting veterans in local communities.



## DONORS AND PROSPECTIVE DONORS

This audience appreciates stories about how DAV helps veterans in positive ways.



- ▶ Supporting DAV as a donor is one small way to repay disabled veterans for the sacrifices and pain they've endured to protect our freedoms.
- ▶ DAV helps veterans achieve personal victories—great and small. For example, when a veteran suffering from PTSD became disconnected from his family and friends and eventually became homeless, DAV helped him access the care he earned and employment he needed to help him get back on his feet.
- ▶ DAV offers special assistance to the most vulnerable and overlooked veterans, homeless veterans and those experiencing PTSD.
- ▶ DAV supports equitable benefits for women and minority veterans.
- ▶ DAV provides free, professional assistance to help veterans get the health care and disability benefits they earned. In a typical year, DAV helps veterans file more than 200,000 claims for benefits.

## THE GENERAL PUBLIC, INCLUDING PROSPECTIVE DONORS

This audience responds to language that establishes a call to action about why people should support DAV. The public believes that it's the "nation's collective responsibility," not just the government's, to support veterans and make sure they receive the services they earned.



- ▶ Keeping the promise to America's veterans is the right thing to do. Regardless of your politics, our service members voluntarily put their lives on the line to ensure our safety and to protect the basic freedoms we enjoy as citizens of the United States.
- ▶ Taking care of veterans who are forever changed in service is the right thing to do. We need to keep our promise to them and provide resources and services so they can achieve their maximum potential in spite of the obstacles their sacrifices create.

# 5

## LANGUAGE GUIDANCE



### WRITING TIPS

- ▶ With few exceptions, DAV follows Associated Press style for writing and grammar.
- ▶ Always use “veterans” instead of “vets.”
- ▶ “Health care” should appear as two words.
- ▶ In its first use, DAV should appear as DAV (Disabled American Veterans).
- ▶ Use “nonprofit,” without a hyphen, rather than “not-for-profit.”
- ▶ “Benefits advocates” is preferred over national, transition, department and chapter service officer when it’s not absolutely necessary to differentiate titles.
- ▶ Veterans benefits are “earned” and not “given.” Veterans benefits should not be conveyed as entitlements or welfare. They are the primary way our nation keeps its promise to America’s veterans.

### Words to USE

- ✓ Service men and women or service members
- ✓ Veterans, service-disabled veterans
- ✓ Heroes\*
- ✓ Defenders of freedom
- ✓ Defenders of the American way of life
- ✓ Injured heroes\*

### Words to AVOID

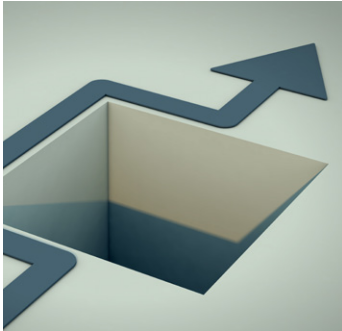
- ✗ Members of the armed forces or military
- ✗ Soldiers or warriors
- ✗ Defenders of liberty, the free world or democracy
- ✗ Disabled
- ✗ Vets

\* Use with general public and prospective supporters, not veterans.



## LANGUAGE TO AVOID

Certain language can have a negative effect on the perception of our organization and the work we do. The language below should not be used.



### ✘ Competition

- ▶ It's important that we avoid any references to being better than or critical of other veterans organizations. Veterans and prospective donors are thankful for any nonprofit organization that exists to help veterans. Any disparaging language or negative communications about other veterans service organizations is not appropriate.

### ✘ High demand for our services

- ▶ Describing the high demand for our services sends a message that we are too busy to help veterans in need, that service will be problematic or that we do not need additional donors. Avoid referencing high demand or any language that would dissuade veterans from seeking our help.

### ✘ Operating costs

- ▶ The percentage of proceeds that go directly to benefit a cause is a top factor for people when deciding which organization to support. While a remarkably small percentage of our budget goes toward operating costs, highlighting those expenses may hinder our appeal to prospective supporters.
- ▶ If pressed, this is how we address operating costs: "In a typical year, more than 85 cents out of every dollar spent goes to program services for disabled veterans and their families." You may reference this resource and contact [feedback@dav.org](mailto:feedback@dav.org) to obtain the most recent ratio for the preceding year.



# 6

## THE POWER OF PEOPLE IN PORTRAYING DAV

The **spokespeople, testimonials and imagery** used in external communications help tell DAV's story and shape perceptions of our organization. DAV strives to portray and communicate the hope, success and positive impact its services have on the lives of veterans and their families.

Research indicates that images and messages delivered by veterans who have been helped by DAV are extremely impactful. **Whenever possible, veterans should be used as spokespeople and in communications materials.** Ideally, this includes veterans with visible and invisible wounds of war. Also, our veteran spokespeople should reflect generations from all conflicts, from Korea to Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as include male and female veterans of all ethnicities. An exception to this rule is volunteers who have not served in the military but donate their time to serve those who did.

Below are guidelines for choosing spokespeople and testimonials and image examples to use in materials.



### SPOKESPEOPLE

#### Members

Veterans who have faced challenges and been helped by DAV, who can share stories of success that exemplify the work of DAV.

#### DAV Leadership

Leaders at the local and national levels.

#### Celebrities

Performers, athletes or other notable people who are veterans or have a strong and genuine connection to veterans or veteran issues.

#### DAV Ambassadors

Individuals very involved with DAV, including supporters, volunteers or donors, who can help build awareness of DAV and advocate for its support.



## TESTIMONIALS

Testimonials should focus on how DAV helps veterans achieve personal victories—great and small.

- ▶ **Share success stories** of veterans who have been helped by DAV.
- ▶ **Include testimonials from a mix of generations**, including recently discharged veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.
- ▶ **Use positive testimonials** of empowerment and overcoming obstacles. Avoid focusing on negativity or problems.
- ▶ **Present stories of hope** for all audiences that resonate and inspire confidence in DAV's services.

## IMAGERY

### Visuals That Work



- ✓ **Emphasize hope and strength:** Visuals should communicate hope and the positive impact DAV has in veterans' lives.
- ✓ **Patriotism:** Imagery should express national pride, including the American flag.
- ✓ **Diversity:** Imagery should reflect veterans of all generations who have visible and invisible injuries, including both male and female veterans of all ethnicities.

### Visuals to Avoid



- ✗ Personal pictures
- ✗ Severe distress that contradicts a message of hope
- ✗ Combat scenes



## IMAGERY EXAMPLES

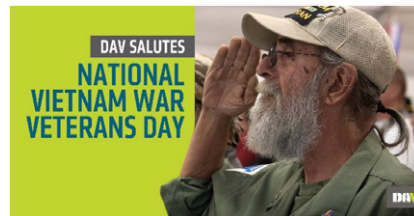
### Public Service Announcements

DAV's public service announcement (PSA) campaign, Victories for Veterans, showcases powerful stories of real veterans who found their personal victories with help from DAV. These positive stories can inspire greater support for our veterans and are strong examples of how we strive to portray DAV. These and additional PSAs can be used in external communications and outreach and can be found at [davpsa.org](http://davpsa.org). More PSA resources to solicit donated space or airtime from media outlets are available in the online PSA Toolkit.



### Social Media

DAV's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) channels are public-facing platforms where inspiring veteran stories are highlighted, veteran recognition months and holidays are celebrated, and awareness is raised about key issues to veterans. Below are examples of social media imagery.







## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ A wide variety of TV, radio and print PSAs are available at [davpsa.org](http://davpsa.org) for you to download and distribute.



- ▶ Resources to solicit donated space or airtime from media outlets for DAV PSAs are available online at [PSA Toolkit](#).



- ▶ Details on how to apply our graphic standards to communications materials are available in the [Brand Stylebook](#).

## REVIEW AND FOLLOW DAV'S SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS



- ▶ [Facebook.com/DAV](https://www.facebook.com/DAV)



- ▶ [Twitter.com/DAVHQ](https://twitter.com/DAVHQ)



- ▶ [Instagram.com/DAVHQ](https://www.instagram.com/DAVHQ)

## HAVE QUESTIONS OR REQUIRE SPECIFIC GUIDANCE?

Contact your National Communications Department at 859-442-1360 or [feedback@dav.org](mailto:feedback@dav.org).



KEEPING OUR PROMISE TO  
**AMERICA'S VETERANS**

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