Communications and Media Toolkit

Guidance for Messaging, Media Engagement, and Development of Communications

Purpose of This Media Toolkit

American Legion Posts across Florida already play an important role in their communities. This Media Toolkit is intended to support, strengthen, and amplify that work by providing practical, easy-to-follow guidance on communications, media outreach, and community engagement.

This toolkit is designed to be useful whether your Post has years of experience working with media or has never sent a press release, posted on social media, or contacted a reporter. Nothing here is mandatory. Posts should use tools that fit their size, capacity, and comfort level.

Rather than focusing on theory or technical language, this toolkit emphasizes:

- Plain language explanations of what each tool is and why it exists.
- Step by step guidance on how to use it.
- Real world examples and sample language that can be copied or adapted.

At its core, this Media Toolkit helps Posts:

- Share their story more effectively with the public.
- Increase visibility and participation in Post activities.
- Document impact for historical recordkeeping and award consideration.
- Support participation in the **Sunshine State 250 Showdown.**

Public communication is not self-promotion. It is a way to ensure that veteran service, leadership, and community impact are visible, understood, and remembered.

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Practical Notes for All Posts

This toolkit is designed to be practical, realistic, and flexible.

Who Should Handle Communications

You do **not** need a communications committee or professional staff.

In most Posts:

- One member can handle emails, social posts, and photos.
- A secondary point of contact should be identified.
- A third backup is recommended if available.
- Responsibilities may rotate between events to prevent burnout.

A personal email account and a cell phone are sufficient.

Technology Expectations

- A cell phone camera is more than adequate for photos.
- A personal email account may be used for media outreach.
- A Post Facebook page or community group post can serve as your primary online presence.
- You do not need a website, paid software, or special tools.

If Media Does Not Respond

This is extremely common.

Lack of response:

- does not mean the event failed.
- does not mean the outreach was wrong.
- does not disqualify a Post from recognition or awards.

Photos, social media posts, internal communications, and preserved documentation all serve as valid evidence of leadership and impact, and they will be considered in the scoring process.

What Success Actually Looks Like

Success includes:

- community members attending and/or learning about the event.
- volunteers returning for future activities.
- partnerships strengthened.
- photos captured and shared.
- documentation saved for awards and records.

Part I – Why Media & Promotion Matter

The 250th anniversary of the United States is a once in a generation milestone. Events held at the local level are not just activities for those who attend but also become part of Florida's historical record.

The Sunshine State 250 Showdown provides a framework for American Legion Posts to lead community engagement during this anniversary. Media coverage, photos, and public communication ensure these efforts are visible beyond the walls of the Post.

Media and promotion serve a dual purpose:

- They inform and engage the community.
- They document participation, impact, and leadership for recognition and awards.

Effective promotion helps:

- Increase attendance and volunteer participation.
- Highlight veteran leadership and service.
- Strengthen relationships with civic leaders, schools, and partners.
- Build long-term reputation and credibility for the Post.

Promotion is not about bragging. It is about ensuring that veteran-led service is seen, understood, and remembered.

Part II – Understanding & Finding Local, Regional, & Statewide Media

Not all media outlets are the same. Understanding the differences between local, regional, and statewide media helps Posts focus their outreach efforts where they are most likely to succeed and avoid unnecessary frustration.

For most Sunshine State 250 Showdown activities, local media will provide the greatest return with the least effort. Regional and statewide media may be appropriate in specific circumstances, but they are not required for meaningful impact or award consideration.

Local Media (Primary Focus)

Local media should be the starting point for every Post, regardless of size or location.

Local outlets exist specifically to cover what is happening in their community. They are far more likely to be interested in veteran-led service projects, ceremonies, and community events than larger outlets.

Local media includes:

- City or county newspapers (print or online): These outlets often publish community calendars, short articles, and photos. Many rely heavily on press releases submitted by local organizations.
- Local TV stations: Even if a reporter does not attend in person, stations often list events on their websites or use submitted photos in community segments.
- Local radio stations: Radio stations frequently promote community events, especially those involving service, veterans, or families.
- Community newsletters or hyperlocal outlets: These may include neighborhood publications, online-only news sites, or association newsletters that reach a highly targeted audience.
- City or county Public Information Officers (PIOs): PIOs manage official communications for local governments and often help share community events through municipal websites, newsletters, and social media.

These outlets are most interested in:

- Local people: Veterans, volunteers, students, families, and community leaders.

- Local service: Activities that benefit the community directly, such as cleanups, food drives, ceremonies, or educational programs.
- Local events: Events that are open to the public or involve visible community participation.
- Community impact: Why the activity matters locally, not nationally.

How to contact local media effectively:

- Visit the outlet's website and look for pages labeled "Contact Us," "Newsroom," "Submit News," or "Community Calendar."
- Use general newsroom email addresses when individual reporters are not listed. This is standard practice.
- Include clear details in your email:
    - who is hosting the event (American Legion Post [Number])
    - what is happening
    - when and where it takes place
    - why it matters locally
- Keep messages short, factual, and respectful of their time.

Local media outreach does not require follow-up calls or repeated emails. One clear message is usually sufficient.

Regional Media

Regional media outlets typically cover multiple counties or an entire metropolitan area. These outlets receive a high volume of submissions and are more selective.

Regional media outreach may be appropriate when:

- Multiple Posts are involved: Especially if the activity spans more than one city or county.
- The event is unusually large: Significant attendance, large volunteer turnout, or multi-day programming.
- The activity is unique or first-of-its-kind: Something that has not previously occurred in the area.

When contacting regional media:

- Emphasize what makes the event different from a typical local activity.
- Highlight scale, partnerships, or broader regional relevance.
- Keep expectations realistic; coverage is not guaranteed.

Statewide Media

Statewide media outlets reach audiences across Florida and typically focus on issues, events, or stories with broad statewide significance.

Statewide media should be pursued only when:

- The event is large-scale or highly visible
- The event involves significant partnerships, major organizations, or statewide leadership
- Coordination occurs with Department leadership or 1Nation

Any media outreach or public-facing messaging should be consistent with the values, intent, and purpose of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown and aligned with the mission of 1Nation.

Part III – Promotion Timeline

A Simple Plan That Works

Successful promotion follows a predictable rhythm. The objective isn't to do everything at once, but to take a few intentional steps early and repeat them consistently so the widest possible audience hears about the event, understands its purpose, and feels invited to participate.

Early planning and public notification are critical. The sooner an event is announced, the easier it is to build visibility, recruit volunteers, and keep people engaged rather than losing momentum. Volunteers who are identified and given clear roles early are far more likely to stay involved and contribute meaningfully from the start.

This timeline is designed to encourage broad participation from Post members, families, partners, and the surrounding community, and can be scaled up or down for small, medium, or large events based on each Post's capacity.

At least 6-8 Weeks Before any Event: Plan and Line Up Support

Purpose: Get organized internally before going public.

At this stage, the focus is preparation, not publicity.

Key actions:

- Confirm the event concept, date, time, and location
- Identify whether the event will involve:
    - partners (schools, civic groups, nonprofits)
    - sponsors (businesses providing food, supplies, or funding)
- Designate simple roles, such as:
    - who will send emails or media outreach
    - who will post on social media
    - who will take photos
    - who will follow up with volunteers
- 1Nation will drive volunteers to Posts, so the more lead time given, the more Posts can engage with volunteers, assign roles, and determine utilization

This model should be repeated for each event. Taking a little time here prevents confusion later.

4-6 Weeks Before the Event: Announce Publicly

Purpose: Get the event onto people's calendars.

This is when the event becomes "real" to the public.

Key actions:

- Submit the event to community calendars (city, county, newspaper, library, chamber).
- Send a press release to local media outlets and city or county PIOs.
- Post an initial event announcement on your Post's social media page.

The goal is awareness, not perfection. Larger events may require additional lead time for more awareness.

10-14 Days Before the Event: Reinforce and Invite

Purpose: Increase participation and ensure key audiences are aware.

At this point, people may have seen the event once but need a reminder.

Key actions:

- Post a reminder on social media with clear details (date, time, location)
- Personally invite:
    - partners or sponsors
    - local officials or civic leaders (if appropriate)
    - community groups involved in the activity

Personal invitations often make the biggest difference.

3–5 Days Before the Event: Media Reminder

Purpose: Help reporters decide whether to attend.

Newsrooms plan coverage days in advance. This is when a media advisory is most effective.

Key actions:

- Send a short media advisory to outlets that received the press release.
- Share a final reminder in community social media groups (following group rules).

Keep messages short and factual.

Day Of the Event: Capture the Story

Purpose: Document participation and impact.

Even if media do not attend, documentation still matters.

Key actions:

- Take photos of people participating (action shots).
- Capture a few wide shots and a few close-ups.
- If comfortable, note 1–2 short quotes from a Post leader or partner (optional).

Photos are often the most valuable output of the entire event**.**

Within 24–48 Hours After the Event: Follow Up

Purpose: Turn the event into lasting visibility.

What happens after the event is just as important as what happens before.

Key actions:

- Post photos and a thank-you message on social media.
- Email photos and a short recap (2–3 sentences) to media and PIO contacts.
- Thank volunteers directly and invite them to stay involved in future activities.

This step helps with community visibility, volunteer retention, and documentation for recognition.

Part IV – Press Releases

What a Press Release Is (Plain Language)

A press release is a short, written announcement that tells the media and the public:

- Who is hosting the event?
- What is happening?
- When and where it will take place?
- Why it matters to the community?

Think of a press release as the official public record of your event. Even if no reporter attends, a press release ensures there is a clear, accurate description of what your Post is doing as part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown.

A press release is not an advertisement. It does not need flashy language. Clear, factual, and local is best.

Why Press Releases Matter

Press releases serve several important purposes:

- They increase the chance of media coverage.
- They save reporters time by giving them direct information.
- They ensure consistent and accurate messaging.
- They create documentation for Sunshine State 250 Showdown awards.
- They provide language you can reuse on social media and community calendars.

When to Use a Press Release

Press releases are appropriate for:

- Public-facing events
- Community service projects
- Youth or family programs
- Ceremonies or commemorations
- Activities connected to the Sunshine State 250 Showdown

In most cases, a press release should be sent 2–3 weeks before the event (but alternatively can be sent following the conclusion of the event).

Who Should Handle It

- Primary communications POC writes and sends the release.
- Secondary POC should review for accuracy.
- A third backup (if available) should know where the file is saved.

What Information Must Be Included

Every press release should include:

- Event name
- Hosting organization (American Legion Post [Number])
- Date, time, and location
- Brief description of activities
- One short quote from a Post leader (optional but encouraged)
- Contact name, phone, and email

One page is ideal. Shorter is better than longer.

Press Release

TEMPLATE – Copy and Paste Text Below

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: [Name]
Phone: [Phone Number]
Email: [Email Address]

Headline: Local Veterans and Community Unite for Sunshine State 250 Showdown Event

City, FL — [Date] — American Legion Post [Number] will host a community event as part of the **Sunshine State 250 Showdown**, bringing together veterans, families, and neighbors to recognize the 250th anniversary of the United States through service, education, and civic engagement.

The event will take place on [date] at [location] and will include [brief description of activities]. The public is invited to attend.

“Our goal is to bring the community together and highlight the continued leadership and service of veterans,” said [Commander or Post Leader Name].

How to Send and Share a Press Release

Step 1: Identify Local Media

Send the press release to:

- Local newspapers (print and online)
- Local TV and radio stations
- City or County Public Information Officers (PIOs)
- Community or neighborhood news outlets

To find local media outlets and points of contact, refer to Part II of this document.

Most outlets list a general newsroom email address, which is appropriate to use.

Step 2: Send the Email

- Paste the press release text directly into the email body.
- Use a clear subject line, such as:
    - "Press Release: American Legion Post [Number] Community Event".
- Attach photos only if you already have them; otherwise, send photos after the event.

You do not need to follow up unless the event is large or time sensitive.

Step 3: Share Beyond Media

The same press release can be reused:

- Posted on your Post's Facebook page.
- Shared in local community Facebook groups.
- Sent to partners, sponsors, or civic organizations.
- Submitted to community calendars (with minor shortening).

Using the press release across multiple channels ensures consistent messaging and saves time.

Step 4: Save a Copy

Always save:

- The final press release.
- The list of outlets it was sent to.

This helps with future planning, documentation, and award submissions.

Reusing the Press Release

The same text can be:

- Posted on your Post's Facebook page.

- Submitted to community calendars.
- Shared with partners and sponsors.
- Used as the basis for social media posts.

Part V – Media Advisories

A media advisory is a short logistical notice sent shortly before an event. Its purpose is simple:

Help reporters decide whether to attend or send a camera.

It answers:

- What is happening?
- When is it happening?
- Where is it happening?
- Who is hosting?
- What visuals will be available?

Why Media Advisories Matter

Media advisories:

- Align with newsroom planning schedules.
- Make it easy for reporters to decide quickly.
- Increase the chance of on-site coverage.
- Reduce confusion about time, location, and access.

Even if media does not attend, sending an advisory demonstrates professionalism and helps build long-term relationships.

How Media Advisories Fit with Other Tools

Media advisories work together with other communications tools:

- The press release (Part IV) explains what and why.
- The media advisory explains when and where.
- A media pitch (Part VI) adds personal context or follow-up.

In most cases, Posts will:

1. Send a press release 2–3 weeks before the event.
2. Send a media advisory 3–5 days before the event.
3. Optionally follow up with a short pitch or phone call (Part VI).

When and How to Use a Media Advisory

Send a media advisory **3–5 days before the event**, after the press release has already gone out.

Media advisories are especially useful for:

- Ceremonies
- Service projects with visible activity
- Events involving youth, veterans, or public officials

Who to Send It To

Send to the **same outlets** that received the press release:

- Newsroom email addresses
- Assignment desks
- PIO offices

Media Advisory Template

MEDIA ADVISORY

What: Sunshine State 250 Showdown Community Event
Who: American Legion Post [Number]
When: [Day, Date, Time]
Where: [Exact Address]
Visuals: Veterans and community members participating in service activities
Contact: [Name | Phone | Email]

Part VI – Pitching A Story To Media

What a Media Pitch Is (In Plain Terms)

A media pitch is a short, personal message sent to a reporter or newsroom that explains *why* an event is worth covering. Unlike a press release or media advisory, a pitch focuses on the human interest and local relevance of the story.

Think of a pitch as answering the question:

Why would someone who lives here care about this?

How Media Pitches Fit with Other Tools

Media pitches work together with other outreach tools including:

- Press release (Part IV): Provides the official facts and background.
- Media advisory (Part V): Provides timing and logistics.
- Media pitch (Part VI): Provides context, personality, and relevance.

Posts do not need to pitch every event. Pitches are most effective when there is a clear community angle.

When to Use a Media Pitch

Consider using a pitch when:

- Veterans and youth are working together.
- The event has strong visuals or hands-on activity.
- Multiple Posts or partners are involved.
- The event connects to a local issue or tradition.
- An elected official, educator, or civic leader is participating.

What Makes a Story Newsworthy? Reporters are often looking for:

- People helping people
- Local leadership and service
- First-time or unique events
- Clear visuals or participation

Simple, genuine stories are often more appealing than polished marketing language.

How to Find Who to Pitch

- Start with the same outlets that received your press release.
- Look for “Reporter,” “Editor,” or “Assignment Desk” on outlet websites.
- If no individual contact is listed, use the general newsroom email.

How to Send a Pitch

- Send by email
- Keep it short (3–6 sentences)
- Mention the event date and location
- Offer to answer questions or provide photos

Sample Pitch Email (Full Draft)

TEMPLATE – Copy and Paste Text Below

Subject: Veterans and Community Serving Together for Local 250th Anniversary Event

Hello [Reporter or Editor],

American Legion Post [Number] is hosting a community event on [date] as part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown, recognizing the 250th anniversary of the United States. Veterans, families, and community partners will be working together on [brief activity].

The event highlights veteran-led service at the local level and offers strong visuals. We would welcome coverage or a calendar listing and are happy to provide additional details.

Thank you for your time, [Name] [Phone]

Following Up:

If you do not receive a response, that is normal.

- One follow-up email or brief phone call is acceptable.
- Do not follow up more than once.

Part VII – Social Media

What Social Media Is and Why It Matters

Social media is one of the easiest and most effective ways to reach people in your community. For many residents, it has replaced newspapers, flyers, and bulletin boards as the primary source of local information.

For American Legion Posts, social media:

- Reaches people who may not already be members.
- Makes veteran service visible to the broader community.
- Helps promote events and encourage participation.
- Documents activity for Sunshine State 250 Showdown recognition.

Social media does not require technical expertise.

Posts only need one platform to be effective:

- Facebook: Best overall option; widely used across age groups.
- Instagram: Best for sharing photos from events.
- X (Twitter): Useful for short updates and tagging media or officials.

Consistency matters more than volume.

What to Post

Effective posts usually answer four questions:

- Who is hosting?
- What is happening?
- When and where it will occur?
- Why it matters?

Photos of people participating are more effective than long explanations.

When to Post

A simple posting rhythm works well:

- Event announcement when the date is set.
- Regular updates on progress and/or teasers about what to expect, as desired/able by Posts.
- Reminder about one week before and day of.
- Post-event photos and thank-you message.

Sample Social Media Posts

Event Announcement
"American Legion Post [Number] is hosting a community event as part of the #SunshineState250Showdown to recognize the 250th anniversary of the United States. Join us on [date] at [location]."

Reminder Post
"One week away! We look forward to welcoming our community to our Sunshine State 250 Showdown event on [date]."

Post-Event Thank You
"Thank you to everyone who joined us in honoring the 250th anniversary of the United States. Proud to serve alongside our community."

Suggested Hashtags

- #SunshineState250
- #AmericanLegionFL
- #1Nation
- #1Nation250Showdown
- #SunshineState250Showdown
- #America250

Part VIII – Photos & Follow-Up

Photos and post-event follow-up are often the most overlooked part of event planning, and one of the most valuable. Even when no media outlet attends an event, photos and follow-up actions ensure that the work of the Post is visible, documented, and remembered.

For Sunshine State 250 Showdown activities, photos serve both an immediate purpose (public engagement) and a long-term purpose (historical recordkeeping and award consideration).

Why Photos Matter

Photos play a critical role in telling your Post's story. Strong photos often communicate impact more effectively than written descriptions alone.

Photos:

- Prove participation: They show that an event occurred, that people attended, and that activities were carried out as planned.

- Support award submissions: Photos provide visual documentation that strengthens Sunshine State 250 Showdown recognition and evaluation.
- Increase social media reach: Posts with photos consistently receive more views, shares, and engagement than text-only posts.
- Preserve a historical record: Photos become part of the visual history of how communities across Florida marked the 250th anniversary of the United States.

Even a small number of clear, well-timed photos can have a lasting impact.

Who Should Take Photos

- Designate one primary person to take photos before the event begins.
- Identify a backup in case the primary person becomes busy.
- A cell phone camera is more than sufficient; professional equipment is not required.

The goal is documentation, not perfection.

What to Photograph

When taking photos, focus on people and activity, not empty spaces.

Recommended photo subjects include:

- People participating (action shots): Volunteers working, veterans interacting, hands-on activities in progress.
- Group photos: A quick group photo at the beginning or end of the event helps capture overall participation.
- Veterans interacting with community members: Conversations, mentoring moments, or collaborative service.
- Signage or banners: Post banners, event signage, or Sunshine State 250 Showdown materials that identify the activity.

If youth are present, follow all applicable policies regarding consent and photography.

What to Avoid

Some images unintentionally weaken the story you are trying to tell.

Avoid:

- Empty rooms or empty tables: These suggest low participation even if attendance was strong at other times.
- Staged or awkward poses: Natural moments are more effective and authentic.
- Photos taken too early or too late: Take photos when activity is happening, not before setup or after cleanup.

If in doubt, take more photos than you think you need and select the best ones later.

Basic Photo Tips (No Training Required)

- Hold the phone horizontally for wider shots.
- Step back slightly to capture context, not just faces.
- Take multiple shots of the same moment; you can choose later.
- Don't worry about perfect lighting or angles; clarity matters more.

After the Event – Critical Follow-Up Steps

What happens after the event is just as important as what happens during it. Follow-up ensures the event continues to generate visibility and engagement.

Within 24–48 hours after the event:

- Post photos publicly: Share a short recap and a few photos on your Post's social media page and, where appropriate, in community groups.
- Thank volunteers and partners: A simple public thank-you helps volunteers feel valued and encourages future participation.
- Email photos and a short recap to media: Even if no reporter attended, photos may still be published online or used in follow-up coverage.
- Save photos and documentation: Store photos, press releases, emails, and notes in one folder for future reference, reporting, and award submissions.

Why Follow-Up Matters

Consistent follow-up:

- Extends the life of the event.
- Reinforces the Post's role as a community leader.
- Helps retain volunteers and partners.
- Strengthens documentation for Sunshine State 250 Showdown recognition.

Photos and follow-up are not extras — they are essential final steps that complete the story of your event.

Part IX – Writing An Op-Ed

An op-ed (short for "opinion editorial") is a short article written by a community member or organization (not a reporter) that appears in a newspaper or online news outlet. Unlike a press release, which announces an event, an op-ed explains why something matters and why the community should care.

For American Legion Posts, op-eds are an opportunity to share a veteran perspective on service, civic responsibility, and community leadership during the 250th anniversary period.

Op-eds are not required for Sunshine State 250 Showdown participation, but when used appropriately, they can significantly elevate visibility, credibility, and understanding of a Post's role in the community.

Purpose and Intent of an Op-Ed

The purpose of an op-ed is to:

- Provide context and meaning, not just information.
- Explain why veteran-led service matters to the community.
- Connect local events to broader civic values.
- Share perspective, not promote attendance.

An op-ed is not an advertisement and should not read like a press release. It should feel thoughtful, reflective, and grounded in community experience.

When an Op-Ed Is Most Effective

Op-eds are best used:

- Before a major milestone: To set the tone for why the 250th anniversary matters locally.
- After a successful event: To reflect on what the event demonstrated about service, unity, or civic engagement.
- When explaining why veteran-led service matters: Especially for audiences who may not be familiar with the American Legion's ongoing role.

Posts should not feel pressure to write multiple op-eds. One well-timed op-ed is more effective than several rushed ones.

Who Should Write the Op-Ed

- The Post Commander or another Post leader is often the best author.
- Co-authored op-eds (e.g., a veteran and a community partner) are also appropriate.
- Writing does not need to be polished or academic; clear and sincere is better.

If writing feels intimidating, start by explaining the idea verbally and then write it down in simple language.

Op-Ed Structure (What Editors Expect)

Most local outlets prefer op-eds that are:

- 500–700 words
- Community-focused, not national or partisan
- Written from a personal or local perspective
- Clearly tied to local relevance

A simple structure that works well:

1. Opening paragraph: Introduce the local moment or milestone and why it matters.
2. Middle section: Explain the role of veterans, service, or the Post in the community.
3. Local connection: Reference a specific Sunshine State 250 Showdown event or activity.
4. Closing reflection: End with a forward-looking message about community, service, or unity.

What to Include (and What to Avoid)

Include:

- First-person perspective ("we," "our community," "as veterans")
- Specific local references (city, county, Post number)
- Plain language and real examples
- Why the issue matters now

Avoid:

- Political endorsements or partisan commentary
- Calls for donations
- Promotional language ("join us," "register now")
- Long historical lectures

The goal is understanding, not persuasion.

How to Submit an Op-Ed

1. Visit the outlet's website.
2. Look for pages labeled:
    - "Opinion"
    - "Submit an Op-Ed"
    - "Letters & Commentary"
3. Follow word count and submission instructions exactly.
4. Include:
    - Author name and title
    - Post affiliation
    - Phone number and email

Most outlets will respond within a few days if they plan to publish it. If they don't respond, that's normal; no follow-up is required.

Full Sample Op-Ed (Ready to Adapt)

Title: Why Local Service Still Matters as Our Nation Marks 250 Years

As our community marks the 250th anniversary of the United States, it is worth remembering that our nation's strength has always depended on local service and civic engagement, not just moments in history books, but the everyday actions of neighbors helping neighbors.

As members of American Legion Post [Number], we see this firsthand. Veterans understand that service does not end when a uniform comes off. It continues in how we support our communities, mentor young people, and step forward when help is needed.

This year, our Post participated in the Sunshine State 250 Showdown, an initiative encouraging veteran-led community engagement across Florida. Through service projects and civic activities, we were reminded that the values that shaped our nation 250 years ago such as responsibility, cooperation, and shared purpose are still very much alive at the local level.

Our recent event in [City/County] brought together veterans, families, and community members to work side by side. It wasn't about ceremony or recognition. It was about showing what civic unity looks like in practice.

In a time when national conversations often feel divided, local action matters more than ever. When veterans lead by example, communities respond because service is something people recognize and respect.

As we look ahead to the remainder of this historic anniversary period, we hope more communities will see veteran-led service not as something from the past, but as a living tradition that continues to strengthen our neighborhoods today.

Why Op-Eds Matter for the Sunshine State 250 Showdown

When used thoughtfully, op-eds:

- Add depth and meaning to community events.
- Reinforce the leadership role of American Legion Posts.
- Create lasting written records tied to the 250th anniversary.
- Complement media coverage, photos, and documentation.

An op-ed is not required, but when done well, it can become one of the most impactful pieces of communication a Post produces.

Part X – Community Partnerships & Sponsorships

Community partnerships and sponsorships can dramatically increase your event's impact without increasing the burden on your Post's volunteers or budget. Many Posts already have relationships in the community (restaurants, schools, faith groups, civic associations, small businesses) but may not realize those connections can translate into meaningful support for a Sunshine State 250 Showdown activity.

This section explains the difference between a partnership and a sponsorship, why each matter, and exactly how to secure them in practical terms even if you've never done this before.

Important note: Your Post is still leading your local activity, and 1Nation remains the leading organization behind the overall Sunshine State 250 Showdown. Community partners and sponsors are supporters of your Post's local execution and community engagement.

Why Partnerships and Sponsorships Matter

Partnerships and sponsorships help Posts:

- Reduce cost (food, supplies, venue support).
- Increase turnout and volunteer engagement.
- Add legitimacy (community leaders/businesses endorsing participation).
- Expand reach (partners share the event to their networks).
- Strengthen award documentation by showing collaboration and community impact.

Even a small in-kind partner (like donated water) can improve participant experience and increase the quality of the event.

Plain-Language Definitions

Partnership (In Plain Terms):
A partnership is when a local organization works alongside your Post to help the event happen or increase its impact. Partnerships often involve shared planning, shared volunteers, shared space, or shared outreach.

Sponsorship (In Plain Terms):
A sponsorship is when a local business or organization supports your event with money or in-kind resources, usually in exchange for simple recognition (for example: their logo on a flyer, a thank-you post, or a sign at the event).

Co-Sponsor (In Plain Terms):
A co-sponsor is a type of partner that is publicly listed as helping host or support the event. Co-sponsors are typically organizations (not individuals) and may provide volunteers, promotion, or

resources. “Co-sponsor” language can be helpful when an organization wants to be visibly associated with the activity.

What Partnerships Can Look Like (Examples)

Partnerships may include:

- Food support
  - A local restaurant provides lunch trays or boxed meals
  - A grocery store donates water, snacks, or ice
  - A coffee shop provides coffee for volunteers
- Supplies and materials
  - A hardware store donates gloves, trash bags, rakes, paint, or lumber
  - A print shop donates flyers, banners, or signage
  - A landscaping company provides mulch or tools
- Shared venues or space
  - A school lets you use a parking lot or auditorium
  - A church provides meeting space or staging area
  - A city parks department supports space reservation
- Volunteer support
  - A JROTC unit helps with manpower
  - A Scout troop provides volunteers
  - A Rotary Club helps staff check-in tables
- Community credibility and access
  - City hall promotes the event in a newsletter
  - A chamber of commerce shares it in their calendar
  - A local museum or historical society participates in a ceremony segment

What Sponsorships Can Look Like (Examples)

Sponsorships may include:

- Financial sponsorship
  - $250–$1,000 to cover supplies or rentals
  - A small “event underwriting” donation to cover food or printing
- In-kind sponsorship (often easier than cash)
  - Food donated (equivalent value)
  - Supplies donated
  - Equipment loan (tents, tables, audio speakers)
- Service-based sponsorship

- A local photographer donates time
- A business provides a volunteer team
- A company prints signage at cost

Most first-time sponsorships for Posts start as in-kind because businesses are more comfortable donating products/services than writing a check.

Step-by-Step: How to Get a Partner or Sponsor (Even if You've Never Done This)

Step 1: Decide What You Need (Make a Simple List)

Before you contact anyone, write a quick list of needs. Examples:

- Food for 25 volunteers
- Water/ice
- Gloves/trash bags
- Flyers
- Use of a venue/parking lot
- A small budget for supplies ($200–$500)

This prevents awkward conversations where someone asks, "What do you need?" and you're unsure.

Step 2: Identify 10 Local Targets (Start with "Warm" Options)

Use existing connections first:

- Businesses that members already patronize
- Friends/family of business owners
- Chamber of Commerce member directory
- Restaurants near the event location
- Hardware/grocery stores
- Local civic clubs, schools, faith organizations

If you don't have existing relationships, that's okay. You can cold call, but start local and simple.

Step 3: Choose the Right Ask (Make It Easy to Say Yes)

People say yes when:

- The ask is specific
- The cost is reasonable
- The benefit is clear
- It aligns with community pride or veterans' support

Instead of “can you sponsor us?” say:

- “Would you be willing to donate 3 trays of sandwiches?”
- “Could you provide 2 cases of water and a bag of ice?”
- “Could you print 50 flyers at cost or donate them?”

Specific asks remove confusion.

Step 4: Contact Them (Email or Phone Is Fine)

You don’t need perfect language. You need clarity and respect for time.

Best practice:

- Email first (if available)
- Follow up with one phone call (optional)
- If someone says no, thank them and move on

Step 5: Confirm Details in Writing

Once someone says yes, confirm:

- What they are providing.
- When and where it will be delivered.
- Who your Post contact is.
- What recognition they will receive (if any).

Even a simple email thread is enough.

Step 6: Recognize Them Publicly (Keep It Modest and Professional)

Sponsors/partners usually want simple recognition:

- A thank you social media post
- A logo or name on a flyer (optional)
- A sign at a table (“Lunch provided by ____”)
- Verbal thanks during remarks

Recognition is important because it:

- Encourages future support
- Increases goodwill
- Helps the business justify participation

What “Recognition” Can Look Like (Examples)

Options include:

- Social media: “Thank you to [Business] for supporting our Sunshine State 250 Showdown event by donating lunch for volunteers.”
- Event signage: small sign at food table.

- Flyer line: “Community partner: [Business Name]”.
- Photo moment: quick picture with owner/manager holding a thank-you certificate (optional).
- Thank you notes after the event.

Keep recognition consistent with Post standards and avoid implying official endorsements beyond factual support.

Sponsorship/Partnership Outreach Scripts

TEMPLATE – Copy and Paste Text Below

Sponsor/Partner Email (General – In-Kind Ask)

Subject: Community Support Request – American Legion Event in [City]

Hello [Name],

I'm reaching out on behalf of American Legion Post [Number] in [City]. We're hosting a community service event as part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown recognizing the 250th anniversary of the United States.

We are looking for local partners to help make the event successful. Would [Business Name] be willing to support by providing [specific item/service] (for example: lunch for volunteers / water / supplies / printing)?

The event is on [date] at [location] from [time–time]. We would be glad to recognize your support with a thank-you post and signage at the event.

Thank you for considering supporting local veterans and community engagement.

Sincerely,
[Name]
American Legion Post [Number]
[Phone] | [Email]

Quick Phone Script (Cold Call)

"Hi, my name is [Name], I'm with American Legion Post [Number] in [City]. We're hosting a community event as part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown, and I wanted to see if you'd be willing to help with a small local sponsorship; something like [specific ask]. Who would be the best person to speak with about that?"

Follow-Up (If They Say Yes)

Subject: Thank You – Confirmation of Support

Thank you again for agreeing to support our Sunshine State 250 Showdown event. Here are the details we have:

- Support provided: [item/service/value]
- Delivery/arrival: [date/time/location]
- Post point of contact: [name/phone]
- Recognition: [thank-you post / signage / mention]

We truly appreciate your support for local veterans and community service.

What a Partnership/Sponsorship "Looks Like" in Your Event Materials (Examples)

If the sponsor donated food:

- Flyer: "Lunch provided by [Business Name]"
- Social post: "Thank you to [Business Name] for donating lunch for our volunteers!"
- Event: sign at the food table
- After-action: include a photo of volunteers eating + caption

If the partner provided volunteers:

- Press release: "Community partners include [Organization], supporting volunteer participation."
- Social post: tag partner and thank them
- Photo: group photo with partner volunteers

Practical Guardrails (So Posts Don't Get into Trouble)

- Don't promise things you can't deliver (large logo placements, guaranteed media coverage).
- Keep recognition factual ("provided water," "donated supplies").
- Avoid political affiliation or endorsements in sponsor messaging.
- Ensure all arrangements align with:
    - Post policies
    - American Legion guidelines
    - local ordinances/permit requirements

- any event-site rules

If unsure, keep it simple and coordinate with Post leadership.

Simple Partnership/Sponsorship Tracker (Recommended)

Maintain a basic tracking sheet with:

- Organization name
- Contact person + phone/email
- What they agreed to provide
- Delivery details
- Recognition promised
- Follow-up completed (yes/no)

This reduces confusion and ensures no one is forgotten.

Sample Outreach Email

Hello [Business Name],

American Legion Post [Number] is hosting a Sunshine State 250 Showdown event and is seeking community partners to support this effort. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss ways to collaborate.

Thank you,
[Name]

Part XI – Virtual Information Sessions: Q&A

Overview

To support participating Posts and ensure a clear understanding of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown, 1Nation will host multiple virtual informational sessions that include live question and answer opportunities. These sessions are intended to supplement the written Rules & Regulations and Toolkits and provide Posts with an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and hear guidance directly from the 1Nation team.

Planned Sessions

1Nation will host, at a minimum, the following virtual sessions:

- March 9, 2026
- March 31, 2026

The sessions will be held at 6:00 PM (ET) on the dates listed above. Registration links and access details will be shared in advance via email, the Contest Platform, 1Nation social media channels (including Facebook), and on the 1Nation website (https://www.1nation.org/).

Additional Information

Posts are encouraged (but not required) to attend at least one session, particularly if they are new to event planning or have questions about participation. Based on participation levels, demand, and feedback from Posts, 1Nation may schedule additional informational sessions as needed throughout the Contest period. Posts are responsible for reviewing all official Contest materials and complying with submission, approval, and participation requirements regardless of attendance.

Part XII – Advertising Events To The Public

Advertising your event does not require money, professional marketing experience, or paid ads. Many of the most effective ways to reach the public, especially at the local level, are free, community-based, and already trusted by residents.

This section explains where to advertise, how to do it, what to say, and what success realistically looks like, even for Posts that have never promoted an event beyond word of mouth.

The goal of public advertising is simple:

- Let people know the event exists.
- Make it easy to understand what it is.
- Make it clear that the public is welcome.

Advertising also supports Sunshine State 250 Showdown goals by increasing participation, visibility, and documentation of community engagement.

Why Public Advertising Matters

Even well-planned events can struggle if people don't know they're happening.

Public advertising helps:

- Increase attendance and volunteer turnout.
- Reach people who are not already connected to the Post.
- Demonstrate openness and community leadership.
- Strengthen documentation for awards and recognition.

- Reinforce the Post's role as a trusted civic organization.

You do not need to advertise everywhere. A few well-placed notices are usually enough.

Free Advertising Options (Overview)

The following channels are widely available, free to use, and appropriate for community-focused events:

- Community calendars
- Libraries
- Schools
- Faith organizations
- Local Facebook groups

Each option reaches a slightly different audience, and Posts can choose the ones that best fit their event and community.

Community Calendars

What they are:
Community calendars are event listings hosted by:

- City or county governments
- Local newspapers
- Chambers of Commerce
- Libraries
- Tourism or community websites

These calendars are specifically designed to promote local events.

Why they matter:

- Many residents check them when looking for things to do.
- Media outlets often pull events directly from calendars.
- They provide a permanent, searchable record of the event.

How to find them:

- Search: "[City] community calendar"
- Check the websites of:
    - City hall
    - County government
    - Local newspapers
    - Chamber of Commerce
    - Public library

Look for links labeled:

- “Community Calendar”
- “Events”
- “Submit an Event”

What to submit (typical fields):

- Event name
- Date and time
- Location
- Short description (2–4 sentences)
- Contact email or phone number
- Hosting organization (American Legion Post [Number])

Example calendar description:

American Legion Post [Number] will host a Sunshine State 250 Showdown community event on [date] at [location]. The public is invited to participate in activities recognizing the 250th anniversary of the United States and veteran-led community service.

Libraries

Public libraries are trusted community hubs and often serve:

- Families
- Seniors
- Students
- Civic-minded residents

Ways libraries can help:

- Posting flyers on bulletin boards.
- Including events in newsletters.
- Sharing events on library websites or social media.

How to approach them:

- Call or email the library’s front desk or community outreach staff.
- Ask if they accept flyers or event submissions.
- Provide a simple one-page flyer or event description.

Schools

When schools are appropriate:

- Events involving youth, families, or education
- Service projects where students can volunteer

- Ceremonies or educational programs

Ways schools can help advertise:

- Sharing event details in newsletters
- Posting on school or PTA websites
- Sharing with student organizations or service clubs

How to approach schools:

- Contact the main office or guidance counselor
- Ask about community bulletin policies
- Be clear that the event is:
    - Non-political
    - Community-focused
    - Open to families

Do not expect every school to participate; policies vary widely.

Faith Organizations

Why faith organizations matter:

Churches, synagogues, mosques, and other faith groups often:

- Communicate weekly with members.
- Maintain event boards or newsletters.
- Encourage volunteerism and service.

Ways they can help:

- Announcements in bulletins
- Posting flyers
- Sharing in email newsletters or social media

How to approach them:

- Contact the office administrator or community outreach lead
- Provide a short, written description
- Respect any content or posting guidelines

Focus on service and community impact, not ideology.

Local Facebook Groups

Why Facebook groups are powerful:

Local Facebook groups are often the fastest and most effective way to reach residents.

Examples include:

- “What’s Happening in [City]”
- “[City] Community Events”
- Neighborhood association groups

How to find them:

- Search Facebook for your city or neighborhood name
- Look for groups with active posts and clear rules

How to post effectively:

- Read group rules before posting
- Keep posts short and friendly
- Clearly state:
    - Who is hosting
    - What the event is
    - When and where
    - That the public is welcome

Example Facebook group post:

American Legion Post [Number] is hosting a Sunshine State 250 Showdown community event on [date] at [location]. We’re inviting neighbors to join us in recognizing the 250th anniversary of the United States through service and civic engagement. All are welcome.

Avoid posting repeatedly or spamming multiple groups at once.

How Much Advertising Is “Enough”?

For most Posts:

- 1–2 community calendar listings
- 1–2 Facebook group posts
- 1 additional channel (library, school, or faith organization)

Quality and clarity matter more than volume.

What Success Looks Like

Success means:

- People show up who otherwise wouldn’t have known.
- Community members recognize the Post’s leadership.
- The event is visible and documented.
- Volunteers and partners feel informed and included.

How This Supports the Sunshine State 250 Showdown

Public advertising:

- Increases participation.
- Strengthens community reach.
- Demonstrates openness and leadership.
- Supports award documentation.
- Reinforces the Post's role during this historic anniversary.

Even simple, free advertising efforts contribute meaningfully to the overall impact.

Sample Community Calendar Text

American Legion Post [Number] will host a Sunshine State 250 Showdown community event on [date] at [location]. The public is invited.

Part XIII – Internal Communications

Internal communication is one of the most important elements of successful Sunshine State 250 Showdown participation. While media and public outreach focus on visibility, internal communication determines whether volunteers, partners, and potential members stay engaged or quietly disappear.

Simply put:

The fastest way to lose a volunteer, recruit, or partner is to leave them in the dark.

This section explains who needs to be kept informed, how often, by whom, and using what tools, even for Posts with limited time or experience.

Why Internal Communication Matters

Strong internal communication:

- Keeps volunteers motivated and informed.
- Builds trust and reliability.
- Converts one-time volunteers into repeat volunteers.
- Turns interested community members into potential Legion members.
- Strengthens relationships with partners and sponsors.
- Reduces confusion and last-minute issues.
- Improves event execution and follow-through.

Poor internal communication often leads to:

- Volunteers not showing up because details were unclear.
- People assuming events were canceled.
- Sponsors feeling ignored or undervalued.
- Lost momentum between events.

Internal communications should cover multiple groups, not just Post leadership:

- Post members: Especially those helping plan or execute events.
- Volunteers: Including first-time volunteers recruited through 1Nation or local outreach.
- Potential members / recruits: People who show interest through volunteering or attending events.
- Community partners: Organizations providing space, volunteers, or coordination.
- Sponsors: Businesses or groups donating food, supplies, or funding.

Each group may need slightly different information, but all need timely updates.

Coordination with 1Nation (Important Context)

As part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown:

- 1Nation will lead a volunteer drive once Posts submit event ideas and are approved.
- Volunteers may be routed to Posts through centralized outreach.

Because of this:

- Posts must have at least one primary and one secondary Point of Contact (POC).
- These POCs are responsible for:
    - Responding to inquiries
    - Providing updates
    - Confirming logistics
    - Maintaining engagement

Central recruitment only works if Posts actively communicate once people raise their hand.

Designating Points of Contact (POCs)

Every participating Post should identify:

- Primary POC
    - Handles emails and volunteer inquiries.
    - Shares updates and reminders.
    - Acts as main coordinator.
- Secondary POC
    - Backup if the primary is unavailable.
    - Helps with follow-ups or logistics.
- *(Optional)* Tertiary POC

- Useful for larger events or multiple activities.

POCs do not need to do everything themselves, they just need to ensure communication happens.

What Information People Expect (and Need)

Volunteers and partners don't need constant messaging, but they do need clarity.

At minimum, people want to know:

- Is the event still happening?
- When and where should I arrive?
- What should I bring or wear?
- Who do I contact with questions?
- What happens next after the event?

Recommended Communication Cadence (Simple and Effective)

You do not need daily emails. A simple cadence works well:

- Initial confirmation: When someone signs up or expresses interest.
- Pre-event update (Weekly or bi-weekly updates and check-ins beginning at least 3-4 weeks out; general reminder 5 days out requiring confirmation of participants): Confirm date, time, location, and expectations.
- Final reminder (1–2 days out): Quick logistics reminder.
- Post-event follow-up (within 48 hours): Thank you, photos, and next steps.

Planning Calls and Coordination Meetings

For events with multiple moving parts, short planning calls can make a big difference.

When to hold a call:

- If multiple partners or sponsors are involved.
- If the event has multiple activities or stations.
- If volunteers are unfamiliar with the Post.

Best practices:

- Keep calls to 20–30 minutes
- Share an agenda in advance
- Focus on:
    - Roles and responsibilities
    - Timelines
    - Points of contact
- End with clear next steps

Assigning Roles and Tasks

Clear task assignments prevent last-minute scrambling.

Examples of simple assignments:

- Volunteer check-in
- Food pickup or setup
- Media/photos
- Partner coordination
- Cleanup

Assignments do not need to be formal; even verbal confirmation helps.

Best Practices for Internal Communication

- Respond quickly, even if it's just "We received your message and will follow up soon."
- Be clear and concise.
- Repeat key details because people often miss messages.
- Thank people often.
- Close the loop after events.

Consistency matters more than perfection.

Sample Initial Volunteer Confirmation Email

Subject: Thank You for Signing Up – Sunshine State 250 Showdown Event

Hello [Name],

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with American Legion Post [Number] as part of the Sunshine State 250 Showdown.

Our event will take place on [date] at [location]. We'll be sharing more details soon, including arrival time and what to expect.

If you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to reach out.

We appreciate your willingness to support our community and look forward to working with you.

Best regards,
[Name]
American Legion Post [Number]
[Phone] | [Email]

Sample Pre-Event Update Email

Subject: Event Details – Sunshine State 250 Showdown

Hello everyone,

We're looking forward to our Sunshine State 250 Showdown event on [date].

Details:

- Location: [address]
- Arrival time: [time]
- What to bring: [if applicable]
- Contact on site: [name/phone]

Thank you again for being part of this effort. We look forward to seeing you.

Best, [Name]

Sample Post-Event Follow-Up Email

Subject: Thank You for Volunteering with American Legion Post [Number]

Thank you for volunteering at our Sunshine State 250 Showdown event.

Your time and effort made a real difference, and we're grateful for your support. We've included a few photos below and will be sharing more updates soon.

If you're interested in staying involved in future activities, we'd love to keep in touch.

Thank you again, [Name]

How Internal Communication Supports the Sunshine State 250 Showdown

Strong internal communication:

- Keeps volunteer pipelines active.
- Supports recruitment and retention.
- Improves event execution.
- Strengthens partnerships and sponsorships.
- Reinforces professionalism and trust.
- Increases the likelihood of long-term engagement and membership.

Internal communication is not busy work but rather serves as the connective tissue that turns participation into sustained impact.

Part XIV – Legal & Compliance Disclaimer

This toolkit is provided for informational purposes only. Each Post is responsible for complying with all applicable laws, ordinances, permits, insurance requirements, and American Legion Constitution and Post Bylaw's. Posts should consult appropriate authorities when necessary.