THE AMERICAN LEGION

ACCESS GRANTED

ASSISTING TROOPS WITH TRANSITION AND BENEFITS

How American Legion posts can help servicemembers at military installations

Commander
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DoD POLICY ALLOWS VETERAN AND MILITARY SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS GREATER ACCESS

Helping servicemembers transition from the military world to civilian life is among the top priorities of The American Legion. The Department of Defense (DoD) has made access to troops and their families easier than ever.

At the urging of The American Legion and other organizations, DoD approved two policy memoranda that direct military services to allow veteran and military service organizations (VSOs/MSOs) greater and more standardized access to installations, their troops and families.

The American Legion worked with DoD staff to shape the policy to increase the presence of service officers at installations and to create greater troop and military family awareness of American Legion support programs, such as Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW), transition assistance, career support and more.

American Legion departments, districts and posts are encouraged to use this publication as a resource for working with military installations to help troops ease the transition from military to civilian life.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LEGION TO CONNECT WITH SERVICEMEMBERS

While DoD does not allow membership recruiting on its installations, the easier access policy allows the Legion to display its programs and demonstrate its advocacy for veterans to prospective members. Legion posts can host informational and approved fundraising events to leverage the opportunities that DoD policy provides.

Reconnecting: The best avenue for renewed engagement is at the grassroots level. Using this publication, post, district and department commanders should establish good working relationships with installation commanders. It's important to make arrangements far in advance to ease the burden on the installation staff and maximize impact.

Informational events: The Legion is allowed to host informational events geared toward educating servicemembers about the many services it provides, including education, career guidance, benefits and health-care assistance.

Fundraising: Raising funds for the organization is not allowed on DoD installations, but raising funds for programs that provide support to servicemembers and their families is allowed. One example would be a 5K race sponsored by a department or post that raises money for an American Legion program, such as Operation Comfort Warriors or National Emergency Fund.

KEY SERVICES TO PROMOTE

Transition assistance

- Education information
- Employment assistance and information
- VA disability claims advice and resources

Troop assistance

- Benefits guidance
- Health-care information
- Financial services
- Operation Comfort Warriors

Family and youth services

- Family Support Network and Temporary Financial Assistance
- American Legion Auxiliary outreach with on-base aid organizations such as Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

VA CLAIMS DEVELOPMENT

According to the law, DoD installation commanders must permit volunteers who are accredited by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) from VA-approved VSOs such as The American Legion to function at military installations for the purpose of providing representation services and other assistance for transitioning servicemembers. As a matter of policy, accredited volunteers are to be treated in the same manner as paid full-time and part-time accredited service officers.

DoD also laid out other points that are designed to remove "unnecessary barriers and inconsistencies" in dealing with nonprofit organizations. Here is what it means to American Legion personnel:

1. Installation commanders must provide available space and associated services — such as office furniture, equipment and existing utilities — on military installations without charge to VSOs/MSOs so that the organizations can provide VA-accredited representation services to servicemembers.
2. All requests and decisions on installation access and use of space or logistical support will be made in writing.
3. Training and education will be provided in regular pre-command, judge advocate and public affairs officer training courses to educate DoD personnel on the procedures and support.

4. DoD will use consistent, fair and standard procedures to process requests for installation access and space.
5. Installation commanders are authorized to use official command communication channels, including Transition Assistance Program materials, to inform servicemembers of the availability of services and support on the installation provided by VSOs, MSOs and military-supporting nonprofits.

RESTRICTIONS

- Fundraising for the organization is not allowed. (However, VSOs may hold fundraising events for programs that support servicemembers and their families.)
- Recruiting for the organization is not allowed.
- Internal, administrative or back-office functions of the organization are not allowed.
- Access to installation services, such as the Exchange or Commissary, is not granted.
- The organization may not offer services that require a service, admission or other fee.
- Servicemembers may not be compelled to participate.
- Installation commanders will neither create nor develop space, make major renovations to existing space, or allocate space in decommissioned facilities or those scheduled for demolition.
- Installation commanders retain the authority to revoke access or withdraw the provision of available space and associated services when warranted.

REQUESTING ACCESS

Organizations must request access and support for events in writing. You can request access for multiple or recurring events in a single letter. To ensure installation commanders have all of the necessary information to approve your request, follow these steps.

1. Write a letter requesting access to the installation. Be sure to include the date, time, specific event and purpose of the event. Installation commanders will be checking to make sure your event provides a beneficial service for servicemembers and their families, so make sure that also is clear. (For an example of a request letter, visit the link found on page 8.)
2. If not previously done, complete a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the installation commander. (For an example of an MOU, visit the link found on page 8.) Replace the yellow highlighted text in the template with the information relevant to your request. The blue highlighted text is for the installation commander to fill out.
3. When applicable, do background checks for employees and volunteers who will be interacting with military children under the age of 18 in DoD-operated, DoD-contracted or community-based programs.
4. Gather a copy of your most recent IRS exemption determination letter, a copy of your Form 990 and organizational documents that describe the nature, function, objectives and membership eligibility of the organization.
5. Send your request letter, a copy of the MOU, a copy of the IRS exemption determination letter, a copy of Form 990 and the appropriate organizational documents, as well as any necessary background checks, to the commander of the installation which you are asking to access.

Once an installation commander receives your request, he or she will respond in writing with either an approval letter or a disapproval letter. If the MOU is new, both parties will need to sign and date it. The DoD has given installation commanders a checklist for considering requests, as well as examples of an approval letter and a disapproval letter. (For the checklist and letter examples, visit the link found on page 8.)

CHECKLIST: OBTAINING ACCESS

- ☐ Have you made initial contact with the installation commander through a phone call, in-person meeting or e-mail for the purpose of establishing a rapport and discussing the Access Granted: Assisting Troops with Transition and Benefits Program and Department of Defense memorandum regarding installation access and support services to VA-recognized veterans service organizations/military service organizations?
- ☐ Have you submitted your written request for installation access to the installation commander?
- ☐ Does your written request explain how The American Legion's programs and services provide a valuable service for servicemembers and their families?
- ☐ Does your written request include your plan for assisting transitioning servicemembers?
- ☐ Does your written request include date(s), alternate date(s), time(s), specific event(s) and purpose of event(s)?
- ☐ Have you considered the installation's mission requirements before writing your written request?
- ☐ Did you include a copy of The American Legion's IRS Form 990, known as Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax, with your written request?
- ☐ Have you provided the installation commander with The American Legion's most recent IRS exemption determination letter?
- ☐ Have you provided your contact information, The American Legion's website, Twitter and Facebook information to the installation commander?
- ☐ Does your written request contain a summary of The American Legion's key services and programs?

TEMPLATES AND TOOLS

Request letter template: Example of how to write a letter requesting access to the installation to host an event.

MOU template: Example of how to complete a Memorandum of Understanding between the installation and post.

DoD approval letter: Example of what a letter approving access to the installation may look like.

DoD disapproval letter: Example of what a letter denying access to the installation and why may look like.

Checklist for installation commanders: Example of items installation commanders will look for before considering a request for access to the installation.

You can find all of the tools and templates on The American Legion's National Security web page, www.legion.org/security/resources.

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