



LANGUAGE GUIDE

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MESSAGE FROM OUR NATIONAL ADJUTANT

In 2010, when we celebrated the 90th anniversary of our founding, we discussed our needs as an organization to evolve and grow in order to meet the challenges of a new century. After more than nine decades of service to the men and women who have served this country, DAV continues to be the premiere veterans service organization in our nation.

A recent research initiative conducted through our Communications Department confirmed we are highly regarded and respected. It also demonstrated the critical need for us to engage our members and the public while distinguishing our organization as one focused foremost on service and advocacy.

Research and internal feedback showed us that the public, including veterans, has misconceptions about the word “disability”—a word that’s at the core of our mission. This means there is a need to update how we communicate who we are, and how we serve all veterans.

As we embark on this new path, remaining true to our charge, we have refreshed our principal communications. To more concisely communicate our mission, we have created a new logo, mission statement and tagline. It is our expectation that our efforts to enhance DAV’s brand will generate greater public engagement, support and understanding of the valuable services our organization provides to veterans and their families. We seek to do this with careful planning and abiding respect of our past.

This Language Guide summarizes our process to date, introduces our new logo and tagline, and offers new language, which better serves our organization as we prepare for a new century of service and advocacy.

Sincerely,

J. MARC BURGESS
National Adjutant

MORE THAN 90 YEARS OF SERVICE

Introduction

The new language and messages presented in this language guide build on the more than 90-year legacy of DAV. The phrases and language will help sharpen our external communications to effectively communicate with a broader audience about the great work we do.

All the messages presented were tested for their effectiveness. By integrating these messages into our external communications efforts, together we can help to effectively increase awareness about DAV.

This new, unified message guides the development of all external communications materials, including brochures, direct mail campaigns, membership drives, videos, advertising, media interviews and any other external communications materials intended for our members, donors and the general public. This important tool helps you apply these words/phrases to a variety of situations in a credible way.

The messages presented in this guide outline ways to effectively communicate with our primary target audiences: the general public, including supporters, and veterans—members and non-members (see Target Audiences section). These messages are intended for general external communications efforts, including publications, direct mail pieces, media interviews and advertising campaigns. Please note that in some instances, such as a fundraising campaign, messages may need to be adjusted for the particular audience.

DAV COMMUNICATIONS PROPERTIES

Overview

Today, after nine decades of service to the men and women who served this country, we are at a significant crossroads. To continue our important work, it will be necessary to build our membership and broaden awareness about our organization to a larger public.

However, the extent of our work is so vast that many are unclear about all that we do. We need to clarify our mission and better explain what we do—to veterans and the general public.

Our message and external communications are in greater need of clarity and uniformity. We must be consistent in how we communicate as an organization. We also need to tailor our communications depending on whom we are addressing.

The public, including veterans, have misconceptions about the word “disability,” a word that’s at the core of our work. This means that we need to readdress how we talk about our services and the language we use to make our case. We need to soften the use of the word “disability” to broaden the perceived reach of our organization beyond the most disabled.

As we embark on this new communications path, we have refreshed our principal communications, including adopting our acronym instead of our name. We have also created a new tagline, mission statement and elevator pitch. It’s our hope that this clarity of message will generate greater public engagement, support and understanding of the valuable services our organization provides to veterans and their families.

Acronym

By using our acronym moving forward, as other companies have done (i.e., AARP, KFC), we can rely on the tagline and mission statement to better define our work and communicate the broad scope of our services without alienating key target audiences.

Tagline

To better explain the broad spectrum of people we serve, we have updated our current tagline for the organization:

Fulfilling Our Promises to the Men and Women Who Served

Mission Statement

The new mission statement speaks to a collective goal for veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. It also broadens our mission to include all the veterans (not just the most severely disabled) who are touched by our work. It clarifies how we fulfill our mission through the use of succinct and action-oriented words. Moving forward the new statement replaces the opening paragraph of our existing mission statement:

We are dedicated to a single purpose: empowering veterans to lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity. 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; and educating the public about the great sacrifices and needs of veterans transitioning back to civilian life.

(The listed bullets we currently use remain the same.)

Elevator Pitch

The elevator pitch is an example of how to communicate our work when you need to offer further explanation beyond the mission statement. This “30-second” pitch can be used in print or other communications and expands on the work that we do.

Veterans making the transition back to civilian life must overcome many obstacles, and we provide programs that address their overall health and well-being. Beyond helping hundreds of thousands of veterans from all eras each year access available government benefits, we fund rehabilitation and counseling programs, link veterans to job training programs and work to address homelessness. All DAV services are free.

With the strength of 1.2 million members behind us, we represent the voices of ill and injured veterans before Congress.

THE LANGUAGE OF DISABILITIES

Overview

As we embrace a new message that will help us better define our work with key target audiences, it is important that we begin to move away from the language of disabilities. We currently use “disabled” in every communication, such as our name, tagline, brochures and direct mail pieces. This booklet outlines alternative ways to talk about our work without relying so heavily on the use of the word “disabled.” The language presented will help us communicate about the work we undertake on behalf of veterans with disabilities without distancing our target audiences.

Moving Away from Ineffective Language

Example of how to talk about language of disabilities:

- DAV serves all injured and ill veterans, whether their injury is visible or not. Any assistance we can give to our veterans is so important.
- DAV is dedicated to the service our nation’s injured heroes. The men and women who live with illnesses and injuries related to their military service. Some injuries are visible, and some, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, are not. We are here to help them all, regardless of the severity or degree of their injuries.
- For veterans only, add: You are not alone.

DAV MESSAGE

Overview

DAV messages help clarify and better explain our organization to target audiences. Overall, they will help us communicate with clear and concise language about the positive impact we have in the lives of veterans. The messages convey hope and build the case about our credibility and effectiveness.

We have included some basic message principles and themes to help our organization deliver a consistent and impactful message to our target audiences. To be most effective, it will be important to consistently integrate these messages across communications channels.

In this section, we have provided guidelines on how to communicate who we are (beyond our mission statement and elevator pitch), what we do and how to talk about the people we serve.

The messages that follow are effective with the general public and veterans (members and non-members).

DAV: Telling the Story

The DAV message and how we talk about our organization will pivot around the following guidelines and themes:

Empowering veterans—DAV empowers veterans to take back their lives, return to normalcy and, ultimately, live high-quality lives.

Reframe our disabilities language—Broaden the way we talk about ourselves as an organization. In society, the word “disabilities” polarizes and stigmatizes the people we are trying to help. Prospective donors look for organizations with a broader perceived reach, and prospective members could assume DAV is not for them.

Tell stories of hope and success—Strong family bonds and individuals overcoming great odds speak more about the efficacy and need for our services than dwelling on tragic stories and helplessness.

Clear and consistent—Simplify how we talk about our organization and our work. It’s also important that we collectively communicate with one voice in a consistent manner.

DAV: Who We Are

To help differentiate ourselves and the important work we do from other organizations, it will be important to highlight the following in our communications efforts:

Our substantive work: We empower veterans to lead healthy and successful lives.

Record of success: We help many thousands of veterans overcome great odds as they try to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives.

Effectiveness advocating for veterans on Capitol Hill: We fight for veterans' rights by making sure their voice is heard in Congress.

History and legacy: We help hundreds of thousands of veterans each year obtain needed benefits through 100 offices throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

HOW WE TALK ABOUT OURSELVES:

- Use the language of **heroes**.*
- Speak to our collective goals for veterans (lead high-quality lives with **respect and dignity**).
- Speak to a **larger population of veterans** who are touched by our work, not just the most severely injured.
- Describe what we do in **simple**, more **action-oriented** terms.

**Use heroes for communications targeting general public and supporters, not veterans.*

Language to Describe DAV

- We are committed to the service of those who sacrificed in our defense.
- We are a strong and influential advocate for veterans' rights.
- We are empowering our veterans to live high-quality and fulfilled lives.
- We are fulfilling our promises to the men and women who served.
- We understand the needs of today's veterans, because we are an organization of veterans helping veterans.
- We are dedicated to addressing the needs of all injured and ill veterans, whether their injury is visible or not.*
- We have a proven track record of success; helping hundreds of thousands of veterans each year obtain needed benefits and services.
- We offer services for veterans and their families that address their overall health and well-being, from their physical to their emotional to their financial health.
- DAV is dedicated to the service of our nation's injured heroes. We are here to help them and to ensure they are not alone on their road to recovery.
- We are dedicated to a single purpose: ensuring men and women who served in our military lead high-quality lives with respect and dignity.
- We are standing up for veterans, because they stood up for us.
- We are here to help veterans overcome great odds as they try to regain a sense of normalcy.

*Only use for veterans.

The People We Serve

When talking about the people our organization serves, here are some guidelines:

- **Language of strength:** Move away from language of disabilities.
- Refer to **veterans across all eras and generations**, not just the most recent conflicts.
- We serve **veterans AND their families**.

Words to **USE:**

- Service men and women
- Veterans
- Heroes*
- Defenders of freedom
- Defenders of the American Way of Life
- Injured heroes*

Words to **AVOID:**

- Members of the Armed Forces, Military or Soldiers
- Warriors
- Defenders of liberty, the free world, or democracy
- Disabled

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

DAV: What We Do

To cut through the language clutter about the many services DAV spearheads, here is a simple list that can be used to describe our services in a succinct way.

LANGUAGE ON WHAT WE DO (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE):

1. We provide free, professional assistance to veterans of all generations in obtaining VA and other government benefits earned through service.
2. We help returning veterans transition back to civilian life by linking them with services that address their physical, emotional and financial needs.
3. We fight for the rights of ill and injured veterans on Capitol Hill.
4. We founded a PTSD program now being used by the VA.
5. We provide transportation for veterans who need help getting to and from medical appointments.
6. We link service-injured veterans to job training and job assistance programs.
7. We fund rehabilitation programs for veterans with severe disabilities.
8. We give emergency grants to ill and injured veterans living in areas damaged by natural disasters.
9. We help homeless veterans by providing food and shelter while connecting veterans to medical care, benefits counseling and job training.
10. We host recreational programs, which bring veterans together.

Call to Action

WHY SUPPORT DAV?

Collective Responsibility & Right Thing to Do

To establish a call to action on why people should support DAV, it's important to talk about the collective responsibility that private citizens can play in ensuring veterans have access to needed resources. The public believes that it's the "nation's collective responsibility," not just the government's, to ensure returning veterans receive the services they need.

It is also seen as the "right thing to do" instead of a duty. Please note that we have included language on effective ways to make a call to action with the general public and prospective funders in the target audience section.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

Fulfilling promises is the right thing to do. Regardless of your politics and whether you agree with our government's foreign policy decisions, our service men and women voluntarily put their lives on the line to ensure our safety, to protect the basic freedoms we enjoy as citizens of the United States.

What is right for our nation and our citizens is to take care of those who served and sacrificed for our collective freedom. We do this by never forgetting the sacrifices of the men and women who served. We do this by keeping our promise to them: to provide the resources and services they need to enjoy the best quality of life possible, as they make the difficult transition back to civilian life.

WHY CHOOSE DAV?

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

No other organization has helped more veterans lead successful and healthy lives. Each year we help hundreds of thousands of veterans obtain government benefits earned through service. We provide much-needed help finding good jobs, a place to live and quality health care. We bring together veterans struggling with physical or emotional injuries to share their experiences as part of the healing process. We are here to help veterans overcome great odds as they try to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives.

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVENESS

PRIMARY MESSAGE

- **We serve hundreds of thousands of veterans each year from roughly 100 offices nationwide.**

ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVENESS

SECONDARY/SUPPORTING MESSAGES

- We have been around for nearly a century.
- 1.2 million members.
- We wrote the book on service officer training. Our veterans advocates, who themselves served, undergo an accredited 16-month education program and receive ongoing training to serve as a valuable resource to help veterans with benefits issues.

**CALL
TO ACTION**

WHY CHOOSE DAV?

Veterans Helping Veterans

The message that our organization is made up of veterans helping veterans so that they don't have to go it alone is extremely effective. Veterans are encouraged that they are getting help from people who fully understand the difficulties they face. The message of "not having to go it alone" resonates with veterans and the public. The fact that we are an organization made up of veterans helping fellow service members in their journey toward healing bolsters this concept of not having to go it alone. For specific examples on effective language for veterans, see *the veterans target audience section*.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

We are a strong and influential advocate for veterans and fight on their behalf to ensure they receive the full range of services and protections they deserve. We do this by providing free, professional assistance to all veterans and their families in obtaining VA benefits and advocating for the rights of ill and injured veterans on Capitol Hill. And we do it all for free, without any government funding.

We have a proven track record of results. We help hundreds of thousands of veterans each year obtain needed benefits through 100 offices throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico and mobile service units which go out to rural communities. No other organization has helped more veterans lead high-quality lives after service than ours.

We're effective because we've been doing this for 90-plus years and because our team are all veterans themselves. They're not only good at what they do, they understand better than anyone else the unique and pressing needs facing veterans returning home who must learn to live with illnesses or injuries related to their service.

Talking About Our Work

Creating success stories for veterans and, in the short term, helping them “return to normalcy” or “take back their lives.”

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

Each year, DAV helps hundreds of thousands of veterans obtain government benefits they deserve because of their service. We provide much-needed help finding good jobs, a place to live and quality health care. We bring together veterans struggling with physical, mental or emotional injuries to share their experiences as part of the healing process. We are here to help veterans overcome great odds as they try to **regain a sense of normalcy and take back their lives.**

DAV meets the needs of people returning from service and not just a specific illness or injury.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

We respond not just to the needs of veterans returning home, but to the needs of their entire families. And we provide services that not only address physical injuries, but that also address the needs of the whole person returning home, from their physical to their emotional to their economic well-being. **We empower veterans to lead fulfilled, high-quality lives.**

TARGET AUDIENCES

Overview

Although the language presented in the message portion was effective with all the target audiences, the order of how we present our services should change depending on whom we are addressing.

As an organization, it's important to be consistent in how we talk about what we do. However, we can adapt which services to highlight with different target audiences.

In this section, we have outlined some guidelines on how to tailor our communications based on what issues and services are most important to the general public/donors and veterans (our members and prospective members).

Veterans (including our members) believe readjusting to civilian life and unemployment as the most important issues or problems that veterans face when transitioning back to life after service. Benefits assistance, medical assistance and financial/emotional help are the most important services to provide veterans transitioning back to life at home and their families. Therefore, our communications efforts that reach veterans, the public and our members should highlight our services that fit into these categories.

Veterans

Benefits assistance, medical care and financial/emotional help were considered the most important services to provide veterans transitioning back to life at home and their families. Therefore, our communications efforts that reach veterans and our members should highlight our services that fit into these categories.

ADVOCACY LANGUAGE:

Advocacy is an extremely important piece of what we do for veterans and DAV members. After all, it is essential to veterans that they have a voice and representation before Congress. DAV members want to be part of an organization that advocates for veterans benefits. They also want to be a part of an organization that is effective in Washington and that will fight to ensure veterans' rights are protected, now and in the future.

Therefore, communications aimed at veterans should focus on the following services:

1. We help returning veterans transition back to civilian life by linking them with services that address their physical, emotional and financial needs.
2. We link service-injured veterans to job training and job assistance programs.
3. We provide free, professional assistance to veterans of all generations in obtaining VA and other government benefits earned through service.
4. We provide transportation for veterans who need help getting to and from medical appointments.
5. We fight for the rights of ill and injured veterans on Capitol Hill.
6. We are a strong and influential advocate for veterans' rights. We fight for veterans' rights on Capitol Hill, promoting policies which ensure veterans and their families can live with respect and dignity. When our leaders testify before Congress, policymakers listen, not just because we've been around for more than 90 years, but because we are backed by our members – 1.2 million veterans – a voice that policymakers cannot ignore.

ESTABLISHING A NEED WITH VETERANS AND PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

- Our men and women returning home from service face obstacles others simply can't fathom in their daily lives. They must find jobs in a difficult economy; re-learn how to relate to their families after having been away for long periods of time; or find housing. Accessing basic services and health care can be daunting. And as many veterans struggle to regain a sense of normalcy, they must start the long and often difficult process of healing and rehabilitation so they can begin to rebuild the lives they once knew. And DAV is here to help them every step of the way.
- DAV assists with more than 300,000 claims a year before the VA, and our help is free. You don't need to be a member to qualify for assistance. With more than 1.2 million members behind us, we have been serving our nations, injured for more than 90 years. It's not how long we've been around or the size of our membership that makes us so good at what we do, it's because our service officers have been in your seat. They have all served, and they have sacrificed for our country. They too have faced the daunting task of trying to re-enter and adjust to civilian life. And they were helped along the way by an experienced member of the DAV team, and now they want to give back. They are veterans who want to support other veterans. They are veterans who want to help create success stories like theirs in their own communities.
- It is a confusing world for veterans re-entering civilian life after years of service. Most civilians can't begin to understand. But there's help right in your own communities. These are professionals, veterans themselves, who can help you access the benefits you deserve – from health benefits to economic assistance and job training. You should never have to go it alone. DAV service officers understand your needs. They are here to help you through the sometimes difficult process of re-engaging and rebuilding lives after service. And they will be there for you in the long haul—not just next week or next month but for however long it takes you to regain a sense of normalcy and well-being in your life.

General Public

Our research revealed that in establishing the need (talking about need) for supporting DAV and the work we do, our messages also need to focus on the positive impact our services and organization are having on the lives of veterans (this shows our effectiveness as an organization and boosts confidence in our work).

The new language and messages build on DAV's more than 90+-year legacy. The phrases and language help us communicate more effectively with a broader audience about the great work we do.

ESTABLISHING A NEED:

Why the General Public Should Support DAV

The general public (including prospective donors) identified the financial, emotional and health needs of returning veterans as the most important issues that veterans face when they transition back to life after service. These included PTSD, access to health care, homelessness and employment.

Therefore, communications aimed at the general public (including prospective donors) should focus on the following services:

1. We help returning veterans transition back to civilian life by linking them with services that address their physical, emotional and financial needs.
2. We ensured the nation first recognized post-traumatic stress, developed the primary treatment program the VA uses today and have advocated for veterans with mental health challenges for more than a half century.
3. We link service-injured veterans to job training and job assistance programs.
4. We help homeless veterans by providing food and shelter while connecting veterans to medical care, benefits counseling and job training.
5. We give emergency grants to ill and injured veterans impacted by natural disasters.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE:

Establishing a Need with the General Public

When service men and women are overseas fighting for our country, all they want is to come home. But when our heroes return, many with life-altering mental and physical injuries, coping with the realities of daily life is more of a challenge than before. The number of disabled veterans grows daily and their needs are immense: homelessness, severe trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder. Our job is to make the transition easier, to pay respect to the men and women who deserve our help in their time of need.



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