

YOU MATTER

**Every Legionnaire. Every Veteran. Every
Family. Every Community. Every Day.**



The Department of Minnesota
Strategic Membership Plan
2026–2027

**Prepared for
The American Legion
Department of Minnesota**

**Prepared by
James Olson
Department Membership Director
2026-2027**

Dedication

Dedicated to the Legionnaires of the Department of Minnesota—past, present, and future—whose quiet acts of service strengthen veterans, families, communities, and the enduring mission of The American Legion. May this guide inspire leaders to build a stronger Legion by remembering that every Legionnaire, every veteran, every family, and every community matters.

Foreword

We cannot change yesterday's membership report.

We can change tomorrow's.

It begins with one conversation.

One invitation.

One Buddy Check.

One volunteer.

One leader.

One Legionnaire.

One veteran.

Because when one person matters...

Everyone benefits.

You Matter.

Every Legionnaire.

Every Veteran.

Every Family.

Every Community.

Every Day.

Preface

The 2026–2027 Department of Minnesota Strategic Membership Plan is founded on a simple belief: membership is about people. Every Legionnaire represents a life of service and an opportunity to strengthen the mission of The American Legion. This plan is designed to help leaders recruit, retain, mentor, and inspire Legionnaires with purpose throughout the membership year.

Introduction

This Strategic Membership Plan provides a practical framework for strengthening membership across the Department of Minnesota during the 2026–2027 membership year. It emphasizes intentional leadership, welcoming culture, and sustainable growth while supporting the Department Commander's theme:

You Matter.

Every Legionnaire. Every Veteran. Every Family. Every Community. Every Day.

The plan is intended to help Department, District, County, and Post leaders work together toward a common goal: strengthening The American Legion by strengthening relationships and developing engaged Legionnaires.

Membership Is Our Mission

"Membership is the means by which our mission endures."

Purpose

This section establishes the leadership philosophy for the Strategic Membership Plan. Membership is not an end in itself—it is the foundation that enables The American Legion to serve veterans, their families, and communities.

Membership Is More Than a Number

Every membership application represents a veteran choosing to continue serving as a Legionnaire. Every renewal reflects a Legionnaire's continued commitment to our mission. Strong membership enables advocacy, youth programs, community service, camaraderie, and the continued success of every Post.

Leadership Insight

The best membership leaders invest first in relationships. When people feel welcomed, valued, and included, recruitment and retention become natural outcomes.

Minnesota Best Practice

Create a year-round engagement plan that welcomes every new Legionnaire, assigns a mentor, and invites participation within the first 90 days.

Action Checklist

- Review your Post's Legionnaire welcome process.
- Contact five Legionnaires to thank them for their service.
- Identify one veteran to personally invite to a meeting.
- Discuss the **You Matter** philosophy at your next leadership meeting.

Summary

Membership is a commitment to people and purpose. By placing relationships before numbers, leaders strengthen both their Posts and The American Legion's mission.

Understanding Today's Membership Landscape

"Leaders make better decisions when they understand the environment they serve."

Purpose

This section helps Legion leaders understand today's membership environment, identify opportunities, and build a foundation for sustainable growth.

The Membership Landscape

Membership trends reflect changing veteran demographics, community expectations, and volunteer availability. Understanding these realities allows leaders to plan proactively rather than reactively.

What Thriving Posts Have in Common

Successful Posts consistently welcome new Legionnaires, communicate regularly, provide meaningful opportunities to serve, and develop future leaders.

Leadership Insight

Numbers tell part of the story; conversations with Legionnaires tell the rest. Measure both participation and membership.

Minnesota Best Practice

Conduct an annual membership review that examines renewals, transfers, new Legionnaires, participation, and outreach goals.

Membership Health Checklist

- Review renewal rates.
- Identify Legionnaires who have become inactive.
- Set realistic recruiting goals.
- Assign follow-up responsibilities.
- Celebrate milestones.

Summary

Understanding today's landscape equips leaders to make informed decisions and prepares them for the recruitment and retention strategies presented in the next chapter.

Building a Culture of Belonging

"People stay where they know they matter."

Purpose

This section explains how intentional leadership creates a welcoming culture that strengthens recruitment, retention, and long-term Legionnaire engagement.

Creating the First Impression

Every interaction with a prospective or new Legionnaire shapes their perception of the Post. Hospitality, clear communication, and personal introductions should be consistent parts of every meeting and event.

From Membership to Engagement

Signing an application is the beginning of a relationship. Invite new Legionnaires to serve on committees, participate in projects, and contribute their skills.

Leadership Insight

Recognition and appreciation are powerful retention tools. A sincere thank-you often has more impact than a formal award.

Minnesota Best Practice

Assign each new Legionnaire a sponsor or mentor who checks in during the first 90 days and introduces them to fellow Legionnaires and volunteer opportunities.

Action Checklist

- Personally greet every visitor.
- Follow up with new Legionnaires within one week.
- Celebrate Legionnaire milestones.
- Ask Legionnaires how they would like to serve.
- Evaluate whether every meeting is welcoming to first-time attendees.

Summary

A culture of belonging does not happen by accident. It is created through intentional leadership, consistent communication, and genuine care for every Legionnaire.

Recruiting with Purpose

"The most effective invitation is personal, sincere, and rooted in service."

Purpose

This section provides practical strategies for recruiting eligible veterans by building authentic relationships and sharing the continuing mission of The American Legion.

Recruitment Begins with Relationships

Successful recruiting is built on conversations, not campaigns. Legionnaires should identify eligible veterans in their workplaces, neighborhoods, faith communities, and volunteer organizations, then invite them personally.

Communicating the Mission

Prospective Legionnaires are more likely to join when they understand how The American Legion advocates for veterans, mentors youth, strengthens communities, and provides opportunities for continued service.

Leadership Insight

Every Legionnaire is a recruiter. Equip Legionnaires with a clear, confident message about why they belong and why others should join.

Minnesota Best Practice

Develop a year-round recruiting calendar that includes community events, veteran outreach, family activities, and follow-up after every contact.

Recruitment Action Checklist

- Identify five prospective Legionnaires.
- Make personal invitations.
- Follow up within one week.
- Welcome every guest at meetings.
- Track contacts and outcomes for continuous improvement.

Summary

Purpose-driven recruitment focuses on people rather than quotas. By connecting veterans to meaningful service and a welcoming community, Posts build sustainable membership growth.

Retention Through Meaningful Engagement

"Legionnaires remain where they are valued, involved, and connected to a purpose."

Purpose

This section focuses on retaining Legionnaires by creating meaningful opportunities to participate, lead, and serve. Retention is achieved through relationships, recognition, and consistent engagement.

Engagement Is the Key to Retention

Renewals are the result of an outstanding Legionnaire experience. Posts that communicate regularly, invite participation, and recognize contributions build lasting commitment.

Creating Opportunities to Serve

Every Legionnaire has unique skills and interests. Leaders should intentionally match Legionnaires with committees, events, mentoring opportunities, and community service projects where they can make a difference.

Leadership Insight

Retention is a year-round responsibility. Do not wait until renewal season to reconnect with Legionnaires.

Minnesota Best Practice

Develop a Legionnaire engagement calendar that includes personal outreach, volunteer opportunities, educational programs, family events, and recognition throughout the year.

Retention Action Checklist

- Contact Legionnaires who have not attended recently.
- Welcome every new Legionnaire personally.
- Recognize volunteer contributions regularly.
- Survey Legionnaires about their interests.
- Celebrate anniversaries and milestones.

Summary

Strong retention grows from a culture where every Legionnaire knows they are appreciated, needed, and connected to the mission. When Legionnaires feel they matter, they are far more likely to remain engaged for years to come.

Developing Leaders for Tomorrow

"Leadership is not inherited—it is intentionally developed."

Purpose

This section emphasizes the importance of identifying, mentoring, and preparing future leaders so every Post can sustain its mission for generations.

Building a Leadership Pipeline

Strong Posts deliberately identify Legionnaires with interest and potential, then provide opportunities to learn, serve, and lead through progressively greater responsibilities.

Mentorship in Action

Experienced Legionnaires play a vital role by sharing knowledge, encouraging participation, and helping emerging leaders gain confidence through real experience.

Leadership Insight

The best succession plans begin long before an office becomes vacant. Leadership development is a continuous process.

Minnesota Best Practice

Invite newer Legionnaires to serve on committees, attend district training, and shadow current officers before asking them to accept elected positions.

Leadership Development Checklist

- Identify future leaders.
- Pair mentors with new volunteers.
- Encourage training attendance.
- Delegate meaningful responsibilities.
- Recognize leadership growth.

Summary

The future of every Post depends on leaders who are prepared, supported, and inspired to serve. Investing in Legionnaires today ensures The American Legion remains strong tomorrow.

Communicating the Mission

"People support a mission they understand and a story they can share."

Purpose

This section demonstrates how effective communication strengthens membership by building awareness, fostering trust, and inspiring veterans, families, and communities to engage with The American Legion's mission.

Telling the Legion Story

Every Post has stories of service, sacrifice, and impact. Sharing those stories through conversations, newsletters, social media, local media, and community events helps others understand the value of becoming a Legionnaire.

Communicating with Legionnaires

Consistent communication keeps Legionnaires informed and connected. Regular updates, recognition of volunteers, and timely reminders encourage participation and reinforce that every Legionnaire matters.

Leadership Insight

Communication is most effective when it is personal, consistent, and authentic. Listen as carefully as you speak.

Minnesota Best Practice

Develop an annual communications calendar that coordinates membership campaigns, community service projects, patriotic observances, and recognition events across multiple communication channels.

Communication Checklist

- Maintain an up-to-date contact list.
- Publish a regular newsletter or email update.
- Share Legionnaire success stories.
- Recognize volunteers publicly.
- Invite feedback and respond promptly.

Summary

Strong communication builds stronger relationships. By clearly sharing the Legion's mission and celebrating the Legionnaires who make it possible, leaders strengthen engagement, recruit new Legionnaires, and reinforce a culture where every Legionnaire knows they matter.

Strengthening Communities Through Service

"When a Post serves its community well, its community learns the value of The American Legion."

Purpose

This section explores how visible, meaningful service strengthens community relationships, supports veterans and their families, and strengthens membership by demonstrating The American Legion's enduring mission.

Service as the Foundation of Visibility

Communities support organizations they see making a positive difference. Service projects, patriotic observances, youth programs, and veteran assistance demonstrate the Legion's mission every day.

Building Community Partnerships

Partnerships with schools, civic groups, businesses, first responders, faith communities, and other veteran organizations expand outreach and strengthen local impact.

Leadership Insight

Authentic service creates lasting trust. Recognition follows genuine commitment to others.

Minnesota Best Practice

Develop an annual community engagement calendar that coordinates service projects, veteran outreach, youth activities, and public events.

Community Engagement Checklist

- Identify service priorities.
- Build community partnerships.
- Invite Legionnaires and families to volunteer.
- Share stories of impact.
- Review and improve projects annually.

Summary

Visible, mission-focused service strengthens communities, builds public confidence, develops Legionnaire pride, and creates opportunities for sustainable membership growth.

Measuring Success

"What gets measured with purpose can be improved with purpose."

Purpose

This section helps leaders establish meaningful measures, evaluate progress, and create a culture of continuous improvement that strengthens membership and leadership across every Post.

Measuring What Matters

Membership totals are important, but they are only one indicator of success. Leaders should also evaluate Legionnaire engagement, volunteer participation, leadership development, community service, communication effectiveness, and Legionnaire satisfaction.

Using Data to Improve

Review membership reports regularly, celebrate accomplishments, identify trends early, and use objective information to guide decisions rather than assumptions.

Leadership Insight

Metrics should encourage learning, not assign blame. Honest evaluation creates opportunities for growth.

Minnesota Best Practice

Conduct a quarterly leadership review using membership data, engagement indicators, and progress toward annual goals to identify priorities for the next quarter.

Continuous Improvement Checklist

- Review membership reports.
- Compare progress with annual goals.
- Celebrate successes.
- Identify improvement opportunities.
- Adjust plans and communicate next steps.

Summary

Organizations that learn continuously remain strong. By measuring meaningful outcomes and adapting with purpose, Posts position themselves for long-term success while reinforcing that every Legionnaire contributes to the mission.

Sustaining Momentum and Building a Lasting Legacy

"Success is not a single achievement—it is the result of consistent leadership over time."

Purpose

This section helps leaders sustain momentum, build resilient membership programs, and create a lasting legacy that strengthens The American Legion for future generations.

Maintaining Forward Momentum

Membership growth requires consistent attention throughout the year. Celebrate achievements, review goals regularly, and continue engaging Legionnaires through meaningful opportunities to serve.

Creating a Legacy of Leadership

Lasting success is measured not only by today's accomplishments but by the leaders, traditions, and culture that are passed to the next generation of Legionnaires.

Leadership Insight

Momentum grows when leaders recognize progress, communicate optimism, and keep the mission at the center of every decision.

Minnesota Best Practice

Conduct an annual strategic planning session that reviews accomplishments, identifies lessons learned, and establishes priorities for the coming membership year.

Legacy Action Checklist

- Celebrate milestones.
- Document successful practices.
- Mentor future leaders.
- Update strategic goals annually.
- Keep the mission visible in every activity.

Summary

The strongest Posts are those that continually invest in Legionnaires, preserve institutional knowledge, and remain committed to serving veterans and communities. Sustained leadership creates a legacy that endures.

Leading Through Change

"Honor tradition, embrace innovation, and never lose sight of the mission."

Purpose

This section equips Legion leaders to navigate change with confidence while honoring the traditions that define The American Legion. It encourages thoughtful innovation that strengthens leadership, service, and membership.

Embracing Positive Change

Communities, technology, and veteran demographics continue to evolve. Effective leaders adapt their methods while remaining faithful to the Legion's constitutional principles and enduring mission.

Encouraging Innovation

Innovation often begins with listening. Invite ideas from Legionnaires of every generation, evaluate new approaches carefully, and remain willing to improve proven practices.

Leadership Insight

Successful organizations preserve their values while adapting their methods. Tradition and innovation are partners, not competitors.

Minnesota Best Practice

Establish an annual innovation discussion where officers and Legionnaires identify one or two practical improvements that can strengthen communication, outreach, or Legionnaire engagement.

Innovation Checklist

- Listen to Legionnaire ideas.
- Pilot new initiatives.
- Evaluate results objectively.
- Share successful practices.
- Preserve traditions that strengthen the Legion's identity.

Summary

Leaders who embrace thoughtful change position their Posts for continued success while honoring the legacy entrusted to them. Innovation guided by purpose ensures The American Legion remains relevant for future generations.

You Matter: The Call to Continue the Mission

"The future of The American Legion will always be written by those who choose to serve."

Purpose

This concluding section brings together the leadership principles presented throughout this Strategic Membership Plan and challenges every Legionnaire to continue the mission with purpose, compassion, and unwavering commitment.

A Legacy Worth Continuing

For more than a century, The American Legion has strengthened veterans, families, and communities through service, advocacy, and patriotism. Every generation inherits that legacy and accepts the responsibility to carry it forward.

Every Legionnaire Matters

Membership is ultimately about people. Every Legionnaire contributes unique experience, talent, and perspective. Leaders who value every Legionnaire create Posts where people are welcomed, developed, and inspired to serve.

Leadership Insight

The greatest legacy a leader leaves is not a title or an award, but the people they encouraged, mentored, and prepared to lead after them.

Minnesota Best Practice

End each membership year by recognizing volunteers, celebrating accomplishments, thanking every Legionnaire, and sharing a renewed vision for the year ahead.

Final Leadership Challenge

- Thank someone who inspired your service.
- Invite a veteran to join the mission.
- Mentor an emerging leader.
- Strengthen your Post through consistent service.
- Remember every day: You Matter.

Final Reflection

The work of strengthening The American Legion is never truly finished. Every conversation, every act of service, every new Legionnaire, and every returning Legionnaire helps preserve the mission for future generations. May this Strategic Membership Plan encourage leaders to serve with humility, courage, and hope—always remembering that every Legionnaire, every veteran, every family, and every community matters.

Overall Summary

The future of The American Legion will not be determined by membership reports alone. It will be determined by the Legionnaires who choose to welcome, mentor, encourage, and develop others every day. When we invest in Legionnaires, strengthen our Posts, and remain faithful to our mission, membership growth becomes the natural result. Together, we will ensure that The American Legion continues to serve veterans, families, communities, and our nation for generations to come.

For God and Country: A Final Charge to Legion Leaders

Leadership in The American Legion is measured not by titles, but by lives touched through service. Carry this plan forward with humility, courage, and dedication. Welcome every veteran, develop every leader, strengthen every Post, and remember that every conversation is an opportunity to demonstrate that people matter.

Every Legionnaire. Every Veteran. Every Family. Every Community. Every Day.

For God and Country.