LARGE LOCATIONS PLANNING GUIDE
(5000+ VETERANS)

Wreaths Across America
2023
(Contributions by Brenda Kaesler, LC for Miramar National Cemetery)
Planning the wreath laying ceremony for a large location takes a team of volunteers! It’s important to start your planning early in the year so that your efforts during “season” can be more focused on the event itself.

- **Start by creating a task list with check-in dates.** Then create your team of support and delegate tasks!

- **Regularly communicate with Sponsorship Groups** to encourage their participation all year round, involve them on Wreath Day, and thank them for their support.

- **Do outreach with local business to secure Corporate Sponsors for both veteran wreaths and in-kind donations** of supplies/equipment you may need for your event.

- **Customize your WAA page** with specifics for your event so that your community knows exactly what to expect, where to be, and when to be there. Page Alerts are a great tool to use!
Tasks to Delegate

**Organize the list of Grave Specific Requests**, line up help to place those wreaths, and communicate arrangements with families who are placing wreaths for their loved ones.

**Gather in-kind donations** for chairs, sound system, shuttles, water/refreshments, printing, sanitary needs, stones for markers with the Star of David emblem, waste receptacles for wreath clean up, etc.

**Plan the ceremony details**, which may include a master of ceremonies, speakers, sound system, music, color guard, ceremonial wreath placement, programs, etc.

**Arrange for help with unloading and counting boxes of wreaths upon delivery**, then submitting the Delivery Confirmation Form for WAA.

**Collaborate with cemetery staff** to decide which sections to cover (if not full coverage) and determine how many wreaths will be staged for each section.

**Decide on a plan for staging and distributing the wreaths fairly**. Assign volunteers to oversee each section to ensure proper wreath placement protocol is followed.

**Coordinate day of logistics** such as seating, parking and traffic control, creating ease of access for attendees, sound, trash clean-up, volunteer management, etc.

**Plan ahead for wreath clean up**, make arrangements for disposal/recycling of the wreaths, set the Wreath Retirement date with cemetery staff and line up volunteers to help.
CEREMONY DETAILS

Ceremony Details

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the Ceremony logistics.

- Think about where your ceremony will be held. Can everyone in attendance see and hear clearly? Borrow a sound system to help amplify the volume and refrain from holding your ceremony inside an enclosed space that limits the number of people who can watch it. Provide seating for those who may not be able to stand for an extended time.

- Line up your speaker early and make sure to select someone who will not be controversial. Print and use the updated Ceremony Script, found on the Volunteer Resource Page.

- Reach out to the USO or Red Cross to ask if they will provide a trailer for water and first aid. Ask the company that provides port-o-potties to donate them for the event and place them in easily accessible areas.

- Check with local companies like Home Depot or Lowes and ask if they can donate items like chairs, gloves, and safety vests.

- Local print companies might be willing to donate the cost of printing programs, maps of the cemetery, and proper wreath placement instructions.

- Ask a local floral shop or funeral home if they will let you borrow stands for the Ceremonial Wreaths. Consider asking a local woodworker or youth organization to make wreath stands for you to use year after year.

- Invite the local media to attend and have a volunteer ready to greet them with press kits. Line up a photographer or videographer who is willing to donate their services for the event. Keep in mind that you must get approval at least 45 days prior to the event if you are doing drone photography/videography at a National Cemetery.

- If having a Taps Bugler at your ceremony, fill out the online request form on the Bugles Across America website.

- Was there a local company, group, or individual who went above and beyond to help make Wreath Day possible at your location? Thanking them for their support at the ceremony and listing them in your program is a nice way to show your appreciation and encourage their involvement the next year.
GRAVE SPECIFICS

Placement of Grave Specific Requests

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the placement of all Grave Specific Requests.
- Reach out to a local hardware store to see if they will donate surveyor or American flags to help you mark the graves with ahead of time. This is an excellent way to let others know to leave those veteran graves for loved ones to place the wreaths themselves.
- After the Cutoff Date, download your Grave Specific list from the Dashboard and organize it by those being placed by loved ones and those being placed by volunteers.
- Decide on a plan for families placing Grave Specific wreaths for their loved ones. When and where should they pick up their wreath? Will they be placed prior to the ceremony? Communicate these instructions through Dashboard Messaging and on Social Media. Print off the list to help you keep track of which wreaths have been picked up.
- Ask your supporting Sponsorship Groups to help you with the Grave Specific wreaths that need to be placed by volunteers. Organize the list by section, print it out assign each one to a group. Be sure they understand exactly which graves should receive a Grave Specific wreath.
- Always set aside extras in a secure storage area so that you can easily handle any issues or place wreaths for any Grave Specific Requests that were missed initially. Walk the graves after the event to make sure none are missed.
- If you are able to take pictures of each Grave Specific wreath that was placed by a volunteer and have your team send them to sponsors through the Grave Specific Report, it means a great deal to the families that were not able to attend and they will usually repeat their sponsorship the next year.
WREATH DELIVERY

★ Delivery Timeframe

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the logistics for offloading the wreath delivery and securing storing the wreaths until Wreath Day.
- We rely on donated trucking to deliver the wreaths and must work around the trucking partner schedules. To continue providing free shipping of the wreaths and to prevent delivery delays, it is important that you are ready to receive your delivery at any time in the 2-weeks leading up to Wreath Day.
- We ask our trucking partners to give at least 24 hours notice for delivery, however, that timeframe may be shorter due to unforeseen circumstances. Keep your phone close in the 2-weeks leading up to Wreath Day so that you can quickly answer their call!
- Arrange to have volunteers at the delivery location, ready to unload the truck when it arrives, and move the wreaths to a secure storage area. We strongly encourage that you prepare a calling tree or a list of volunteers who can be ready to assist with your delivery upon arrival.
- Make arrangements for the wreaths to be stored in a secure area until placement on Wreath Day. National Guard Units, Fire Stations, VFW Posts, and other off-site warehouses may have space available!
- Boxes are 16”W x 26”L x 32”H and weigh about 40lbs. There are 12 wreaths to a box, 18 boxes per pallet, 216 wreaths per pallet.

★ Box Counting & Delivery Confirmation

- You must count the number of boxes that you receive at delivery to make sure you are taking exactly what is listed on your Bill of Lading. If there is a discrepancy, recount what you have and if the numbers are still off, contact your Regional Liaison Team immediately, while the driver is still there.
- Assign one volunteer to count boxes as they are offloaded. Hand held clicker counters make counting boxes quick and easy. You might also consider marking the rows of boxes to help you keep correct counts.
- After your boxes have been received and counted, you must complete the Delivery Confirmation Form right away to notify us that you have all of your wreaths and to report any issues at delivery.
EXCITING NEWS!! Check out our new boxes!

We have new boxes that will keep our wreaths nice and round!

Box Size: 16"W x 26"L x 32"H
Box Weight: about 40 lbs
12 wreaths per box
18 boxes per pallet
216 wreaths per pallet (865 lbs)
Pallet Size: 40" x 48" x 98"
30 pallets per 53' truck
540 boxes per 53' truck
6,480 wreaths per truck (38,060 lbs)

Every participating location should have at least one registered Sponsorship Group supporting it!
TRAFFIC CONTROL & PARKING

★ Traffic Control

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the traffic control & parking logistics.
- Talk to your local police department about day of traffic control. Consider having off-duty officers on hand to help direct traffic, keep vehicles moving, and prevent lengthy backups getting into the cemetery or parking areas.
- Ask volunteers to help direct traffic in and around the parking lots so that everyone can get in and out quickly. Don’t forget reflective vests for safety!

★ Parking

- Do you have enough parking available at your cemetery? If not plan where they will park, considering locations nearby like a warehouse, school, or other business that would not be impacted by parking on a Saturday that offers free or validated parking. If parking is off-site, coordinate transportation to get them to the cemetery, using shuttles, school, city, or charter busses.
- If you need to bus people in, check with your local school district to see if they can donate busses and drivers. We can provide In-Kind Donation Receipts for services, supplies, and equipment donated for the event!
- Designate parking that’s close to the ceremony location or have a shuttle or golf carts available to assist with transporting visitors with disabilities and the elderly, to allow them the opportunity to participate without long distance walking.
- Always communicate parking and event instructions on your WAA location page customizations and using Page Alerts, in addition to sending Dashboard Messages, and sharing details on Social Media and with your Local Media, to give visitors adequate time to park and arrive at the ceremony.
WREATH STAGING & DISTRIBUTION

★ Staging

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the wreath staging & distribution logistics.
- Schedule a meeting with the cemetery staff to agree upon a plan for which graves will receive wreaths if your location is not fully covered and rotate sections yearly. Be sure to honor the cemetery “exceptions list”.
- Walk through sections receiving general veteran wreaths to get a count of how many are needed in each area, then stage wreaths near each of those sections with Proper Wreath Placement Instructions posted clearly for all to see and follow.
- Set aside Grave Specific wreaths and communicate with sponsors about when and where they can pick theirs up or, for those being placed by volunteers, organize them by group and provide them with a map so they know exactly where to place them.
- Keep a good number of wreaths in a secure storage area as a buffer for last minute burials and to help you easily resolve issues for those who thought they sponsored a Grave Specific wreath but didn’t.

★ Distribution

- Invite those with a loved one interred or who sponsored a wreath to place theirs first before opening it up to the general public. Then, we suggest passing out 1-2 wreaths per person and allowing them to get back in line for more. Be cognizant of the lines and try to limit wait times by having enough volunteers at the distribution spots to pass the wreaths out quickly and to prevent people from taking more than is fair.
- Consider having youth organizations, like CAP, ROTC, Girl Scout, etc be available to help volunteers find loved ones’ graves. Make sure helpers have a print out of the cemetery map (if available).
Disposal Arrangements

- Assign a team of volunteers to coordinate the box and wreath disposal logistics and to get necessary supplies and equipment donated for wreath day and for the wreath clean up.

- Plan ahead and contact local waste companies to ask for an in-kind donation of dump trucks, dumpsters, recycle bins, and assistance with disposal once they are filled. Ask as early in the year as possible for the best chance at getting in-kind donations.

- Check with local fisheries and farmers to see if they can use the wreaths for fish habitats or to feed animals (goats love our wreaths).

- Check with your local American Legion to see if they can do a Flag Retirement Ceremony with the wreaths. After the wreaths are burned, you can recycle the metal rings.

- Create an assembly line of volunteers to disassemble the wreaths, then recycle the metal rings, put the greens through a donated chipper for mulch, and donate the bows to a local retirement home or school for craft projects.

Clean Up

- Schedule your Wreath Clean Up Date with cemetery staff ahead of time so that you can share the details on Wreath Day and on Social Media to invite volunteers to come out and help.

- Stage dumpsters, trailers, or pick up trucks throughout the cemetery so volunteers can go section by section. Using a backhoe or other equipment to compress the wreaths can help you fit more wreaths in the dumpsters. Encourage volunteers to wear gloves and bring broom sticks or ropes to thread wreaths on and easily carry many wreaths to the disposal area.
The #1 Tip for Success:
Create a strong planning committee to help you!

Decide who the “lead” volunteer will be for each of your sub-committees.

The Wreath Day Logistics Template is in the Planning Section of the Volunteer Resource Page and can help you determine how to delegate tasks and identify volunteer roles needed for your location. We recommend you check it out!

The template can be fully customized for your location!

- Tasks to Delegate
- Event Timeline
- 2-Weeks Prior
- Ceremony Program
- Volunteer Roles
- Wreath Presenters
Messages to Supporters

Message templates are built into the Dashboard.

Consider sending messages to communicate these important details:

- **Call to Action to Sponsor Wreaths** for all veterans laid to rest at your location. Include total # sponsored to date and total # needed.
- **Wreath Day Volunteer Duty Assignments** and instructions. Include event timeline, map, & thank you.
- **Grave Specific** wreath placement arrangements for those with loved ones laid to rest.
- **Wreath Retirement** details and thank you.

Clear Communication is the key to strong community support!

Keep messages professional, concise, and include all pertinent details.

Your Regional Liaison Team is here to help!
Make the Most of Your Dashboard

1. The WAA Dashboard is where you will manage your location(s) and group(s).

2. Customize how your WAA page looks: personalize with photos, create a page alert, add a news article!

3. Message your supporters and invite them to sponsor wreaths, attend your fundraising events, and let them know what to expect on wreath day.

4. View the Wreath Count Report to see the total number of wreaths sponsored for your group(s) and/or location(s).

5. Keep track of Grave Specific Requests and see who has volunteered to help on wreath day.

6. Thank sponsors for their generosity!
Important to Know!

Your Regional Liaison Team is your main point of contact for Wreaths Across America and will work directly with you to coordinate the logistics for your location.

What is the difference between your Veteran Grave Count and your Sponsorship Goal?

We ship based on your Veteran Grave Count, so it's important that you provide us with an accurate count of the maximum number of sponsored veteran wreaths that you will need at your location. Extras will be credited to your location the following year or if you prefer to gift extras to other locations in need, your Regional Liaison Team can set that up for you!

Your Sponsorship Goal is linked to the Wreath-O-Meter on your location page. It turns green as wreaths are sponsored for your location, making it a great way to motivate your community to sponsor veteran wreaths.

Your Sponsorship Goal does NOT determine how many wreaths will be shipped to your location.

Your Regional Liaison Team is always happy to help and are just a call, text, or email away!
Community Outreach

Reference the Dashboard Tutorial to learn how to send Dashboard messages!

Be Sure to Include These Details in Your Messages:

- **Address:** Give as much information as you can about where volunteers can park on the day of the event, as well as the address and any other pertinent arrival details.

- **Time:** Be very clear about what time the ceremony starts and what time the veteran wreaths will be placed. Include details for the placement of Grave Specific Requests too.

- **Additional Info:** Let volunteers know who the featured speakers are at your ceremony, how wreaths will be passed out, and if refreshments will be provided.

Send messages through your Dashboard to Sponsorship Groups, Sponsors, and Event Participants.

Mail, email, or hand-deliver formal letters of invitation to elected officials.

You community will appreciate your clear communication about the wreath laying ceremony.
Two Weeks Before Wreath Day

- **Finalize Grave Specific List and wreath placement details.**
- **Watch for emails from your Regional Liaison Team!**
- **Do you have your Ceremonial Flags?**
- **Touch base with the Contact at Location to confirm logistics.**

**Confirm all services (delivery of porta potties, sound system, trash/recycling receptacles, etc)**

**Meet with or touch base with “working volunteers”. Consider holding a “dress rehearsal”**.

**Wreaths will be delivered during the 2 weeks leading up to wreath day.**

*Keep your phone close! Your driver will call you to coordinate delivery and you will need volunteers ready to unload boxes.*

**Respond quickly to emails from your community.**

**Adding a Page Alert to your page can be helpful!**
It’s Wreath Day!

REMEMBER - HONOR - TEACH

Last Minute Considerations

Arrive Early to Set Up: Be to the location at least an hour beforehand to allow you plenty of time to have everything ready to go for volunteers.

Start on Time: This shows respect for your guests time and their other commitments that day. It also promotes solidarity among the hundreds of groups nationwide holding simultaneous ceremonies.

Have Press Kits Ready: Have a dedicated person look for and direct journalists to the area where the ceremony will be held and provide each of them with a press kit.

The National start time is 12pm EST for those locations wishing to hold theirs at the same time as Arlington National Cemetery.

The ceremony must be held on National Wreaths Across America Day unless permission is received otherwise by contacting your Regional Liaison Team.

You’ve worked hard for this day, so take the time to soak it all in and remember WHY you do what you do!
After Wreath Day:

★ Did someone in your community go above and beyond to make your event special? We'd love to hear your story and help you recognize their efforts.


★ Send photos and other stories from your event to the WAA office at pr@wreathsacrossamerica.org or get featured on Wreaths Across America Radio by emailing WAAradio@wreathsacrossamerica.org.

★ If you have any questions or concerns that need to be addressed, contact your Regional Liaison Team.

★ Be sure to communicate with your location about when they would like volunteers to clean up the wreaths. Then reach out to your community to gather help!

★ Your Regional Liaison Team will email you after the first of the year to reinstate and stay active for the 2024 wreath year.
Create a Facebook Page for your WAA Location to encourage your community to get involved!

★ **DO** share stories about heroes being honored or celebrated.

★ **DO** share stories about communities coming together to celebrate veteran's birthdays. There's no shortage of these stories!

★ **DO** share "Thank You" messages to heroes.

★ **DON'T** share notices about deaths or sickness.

★ **DON'T** share articles that are political or religious. Even if it's good news, this creates a platform for people to share disagreements.

Social media content can include images, articles, links to the WAA page for your location (or supporting groups), videos, fundraisers, new WAA campaigns and more!
Develop a list of media contacts. Find out how they like to receive information (email, online, fax, or mail).

- Prepare a media advisory to invite press to the event and customize a pre-event press release, using the Wreaths Across America templates on the Volunteer Resource Page.
- Collect bios of public figures who plan to attend to include in your press kits.
- Follow up via phone or email with journalists to whom you sent the media advisory to remind them of the event.
- If you expect TV coverage, arrange for special parking for satellite trucks.

Inviting the media to cover your event is a great way to share the mission and gather support in the coming years.
Stay WAA Connected!

1. We encourage all of our volunteers to connect with us online to share photos, stories, fundraising ideas and more!

2. The Official WAA Facebook page can be found at www.facebook.com/WAAHQ.

3. Registered Location Coordinators are invited to join our private Facebook group. Check your Registration Confirmation Email for details!

4. Instagram: Follow us at @wreathsacross

5. Twitter: Follow us @WreathsAcross

6. YouTube: Subscribe to our WreathsAcrossAmerica channel for videos from past events, interviews and more.

6. LinkedIn: Connect professionally with WAA by following our company page for organizational updates and information.
Volunteer Resource Page

Where Can I Find the Volunteer Resource Page?
Go to learn.wreathsacrossamerica.org/location-group-resources or visit the main WAA page at www.wreathsacrossamerica.org and go to Location/Group Resources (Under the Menu).

What Is The Volunteer Resource Page?
It is your go-to spot for all of the WAA approved (and updated!) order forms, documents, marketing materials, logos, press releases, webinar recordings, and volunteer tutorials.

What If I Want to Customize A Document?
If you would like to customize an image or document, email the draft to your Regional Liaison Team prior to any printing or distribution to get approval from WAA. This is required.

Should I Use a QR Code?
Yes! Be sure to link it to the WAA group page you want to support so they get credit for the orders.
Listen to Wreaths Across America Radio!

Wreaths Across America Radio is a 24/7 Internet stream. Its unique format of informational and inspiring content about members of the U.S. armed forces, their families, military veterans, and volunteers throughout the country and overseas who support the mission to Remember, Honor, and Teach.

Along with the informational and inspiring content Wreaths Across America Radio plays a variety of music with the roots firmly planted in patriotism with a country music thread running through the core of the stream.

Wreaths Across America Radio has a live morning show every weekday morning from 6am to 10am eastern, along with a variety of special programs that support the mission.

You can listen anywhere at www.wreathsacrossamerica.org/radio, or by using the iHeart Radio app, Tuneln or Simple Radio apps, or download it at the App Store or Google!
Meet the Locations and Groups Team

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THANK YOU!

Wreaths Across America