Washington Department of Veterans Affairs

Stylebook

Modified October 2022

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
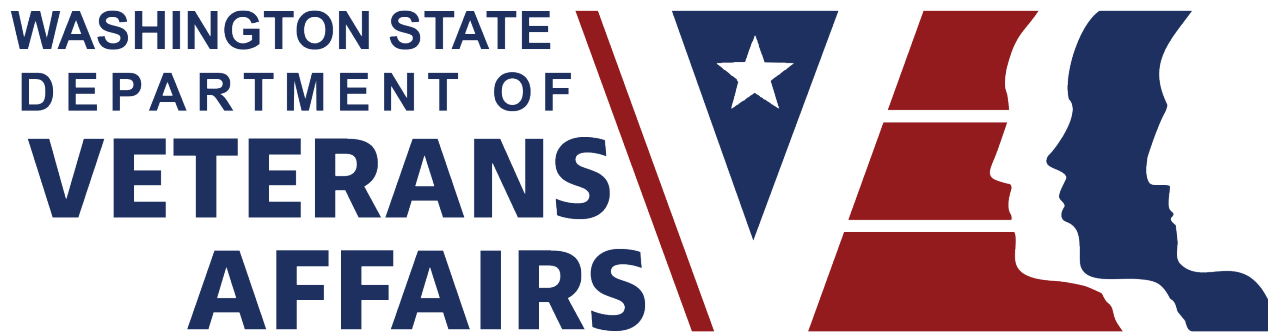
"Serving Those Who Served"

Communication and messaging is an everyday facet of our work at WDVA. This guide is meant to take the guesswork out of commonplace messaging and communication, addressing frequently asked questions about design, clear and precise language, formatting, media, and more.

Guidelines for logo use and images, as well as links to repositories of both, can be found in their own sections. While social media management is a field all its own, tips have been included to help WDVA facilities post meaningful content to their accounts.

This is a living document and, as such, will be amended with new information and links as time goes on. If you have any questions regarding WDVA style, or require any specific assistance, please reach out to the Communications Team at Communications@dva.wa.gov.

Signature Block

A consistent approach to our email signatures gives WDVA communications a consistent and professional look and feel. This standard signature also helps to ensure we all provide the appropriate contact information and nothing extraneous or distracting.

Any extra quotes attached to the signature should be consistent with the WDVA mission, vision, values or programs, such as "Serving Those Who Served." Inspirational quotes or personalized content should be included only when relevant to the communication, and then only in the body of the message.

You may include or exclude information depending on your situation. Please use easily read fonts (like Calibri, Arial, or Times New Roman) at an easily read-size (11 or 12) with standard styles, spacing, and structure.

Adding pronouns to an email signature acknowledges the fact that state agencies are inclusive in their services and recognizes gender diversity. If you have questions regarding including your pronouns to the signature, please take a moment to read through this FAQ document from the Rainbow Alliance and Inclusion Network.

Employee Name
Position or title, Unit/Division
Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Work: (360) 123-4567 | Cell: (360) 987-6543
Email.Address@dva.wa.gov | www.dva.wa.gov
Optional: Pronouns (What is This?)
Optional: Icon links to WDVA social media and programs
Optional: Icon for DEI observance of the month
Optional: Physical or mailing address

Example: John Doe
Veterans Benefits Specialist, Veterans Services
Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Work: (360) 123-4567 | *Cell:* (360) 987-6543
John.Doe@dva.wa.gov | www.dva.wa.gov
He/Him (What is This?)

Optional icons should link directly to WDVA sites, social media accounts, email subscriptions, and other agency-specific sites. Some DEI-related icons will be available for monthly observances and should only be used in accordance with those observances. Personal social media profiles and links should not be included in official email signatures.

These icons are available for download on the VNet under Agency Toolbox > Logos, Brochures, and Templates > Logos.

Logo

- When possible, use a graphic that states the agency's full name. Keep the abbreviated graphic in reserve for occasions when free space is at a minimum.

- Do not make the logo black-and-white. If the color graphic will prove difficult to read in your design, a white rectangle may be included as a background for the logo.

- Do not slant, skew, or tilt the logo. The graphic should be displayed in the same orientation as the majority of the product's text.

- Allow for "breathing space" on each side of the logo to reduce visual confusion.

- When using on printed products, take note of gutters, "bleed" areas, and other print-related measurements. The logo should not be placed in such a fashion that it is truncated in the final physical product.

When pairing the agency logo with that of a division, program or Home, please ensure that the WDVA logo is of a greater or equal size and is not outweighed by the second graphic.

This full-sized logo should be used whenever space and design allow.

The abbreviated logo can be used when space is at a premium.

A wider version is available use in header or footer spaces, or where appropriate.
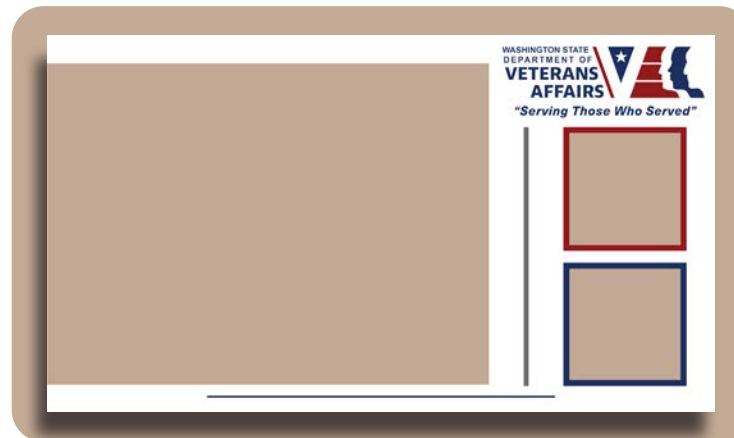
Presentations

There are three PowerPoint presentation formats available for download off the VNet. For simplicity's sake, these have been formatted to meet the guidelines laid out previously. Each format contains multiple slide types.

In cases when WDVA shares a presentation or slide deck with another agency or partner organization, please ensure that both teams' logos are visible. Various WDVA logos can be access on the VNet, and the Communications Team is always ready to help troubleshoot. Please email Communications@dva.wa.gov for more information.

Powerpoint Templates for download

Check out the WDVA Overview Programs Services 2022 presentation!

Language and Voice

Being clear and concise in our messaging is important, both within and outside the agency. Communicating in a forthright and professional manner can stop many problems before they truly arise.

All communications within and out of WDVA and its facilities should adhere to the "plain talk" guidelines set by the Governor's Office. These guidelines keep messaging clear, concise, and easily read.

Use "Your Washington Department of Veterans Affairs" or "Your WDVA" in messaging to all audiences.

For examples of letters being sent outside WDVA, consult the governor's office "Executive and General Correspondence Guidelines" online.

Worried about your readability? Run your text through a checker like this Gunning Fog Index site.

When using "Veteran" in writing, WDVA follows the policy of the federal VA in capitalizing the word.

And don't forget that your WDVA Communications Team is here to help!

Understand your customers' needs
······
Find out who your audience actually is, what information they'll be looking for, and what the circumstances are around your message.

Use words your customers use
······
Choose words normally used by your customers, spell out abbreviations, and define any specialized terms that must be included.

Include only relevant information
······
Don't try to cover too many topics -- stay on target and don't dilute your message with extra information.

Use personal pronouns
······
Use "you" and "we" instead of "citizens" and "the department" or "the agency." Assume the reader is the intended recipient.

Use the active voice
······
This will help eliminate confusion. Writing in an active voice shows who is responsible for doing what.

Keep sentences and paragraphs short
······
Try to limit sentences to fewer than 20 words, and paragraphs to fewer than six sentences.

Design clear pages:
······
The right design will highlight your message so customers can scan the document quickly.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Inclusive language is a communication style that incorporates phrases and expressions that are inherently welcoming. By design, this communication style avoids assumptions that might exclude certain groups of people, even if the exclusion is unintended.

WDVA is committed to diversity and inclusion in all communications, we strive to use inclusive language in emails, presentations, briefs, and even visual communications, like imagery and video content.

Tips for Putting Inclusive Language into Practice

- After writing an email, memo, or other document, review the content and ask yourself, "Am I inadvertently excluding anyone with the wording I've chosen?"
- Don't use gender-specific terms ("guys" is a common one); instead, use words like "folks," "team," or "all."
- Instead of making assumptions about biological parents and defaulting to the terms "mother" and "father," define the family unit with terms like "guardian," "parent," or "caregiver."
- Using "spouse" or "partner" is always a safer bet than "husband" or "wife."
- Use gender-neutral language when discussing careers and professions. For example:
- Consider listing your pronouns (e.g., "she/her," "he/him," "they/them") in your email signature and other public-facing communications. (See Page 2)

> *Chairman* = chair, chairperson, coordinator, head
> *Mailman* = mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
> *Policeman* = police officer
> *Congressman* = legislator, congressperson, congressional representative

- Use nonprescriptive language around faiths and belief systems. For example, "sending positive thoughts" is usually a better option than "keeping you in our prayers." Be mindful of other belief systems and the holidays your clients and colleagues celebrate (or don't celebrate)
- In working to eliminate stigma surrounding mental health diagnosis and treatment, we should avoid using terms like "OCD," "ADHD," and "addicted to" in referring to everyday behaviors. These terms should be reserved for actual mental health references only and never used in jest.
- Don't use words that are ableist in nature, such as "blind," "deaf," "insane," "lame," and "nuts." These terms can be offensive, even when used among close friends and colleagues.
- Contradictory phrases like "awfully good" can create confusion not only for international audiences but also for people who identify as being on the autism spectrum.
- Be cautious with slang: many slang terms have negative connotations from centuries ago. For example, "grandfather in" actually refers to a term from the 1800s that described a way to prevent Black Americans from voting.

It's Okay to Not Know!

If you're not sure of something, ask. It's perfectly acceptable to acknowledge that you don't have all the answers, but you need to be willing to look to a reputable source for information. We're all learning! And unlearning. Your level of awareness and commitment to being more inclusive will ultimately shine through in your day-to-day interactions.

Please email DEI.Committee@dva.wa.gov with any questions!

Fonts

These font pairings are presented as standards for the sake of maintaining a similar presentation across WDVA materials, presentations, and communications. This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list of usable fonts. When choosing a font or group of fonts to use in communications, keep in mind the contrast between fonts (when using two), the color of the font, the line weight, and the slant.

Legibility is key!

Georgia and Arial

WELCOME TO YOUR WDVA!

Hello and welcome to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs website. We invite you to look through our web pages for information on benefits, services and programs. We, at WDVA, would like to thank you for your service to our country.

Calibri and Times New Roman

WELCOME TO YOUR WDVA!

Hello and welcome to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs website. We invite you to look through our web pages for information on benefits, services and programs. We, at WDVA, would like to thank you for your service to our country.

Playfair Display and Raleway

WELCOME TO YOUR WDVA!

Hello and welcome to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs website. We invite you to look through our web pages for information on benefits, services and programs. We, at WDVA, would like to thank you for your service to our country.

Roboto and Montserrat

WELCOME TO YOUR WDVA!

Hello and welcome to the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs website. We invite you to look through our web pages for information on benefits, services and programs. We, at WDVA, would like to thank you for your service to our country.

Colors *(primary)*

Color is important to design, branding, and accessibility. Utilizing a common color scheme across the department's graphic messaging will help build WDVA's branding, and smart use of color in our communications will provide greater usability to a larger population.

These five primary colors can be tinted for use. Tints are created when the color is diluted with white at various percentages, shown here in increments of 10 percent.

Red

HEX *931A1D* | **CYMK** *27, 100, 99, 26* | **RGB** *47, 26, 29*

100
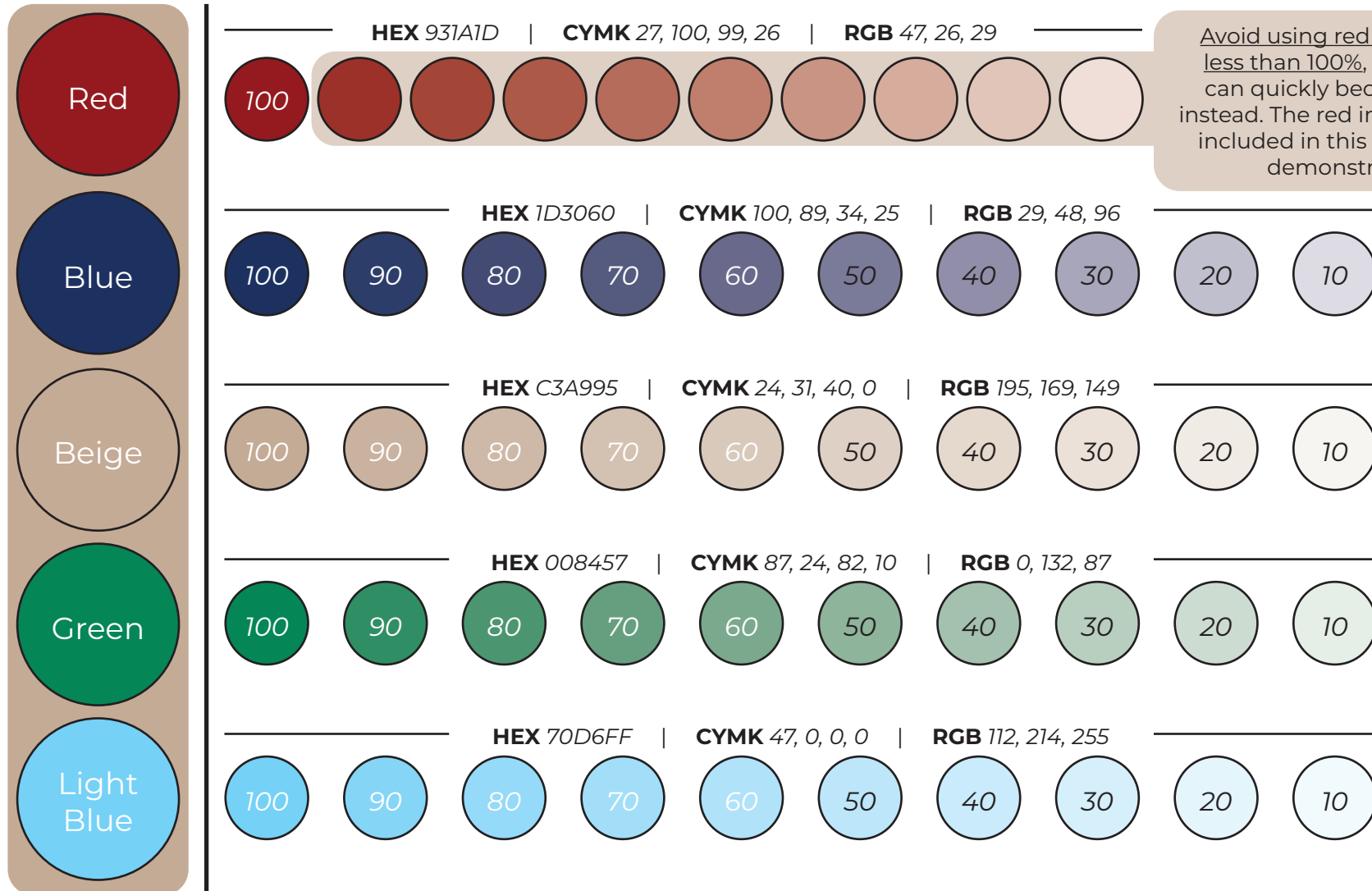
Avoid using red at anything less than 100%, as the color can quickly become a pink instead. The red increments are included in this graphic as a demonstration.

Blue

HEX *1D3060* | **CYMK** *100, 89, 34, 25* | **RGB** *29, 48, 96*

100 · 90 · 80 · 70 · 60 · 50 · 40 · 30 · 20 · 10

Beige

HEX *C3A995* | **CYMK** *24, 31, 40, 0* | **RGB** *195, 169, 149*

100 · 90 · 80 · 70 · 60 · 50 · 40 · 30 · 20 · 10

Green

HEX *008457* | **CYMK** *87, 24, 82, 10* | **RGB** *0, 132, 87*

100 · 90 · 80 · 70 · 60 · 50 · 40 · 30 · 20 · 10

Light Blue

HEX *70D6FF* | **CYMK** *47, 0, 0, 0* | **RGB** *112, 214, 255*

100 · 90 · 80 · 70 · 60 · 50 · 40 · 30 · 20 · 10

Colors *(secondary)*

These secondary colors are meant to complement the primary color schemes, and are useful for adding emphasis and clarity to graphs, charts, infographics, and other engaging visual materials.
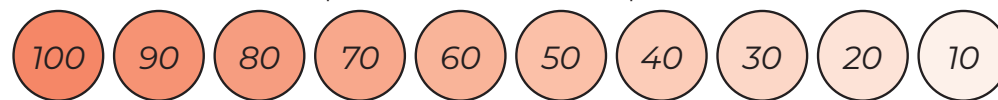
Accessibility
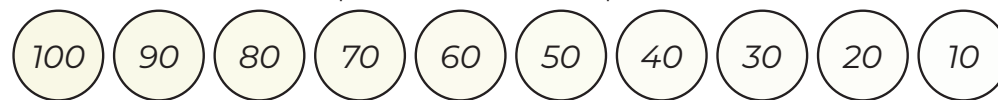
Yellow
HEX *FAA21B* | **CYMK** *0, 42, 100, 0* | **RGB** *250, 162, 27*

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10

Light Green
HEX *87a878* | **CYMK** *51, 19, 64, 1* | **RGB** *29, 48, 96*

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10

Salmon
HEX *F58768* | **CYMK** *0, 58, 59, 0* | **RGB** *245, 135, 104*

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10

Ivory
HEX *F8F6E4* | **CYMK** *2, 1, 11, 0* | **RGB** *248, 246, 228*

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10

Grey
HEX *838EA4* | **CYMK** *52, 39, 24, 1* | **RGB** *131, 142, 168*

100 90 80 70 60 50 40 30 20 10
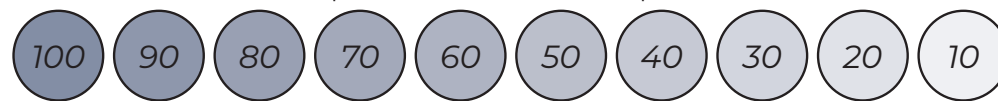
Accessibility is an important consideration in designing visual products, whether they're destined for print or the web. Here are a few tips for making sure your work can be understood easily even when your audience may have some degree of color blindness.

- Use colors and symbols in conjunction
- Reduce your color palette
- Use textures and patterns
- Increase the contrast of your colors
- Utilize thicker lines and fonts

For more information on usability and to test your color combinations, check with the following sites:

Usability.gov

Coloring for Colorblindness

Adobe Color

Images

In-house or agency-provided images are preferred over stock images for use in all communications. All images, including any stock pictures or graphics, should showcase WDVA's values, mission, and goals.

Residents' and customers' privacy must be respected. Residents must have a signed photo consent form on file, as per Policy 160.100, before they can be featured in agency photos or videos.

All visual media (still images and video) should be inspected for protected health information before use in any fashion.

Tips:

- Image should have clear subjects or messages, and be technically solid (properly focused and exposed).
- Avoid an overabundance of negative space -- the frame should be filled with the subject and important scene elements.
- Whenver possible, photographs should be reproduced in color.
- Do not use social media filters on images, and don't excessively edit images.
- Do not digitally manipulate images for publication (adding or subtracting people or objects to a scene via digital retouching).

WDVA Flickr page:

Graphics

Templates should be developed and used for recurring events and notices (monthly events, weekly information to families, etc).

Some templates will be available to all WDVA Homes and facilities. These forms and templates can be tied to their originating facility with that site's name, address, and/or contact information.

Colors, fonts, and logo use should follow the guidelines established earlier in this document.

When designing a print product, include WDVA's logo.

When designing a flyer, poster, or other print product, use ...
- Two to five colors, preferably from the colors and tints on pages 4-5
- One to three fonts from page 6

... and be sure to include the following:
- Contact information
- Pertinent times and dates
- A brief description of the event or notice

Other things to consider when creating an informational product:
- Don't overcrowd the design with information -- provide just the necessary details
- Give icons and logos breathing space so they're not confused with other elements
- Confirm the contact information before adding it
- Check your design for accessibilty: are you using colors AND icons? Do your contrasting colors meet accessibility standards? Refer back to page 5 for more information on accessibility and usability.
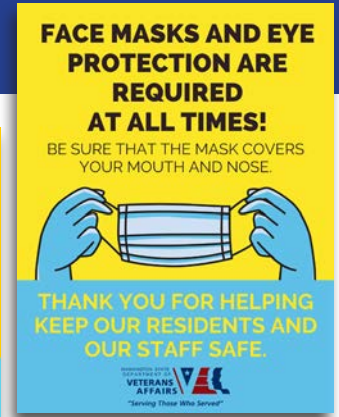
Before printing, please share your draft with the Communications Team!

Social Media

Quick tips for making social media posts:

Answer the five W's
1. *Who is in the post?*
2. *What is the post about?*
3. *Why is this post important?*
4. *Where is the post's content from?*
5. *When did the post's content happen?*

General photo guidelines:
- *No personal information!*
- *Avoid the backs of people.*
- *Avoid people eating.*
- *Avoid meeting room photos.*
- *Do not use resident or client names.*
- *Use photos that show actions!*

Do's and Don'ts for Social Media

DO

- ... encourage positive stories about employees, customers, partners, and projects (but make sure you aren't violating privacy policies).

- ... create anticipation. Hints from your staff that big things are coming can often drive interest.

- ... share lots of pictures! Be sure to respect others' privacy, but putting faces to your story is a great way to connect.

- ... plan a social media strategy. If you're going to use these platforms, think ahead.

- ... follow and re-share appropriate posts from other, similar organizations and partners on social media.

- ... reach out to your Communications Team for help or advice! That's one of the reasons they're there!

- ... discuss these do's and don'ts with your team.

DON'T

- ... get into back-and-forth exchanges that could become arguments. If a conversation is needed, ask them to contact you directly.

- ... share private information, like financial or contact information. This can be a violation of state or federal law. Instead, ask the customer to contact you directly.

- ... make derogatory comments about employers, customers, other agencies or partners, or their practices.

- ... make derogatory comments about customers, ever!

- ... take a political stance or post opinions on politics.

WDVA Social Media pages:

More social media guidance and suggestions can be found on the VNet under ...
"Departments > Communications > Social Media Guide."

Video

The content guidelines for images also apply to video.

Editing should not misconstrue messages from any interview subject.

Audio

If available, use a microphone and tripod. Ensuring that audio is clear and of sufficient volume is important, as is recording a steady video clip.

In regards to a recording format, consider the video's use: while most material viewed on a computer or television screen should be shot horizontally oriented, some social media platforms benefit from a vertical format.

Shorter videos tend to perform better in viewership. Optimal runtimes differ between platforms, but a duration of 1-5 minutes is preferable.

For longer videos, place the agency intro and outro clips on either side of the video. Contact the Communications Team for these clips.

For shorter videos, use WDVA's logo bug overlay in the lower right hand corner. Contact the Communications Team for this PNG file.

Whenever possible, apply closed captioning to the video for accessibility purposes. If using an automated system like YouTube's CC capabilities, doublecheck the result for accuracy before making the video public.

Fonts and color selection for in-video graphics should follow the guidelines previously stated in this booklet, though san serif fonts (Arial, Calibri, Montserrat) will lend clarity to text within a video.

If an audio production uses music for an intro, an outro, or during the main body, ensure that the clips used are royalty-free or have permission for use.

Edit filler noises and dead air, but do not skew the messages or statements of guests and interviewees.

The Communications Team is here to help with your audio and visual needs! Contact them for help with any video, photo, or audio projects. Communications@dva.wa.gov

Merchandise

Promotional products can be purchased by State Veterans Homes and Programs as their budgets allow.

Shirts, jackets and other clothing items can be purchased each quarter through the WDVA store. An email is sent to all WDVA staff when the store is open.

If a Home or Program logo will be used then the WDVA logo should also be included, if space allows. This may not always be possible; however, including both reinforces the relationship between the Home or Program and the agency. Please contact the Communications Team if you are unsure which WDVA logo to use.

A list of items and vendors is available on the V-Net. Purchasing from diverse vendors, including Veteran-owned businesses, is preferred and helps the agency comply with the Governor's Executive Order 22-01.

Please contact the Communications Team at Communications@dva.wa.gov if you plan to purchase an item that isn't listed. This will allow us to expand our item list based on products that our teams find useful. Look for items that will be used, will last, and will call attention to the WDVA Home or Program you are promoting.

Glossary

Commonly used and seen terms and phrases.

- **AFRS**
  Agency Financial Reporting System
- **DEI**
  Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
- **HIPAA**
  Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996
- **HVRP**
  Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program
- **KIA/MIA**
  Killed in action/missing in action
- **MOU**
  Memorandum of understanding
- **NAC**
  Nursing Assistant-Certified
- **NASDVA**
  National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs
- **NASVH**
  National Association of State Veterans Homes
- **PEAR**
  Pro-Equity Anti-Racism
- **PSRW**
  Public Service Recognition Week
- **PTSD**
  Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- **RCW**
  Revised Code of Washington

- **RN**
  Registered Nurse
- **TAG**
  The Adjutant General
- **USDVA**
  United States Department of Veterans Affairs
- **VAAC**
  Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee
- **VAF**
  Veterans Assistant Fund
- **VARO**
  Veterans Affairs Regional Office
- **VBS**
  Veterans Benefits Specialist
- **VERG**
  Veterans Employee Resource Group
- **VISN**
  Veterans Integrated Service Network
- **VLC**
  Veterans Legislative Coalition
- **VSO**
  Veteran Service Organization/Officer
- **WAC**
  Washington Administration Code

A more definitive list of common abbreviations can be found on the VNet under "Communications > Common Acronyms."