

Creating an Effective Public Education Campaign

Introduction

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is a great opportunity to create a campus-wide campaign addressing sexual violence. The following steps are necessary in planning a successful campaign to raise awareness and public knowledge about an issue. Public education campaigns play an important role in changing social norms and providing basic facts and education to members of your audience. Social marketing campaigns aim to change behavior and require a different planning process with an emphasis on understanding why people do what they do. If you are interested in planning a social marketing campaign, visit <http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/campaign-planning>.

Step 1: Select Your Audience

Everyone on your campus has a role to play in ending sexual violence, which makes selecting a specific audience for a public education campaign difficult. However, research shows that choosing a narrow audience and tailoring your message to that audience is the most effective method to raise awareness about an issue.

Your campus has many audiences to choose from – students (and sub-groups of students), faculty, staff, law enforcement, healthcare providers, administrators, and more. When selecting the audience for your campaign, consider which group has the least amount of knowledge and awareness of sexual violence. It may be helpful to consider the groups that are at highest risk for certain types of sexual violence (such as alcohol-facilitated) or that may have the most impact in preventing sexual violence from occurring in the first place (like opinion leaders).

It is also important to consider the demographics of your campus, making sure to include under-represented communities in ways that speak to

their particular needs and barriers when dealing with sexual violence.

Consider conducting a needs assessment to help determine which audiences would benefit most from your campaign. For information on how to conduct a needs assessment, visit:

- Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/tablecontents/chapter_1003.htm.
- Iowa State University Extension: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/tools/assess/>
- The University of Arizona Library: <http://digital.library.arizona.edu/nadm/tutorial/index.htm>

If you are unable to do a needs assessment at this time, look into existing information about sexual violence on your campus (perhaps there is a research institute on campus that has studied this issue). You can also access campus crime statistics that are federally required through the Clery Act (note: this will only include reported incidents.) Ultimately, choose your audience based on your knowledge of the campus community and your organization's resources and goals.

Step 2: Write Objectives

This step goes hand-in-hand with choosing a target audience. In planning a public education campaign, it is critical to clearly articulate why you chose to do this campaign. It is often helpful to outline objectives for your campaign which detail the specific knowledge or attitude change you wish to see in your selected audience (remember that you are not changing behavior with this campaign, but changing knowledge, attitudes, and/or beliefs). Do you want people to know the truth behind rape myths, to know how to help a survivor, or to understand what

they could do to intervene when they see sexual harassment or other forms of sexual violence? Here are some sample objectives:

Objective 1: Increase knowledge about the range of behaviors that constitute sexual violence among students on campus.

Objective 2: Increase knowledge about on-campus and community sexual assault services among faculty on campus.

Objective 3: Increase ability of students to identify and counteract common rape myths.

Objective 4: Increase students' knowledge around how to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment or sexual violence.

Step 3: Devise Strategies

Once you outline your objectives, determine strategies you plan to use in this campaign to accomplish your goals. Examples of strategies include:

- Create posters containing information and statistics
- Write op-ed pieces for your campus newspaper
- Hold an event with speakers to talk to a group about the topic
- Make brochures containing facts and information about sexual violence and distribute to offices across campus (or, adapt brochures from your state sexual assault coalition)
- Create public service announcements to show on the campus radio and TV stations
- Distribute campaign messages via campus listservs to students, faculty, and staff

- Stage a theatre performance

Select strategies which are reasonable and realistic for your organization based on your resources and timeline and ones you feel will resonate with your target audience.

Step 4: Develop Messages

If you were able to conduct a needs assessment of your target audience, you should have a clear understanding of their specific knowledge gaps in relation to the objectives for this campaign. For example, if you have discovered that many students on campus believe that a victim is partly to blame if she has been drinking alcohol, you may want to focus your messages within this area. Alternatively, if you have learned that many students know that sexual assault is a problem, but don't know how to help a friend who has been victimized, you could choose to present information about campus and community services and victims' rights.

If a needs assessment wasn't possible, see if you can locate other research about attitudes and beliefs among students on campus around sexual violence. For example, perhaps a faculty member has conducted independent research on this topic that you could use. If your program or campus has a peer education program, inquire about any pre- and post-test surveys that might provide insight on student beliefs and attitudes. Ultimately, you will have to choose 3-5 facts or messages you feel are important to convey to your target audience. Step 5 will help with this process if you are unsure where to begin.

Step 5: Talk to the Audience

Prior to designing materials, touch base with some members of your audience to verify the message(s) you chose in Step 4 are appropriate and will provide them with new information. This can sometimes feel overwhelming, as your schedule and budget may be barriers to planning and conducting formal focus groups. One option may be to attend the meetings of other campus

groups, or offer pizza for a small group of individuals from your target audience. Faculty members may be willing to devote a portion of class time to focus group research as well. It is okay to be informal; the goal is to obtain insights about your messages from the people you are trying to reach.

Before recruiting subjects for your focus group, remember to check with your Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding requirements for doing research with human subjects. If you do not plan to share the findings from your focus group with outsiders (or publish it, for example), you probably do not need IRB approval. However, if you or someone you are working with does intend to publicize the findings, approval may be required (IRB approval will not cost you anything, but can add weeks or months to your process).

Conducting focus groups will help to determine if the messages you plan to use are effective with your audience. Share the facts you want to include and ask for their reactions. Would this fact make sense if they read it on a poster? Is it something they don't know? Questions like this will help you decide what to ultimately include in your educational materials. If you are struggling to write questions, reach out to faculty in departments like sociology, psychology, or women's studies for help.

Step 6: Get Creative!

Once you gather information from your target audience, start putting your campaign together. If you plan to develop something that requires graphic design, such as a poster or brochure, talk with your campus' art department to find students or faculty willing to create artwork at no cost. Likewise, research other organizations that have developed similar campaigns and messages. Contact the National Sexual Violence Resource Center at 1-877-739-3895 or resources@nsvrc.org for help in locating additional resources.

Step 7: Go Back to the Audience

If time permits, retest your campaign materials with your target audience. After all your hard work and planning, you'll want to feel confident in your messaging and materials. You may need to make changes to better meet the needs of your audience. Ultimately, your campaign will only be effective in increasing knowledge and awareness if your audience pays attention to your message, so this is a crucial step.

Step 8: Implement Strategically

After making any necessary revisions to your materials, consider how and where you'll distribute them. If you're trying to reach faculty members, consider using their campus mailboxes to distribute fact sheets or brochures. For students, talk to dining services about putting up table tents in the cafeterias that include your information (this is usually a free service). Connect with Resident Advisors about posting your materials on bulletin boards in the Residential Halls. You are most familiar with the various marketing channels available on your campus, so take advantage of creative strategies.

Step 9: Evaluate

Effective evaluation is an important element of any public education campaign. Some simple steps for evaluation include keeping track of the number of materials you distribute or how many times a PSA was shown, for example. Data collection and evaluation will help inform future campaigns and assist you in using resources judiciously. If this year passing out brochures in the quad was not successful, redirect your staff to do something else with that time in the future.

In terms of evaluating your chosen objectives, it's helpful to compare your target audience's knowledge and awareness before and after the campaign was launched. Conducting pre- and post-campaign surveys is one way to determine the effectiveness of your efforts. Connect with experts on your campus including professors and

students in psychology, sociology, or public health who may be willing to provide free assistance in this area. For additional resources about evaluation, visit <http://www.nsvrc.org/saam/resources>.

Timeline

If possible, begin planning your campaign 6-8 months before you wish to launch. You will need a month or two to collect information about sexual violence on your campus and identify gaps in knowledge to help you select your target audience. It may take you a few weeks to come up with your main messages based on what you find considering your audience and objectives.

Allow approximately a month to recruit focus group participants and obtain feedback on your messages. Creating campaign materials can take anywhere from 2 weeks to 2 months, depending on who you are working with to create content and how many items you plan to have made. If you are working with a paid designer, factor in more time for passing art back and forth. If you are working with someone within your agency, you may be able to move through this stage more quickly. Try to obtain high-resolution art files for common graphics like your agency logo or your university logo early in the process so you'll have them on hand for future projects. If you are interested in using the black and teal Sexual Assault Awareness Month logo from the

NSVRC, email resources@nsvrc.org for free electronic access.

Once you have materials in hand to show your audience, allow 3-4 weeks to hold another focus group. Depending on the feedback you receive, you may need to make significant changes to your materials, or you may not. Give yourself 2-3 weeks to make changes and finalize everything before printing in bulk and implementing your distribution strategy. Evaluation should be factored in throughout the process, but particularly if you plan to have pre- and post-tests. You will need about a month to administer and evaluate pre/post-test data at the beginning and end of the campaign. Other evaluation measures may not take much time (like checking web site traffic data), but consider who will be responsible for this type of data collection and when they may be available.

If you are unable to start planning your campaign so far in advance, consider how you might be able to break up the work into a multi-year effort, with background research and planning during year one, and implementation during year two. Or, work on the campaign in smaller chunks over a longer period of time when you or your staff or volunteers have breaks in other work. While it is important that you follow the steps outlined here for maximum effectiveness, there are creative ways to plan and implement a campaign that give flexibility to planners.