

Annual Media Campaign Focused on the Military Child

Overview

An annual media campaign is a great way to make the public aware of the efforts you are undertaking on the military community's behalf. It is important that you help shape the ongoing conversation about the military community, and particularly the military child. As a community leader, it is your role to ensure the community celebrates the military child as they inspire us all with their resilience and commitment to service. The goal of this promising practice is to educate and inspire the community to celebrate the military child, as well as motivate community members to honor them and their families and do what they can to support the nation's military children.

There are three basic activities for an annual media campaign: 1) Plan the Campaign; 2) Marketing; and 3) Implementation.

Is it being done already?

It is always a good idea to talk to people in your community to find out if others are already planning or implementing a media campaign for this purpose. You can check with local military bases in the area and/or organizations that serve military youth. You should see if the community organizes around established awareness events, such as the Month of the Military Child (April), Military Appreciation Month (May) and/or Military Family Appreciation Week (November 21-28). By networking with established organizations in the area, you can ensure that you are leveraging resources and not duplicating efforts, which can lead to a much stronger initiative.

Potential Themes for your Media Campaign

- **Celebrate the Military Child**
 - Encourage active involvement with the military child
 - Focus on the strengths of the children
 - Help your community see the military child as an asset
 - Acknowledge the courage of the families who serve
- **Education Compact**
 - Highlight the key components of the compact and get the word out about what the compact does for military families

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Plan the Campaign

With community strengths and assets in mind, it is time to begin planning the awareness campaign. Remember, wherever possible, it is a good idea to capitalize on already established awareness days. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Budget:** Monetary constraints will impose a number of restrictions on the annual media campaign. Budget early in order to avoid pitfalls later. Will television or radio public service announcements (PSAs) be made? What type of literature will be created and disseminated? How many brochures and posters will be needed? Are tables, chairs and other materials available?

Tip: This doesn't always need to cost money

- Partner with an organization that has resources to support the initiative
- Feed into already established community calendar of events
- Set up booths, tables where people are already gathering
- Use existing volunteer capacity in your community; link up with your local HandsOn Action Center, United Way or other volunteer hub to leverage community volunteers
- Utilize free technology like social media (Facebook, You Tube, Twitter, etc.)

- **Timeframe:** Determine the time constraints of the campaign prior to its launch. Try to set specific targets, such as a week-long content development period, a month-long active campaign, a week of post-campaign assessment and so on. Doing so will keep the team focused and will force the limiting factors into view. For example: volunteers can only work so many hours, and television and radio stations may restrict airtime for PSAs. A good schedule will provide enough time to consider and work around these hazards.
- **Volunteer recruitment:** Don't forget about your local human assets – community volunteers. Local organizations, such as veteran and military service organizations, enlisted and officers' spouses clubs, and so on may be able to provide valuable labor and input. Ask your family, friends and co-workers if they would like to participate. Also, remember high school and college students are also a great source of volunteers. Check out the resources section for additional volunteer recruitment tools.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign recruiter

Task: Recruit volunteers for the campaign who are able to discuss the challenges facing the military child; create and disseminate campaign literature; organize recruitment drives across the community

Attributes: Experienced volunteer with excellent communications and leadership skills

Step 2: Marketing

Before designing the campaign, it is a good idea to have a clear message or theme that you wish to get across – an excellent first step is often to develop an **elevator speech**. This two minute or less speech is designed to explain what it is your group is trying to accomplish and the value you are bringing to the community. It should capture the imagination and passion of the listener.

- Humanize your speech – find a meaningful story about a member of the military community who benefitted or could have benefitted from efforts like yours and work it into your message
- Make sure your message is positive, speaks to the community's resilience and treats the military community as a potential community asset
- Make sure that key staff and volunteers working on the media campaign have some version of it memorized and tailored to the audience they will be interacting with

Once you have constructed your elevator speech it is time to craft your overall narrative. The goal of crafting a narrative is to make the military community empathetic and accessible.

- Awareness sites such Military Child Education Coalition and Military Family Alliance can serve as a model for the community's efforts
- Book people on talk radio to discuss first-hand experiences with the military community
- Utilize social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Google+, etc.

In order to create a strong, effective annual media campaign, it is important to decide early on the type of campaign best suited to the community. What will be most effective, and what is the best way to operate within the constraints imposed by time, funding and participation? Here are some examples of media used by many annual media campaigns:

- **Pamphlets, fliers and other handouts:** Cheap and easy to create, handouts are a cornerstone of most public awareness campaigns. Effective literature varies widely in content, but generally material for public dissemination should present a clear picture of the topic. Remember, the goal is to raise awareness.
- **Brochures:** Though similar in nature to fliers, brochures should provide a more in-depth look at the challenges faced by military children. Compile a list of places for handing out brochures.
- **Public service announcements (PSAs):** Though costly and time-consuming to develop independently, PSAs are among the most effective methods of raising public awareness. Television and radio announcements can reach entire communities at once. Some organizations even offer their own pre-designed PSAs for public use.
- **Press release:** Write a press release in advance that can serve as a future template for media interactions.

- **Editorial:** Write an editorial for local and regional papers – at the end highlight your talking points and plan of action.

Finally approach local media stations in the area and see if they're willing to provide some air time for your message. Call or visit in person, and be sure to speak with someone in a position of authority. Many – but not all – stations will have a public service requirement and will donate time for your group.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign manager

Task: Research challenges faced by military children and those of the military children in your area; locate successful examples of previous public awareness campaigns; recommend procedures for raising public awareness; formulate an overall plan for future and current campaigns

Attributes: Strong administrator, excellent communications skills, experience with media campaigns.

Step 3: Implementation

Once the basic infrastructure of the public awareness campaign has been designed, it is time to get things rolling. Here are some useful ideas;

- Raising public awareness has a great deal in common with marketing. **Advertise** what has already been accomplished, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. If you convened a support group or partnered with local organizations, for example, then feel free to use that as leverage towards continued efforts. Spread word about the campaign and its importance/relevance in your particular community.
- Be sure to have a presence at any community events: fairs, town hall meetings, church meetings and so on. Many high-traffic areas also allow organizations to set up **tables** in public spaces, though some areas may charge licensing fees or require registration. A presence in such locations allows for the dissemination of literature and access to interested parties. High visibility within a community is pivotal to the success of your efforts. Be sure to secure permission and/or appropriate permits for each event.
- You will need to plan to handle an influx of calls, etc. due to sparked interest in the military community. This plan should include a method of placing potential volunteers with different organizations and efforts within your community. Remember: failing to follow up with a potential volunteer will likely turn them off to your efforts and will generate bad press for your group in the community. In order to ensure that the interest generated within the community is not wasted, you will need a **point of contact** for those wishing to get involved. This point of contact will need a contact list of project leaders and volunteer coordinators within your volunteer space.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign volunteer

Task: Distribute literature with goal of raising public awareness; volunteers may also be called on to use their oratory skills in explaining the cause to interested parties

Attributes: Volunteers should be able to demonstrate familiarity with issues facing military families

Measures of Success

The point of a media campaign is to keep people engaged with the military community, raising awareness and sharing your successes, but the end result is to help the military child.

Measuring the success of your efforts is important. The ability to track the change created by the community's efforts will motivate volunteers and workers – you will want to know what worked and what was ineffective. Future efforts will rely on the lessons from the first campaign, so it is important to provide an objective evaluation of the process.

Depending on available resources, it can be difficult to accurately measure the success of a public awareness campaign. Here are a few things to think about:

- **Assess campaign materials:** Compare the amount of material disseminated during the campaign with the amount of material created. Though not a rigorous measurement of public awareness, doing so provide valuable information about your literature and distribution methods. Were some areas of the community disproportionately interested or disinterested? Were some types of literature more commonly distributed than others? This information will allow you to better focus successive awareness efforts.
- **Social media and web analytics:** Analyze the success of your web presence, if applicable, by using tools like Google PageRank. If you decided to incorporate a social media aspect into your awareness campaign, be sure to take stock of the digital footprint of your efforts. How many fans/likes/comments did your page receive on Facebook? How many tweets/retweets were created about your efforts? Such data can provide a fast and loose idea of the growth and size of public awareness.
- **Track media coverage:** Note any coverage of your public awareness efforts by the local media, such as newspaper articles, the airing of your PSAs, mention of your efforts in the local news, etc. This should provide a sense of the presence achieved by your public awareness campaign.
- **Other:**
 - Number of speaking engagements your people are asked to attend
 - Number of organizations that celebrate the Military Child Appreciation Week

Remember: 37 people showing up at a table at the local farmer's market to talk to your volunteers is a perfectly acceptable measurement of success. It may be easier in the beginning to focus on measures like these until your group has established itself with the media.

As you gain momentum, the most effective way to measure your success is through surveys. They can be conducted door-to-door, in public areas or over the phone. Surveying does require some basic statistical knowledge. To learn more about surveying, check out the Community Blueprint surveying resources.

Here are some suggestions:

- **Pre-campaign survey:** In order to measure the success of the campaign, one must first know the baseline. Conducting a survey prior to the community's efforts will provide a much stronger background for analysis later.
- **Post-campaign survey:** The pre-campaign survey must be preserved and included in the post-campaign survey. Include additional questions in order to assess the successes and failures of the campaign. What worked? What did not? Such information will prove invaluable.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Surveyor

Task: Conduct pre- and post-campaign surveys in-person, on the telephone, over e-mail and through whatever other medium might be necessary; compile survey results; prepare an overall presentation of the acquired data

Attributes: Detail-oriented, working knowledge of statistical analysis, passionate about the military community, comfortable speaking with strangers, personable

Other Resources

On the website for America's Promise Alliance, you will find samples for interview talking points and tips on how to talk to the media. Also available are templates for: media releases, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. You can use these as they are, or modify them to suit your community's needs.

- America's Promise Alliance has put together a series of ready-made material for interacting with the media, including letters to the editor and sample press releases available at: <http://www.americaspromise.org/Our-Work/Dropout-Prevention/Summit-Toolbox/Media-and-Communications.aspx>
- Learn more about the challenges facing military children in education and the Department of Defense's program to curb absenteeism in school by going to the Department of Defense Education Activity's (DODEA) "Be Here" program that confronts absenteeism: <http://www.dodea.edu/attendance/index.cfm>
- Military Child Education Coalition website section on education: <http://www.militarychild.org/education>
- The Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission: <http://www.mic3.net>
- Volunteer Recruitment Tools & Resources
 - Volunteer Leader Toolkit: <http://www.handsonnetwork.org/volunteers/gethandson/toolkits>
 - Effective Volunteer Recruitment Strategies: http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Effective_Volunteer_Recruitment_Strategies.pdf

- Crafting a Volunteer Recruitment Message:
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Crafting_a_Volunteer_Recruitment_Message.pdf
- The Three R's: Recruitment, Retention, Recognition:
http://www.handsonnetwork.org/files/resources/Three_Rs_Recruitment_Retention_Recognition.pdf