

Annual Public Awareness Campaign: Employment

Overview

America's military community are among its most qualified, experienced and reliable citizens. Despite this, the last few years have witnessed rising unemployment, soaring underemployment and a growing sense of disillusionment among our veterans and military spouses. In part, these troubling statistics can be attributed to misconceptions on the part of employers as to the unique strengths offered by the military community, such as: veterans cannot handle a work environment; spouses will have to leave a job early; Reservists and National Guardsmen will deploy, leaving the company high and dry. These myths must be dispelled. A public awareness campaign presents one of the best ways for communities to do so.

By targeting public awareness, we hope to resolve the fundamental distance between employers and the military community. Advertising the positive qualities of veterans and their spouses is a pivotal step on the road to eliminating the employment problem. Employers must be made aware of the strengths of the military community. When faced with a stack of résumés, they must feel that being a veteran or a military spouse is a point in favor, rather than one against. By raising public awareness, we will support communities across the country, strengthen our corporations and small businesses, and improve society as a whole.

The steps outlined in the document below are explicitly concerned with veterans, Reservists, National Guardsmen and military spouses, as the employment difficulties facing these particular groups are the broadest and deepest in communities across the country. It must be emphasized, however, that the overwhelming majority of the suggestions are applicable to all demographics.

There are four basic steps to conducting a public awareness campaign: 1) Plan the Campaign; 2) Develop Awareness Strategies; 3) Implement the Campaign; and 4) Additional Strategies to Raise Awareness and Combat Unemployment

Is it being done already? Assess any public awareness efforts within your community prior to initiating your own campaign. Military installations and advocacy organizations are the most likely to plan such events, and many advertise these online. You may also wish to contact these organizations over the phone or in person to develop a more complete idea of their current and future awareness plans. Many will have some form of advocacy planned for Military Appreciation Month (May), Memorial Day (the last Monday in May) and/or Veterans Day (Nov. 11). Regardless, keep these dates firmly in mind; you may wish to utilize one or more of these preset awareness periods to accentuate your own efforts. If you find an organization conducting such a campaign, maintain contact. You may be able to work together using the steps outlined below. Even if your goals do not align, it never hurts to be aware of the various organizations acting within your community.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Plan the Campaign

Now that you have assessed your community, it is time to design your own public awareness campaign. Your community evaluation should have left you with some idea of what is already being done. With that in mind, it is time to set some parameters. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Capitalize on awareness days:** Focus your efforts around those days already recognizing veterans, service members and their spouses. Organizations and communities nationwide often step up efforts to promote programs for the target demographics around Military Appreciation Month, Memorial Day and/or Veterans Day. There may be public events, speakers and other activities planned by local military and veterans' groups, many of which offer partnership opportunities. Active involvement in your community's activities is an effective and necessary strategy when designing the public awareness campaign.
- **Budget:** Budget early. Monetary constraints will impose a number of restrictions on your public awareness campaign. What type of literature do you intend to create and disseminate? How many brochures and posters will you need? Will you create television or radio public service announcements (PSA)? Have you recruited any volunteers? Should you hire workers and, if so, how much should they be paid? Do you need tables, chairs and other materials? The extent of your awareness efforts will be determined by your fiscal solvency and the particular needs of your individual community.
- **Timeframe:** Determine the time constraints of your campaign prior to its launch. Set specific targets, such as a week-long content development period, a week of active campaigning, a week of post-campaign assessment, etc. Doing so will keep your team focused, and will familiarize you with possible difficulties down the road. Volunteers can only work limited hours, for example, and television and radio stations may only provide limited airtime for your PSA. An efficient schedule will provide the team with enough time to work around these limitations.
- **Volunteer recruitment:** Throughout this document, you will see *Volunteer Opportunities*. One of the best ways to defray costs is by recruiting volunteers. Veteran and military service organizations, enlisted and officers' spouses clubs and even local employers may be able to provide valuable labor and input. Secondary schools and universities are another valuable source of volunteers. High school and college students are often willing to participate in community initiatives for little or no pay. Ask local high schools, universities and colleges if you can place recruitment fliers on their campuses. Many also have specific summer job websites, bulletin boards and newsletters you may be able to incorporate into your recruitment strategy.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign recruiter

Task: Recruit volunteers for the media campaign on local high school, college and university campuses; be able to discuss the employment problem with interested parties; create and disseminate campaign literature; organize recruitment drives across the community

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should possess excellent social skills; enthusiasm is of particular importance for campaign recruiters; willing and able to learn about and discuss the employment problem faced by the military community; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 2: Develop Awareness Strategies

There is an unequal distribution of resources between communities. Some have an abundance of willing volunteers, others a scarcity; some have public funding for outreach and awareness programs, others do not. In order to mount a strong, effective public awareness campaign, determine what will be most effective, and how best to operate within the constraints imposed by time, funding and participation. Here are some examples of various types of literature used by many public awareness campaigns:

- **Develop an elevator speech:** An elevator speech is a brief synopsis of the purpose, goal and importance of the public awareness campaign. It should answer, in two minutes or less, the following questions: Who are you? Why is this issue important? How does it affect my community? What can I do about it? A strong, focused elevator speech can make or break a campaign. Most individuals will give only the briefest license to the various instruments of the public awareness campaign, so it is important that each be as pointed and persuasive as possible.
- **Make it personal:** The most effective way to engage the community with the employment problem is by putting a human face on the issue. While fact sheets and other campaign paraphernalia can be informative and useful, they are generally poor as prime motivators. Make the employment problem understandable by stressing its impact within the community. Perhaps the best way to do this is by recruiting speakers from the local military community. Invite them to tell their stories where appropriate – public gatherings, church groups, town hall meetings, etc. As a result, many of the advocacy organizations concerned with employment are willing and able to provide excellent speakers for community initiatives such as your public awareness campaign. For a listing of some of these organizations, see *Other Resources*.
- **Donations:** The solicitation of donations is important to the success of any public awareness campaign, particularly if funding is a problem. Many businesses and organizations are happy to donate to charitable causes – doing so provides an excellent PR opportunity and improves the community in which they live and operate. Initiate contact as high up the hierarchy as possible, explain the importance of the employment problem to the community and try to provide a specific, manageable request.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign capacity builder

Task: Compile a list of local businesses, organizations, universities, etc. that might be willing to participate in or donate to the campaign; identify potential public speakers within the community; convey the importance of the employment problem to interested parties

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be familiar with basic research techniques; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

The specific types of campaign materials to be created and disseminated must also be decided in advance of awareness efforts. These are the documents volunteers will hand out, that interested parties will take home and that will point to specific reasons employment is an important issue. Some of the most common forms of literature are as follows:

- **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, your goal is to highlight the employment situation of veterans and military spouses, and to identify the strengths unique to each of these groups.
- **Brochures:** Brochures should provide a more in-depth look at the employment situation of veterans and military spouses. Compile a list of places where you can distribute your brochures. In many cases, it is helpful to coordinate with local behavioral health and veterans organizations to find events where your message will have the greatest impact: veterans' gatherings, the local Chamber of Commerce building, the local Better Business Bureau, university campuses, military bases, etc.
- **Public service announcements (PSAs):** PSAs are among the most effective methods of raising public awareness. Television and radio announcements can reach entire communities at once, and are more likely to grasp and retain the attention of the populace at large than handouts and brochures. Though costly and time consuming to develop independently, some behavioral health organizations may have ready-made PSAs for use in public awareness campaigns. See *Other Resources* for some suggestions.
- **Approach local media:** Television and radio stations are perfect avenues for the PSAs you have acquired or designed. Approach the local stations in your area and see if they are willing to donate airtime for your message. Call or visit in person, and be sure to speak with someone in a position of authority. Use the pre-designed elevator speech to begin, and support your statements with additional information as necessary.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Campaign managers

Task: Research the employment difficulties facing the military community; locate successful examples of previous employment and public awareness campaigns; recommend procedures for raising public awareness and advocating employment; formulate an overall plan for current and future campaigns

Attributes: Enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should possess familiarity with basic research techniques, experience with graphic/media software and strong writing skills; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 3: Implement the Campaign

Once you have designed the basic infrastructure of the public awareness campaign, it is time to get everything off the ground. Here are some ideas general ideas you may find useful in your efforts to raise employment:

- **Advertise:** Raising public awareness has a great deal in common with marketing. Advertise what you have already accomplished, and what you hope to accomplish in the future. If you convened a support group or partnered with local organizations, for example, then leverage that towards your continued awareness efforts. Spread the word about your campaign and its importance in your particular community. Make it relevant to the daily lives of the community members.
- **Centralize:** A centralized location is helpful through all the stages of the campaign process. Once implementation begins, it becomes even more important. Be sure to have a centralized location, phone number and email address for interested parties to use as a point of contact. This location will answer queries about employment, the struggles facing the military community, provide additional information for those whose interest was sparked by the campaign, and direct military families to the services and organizations they need.
- **Establish a presence:** Be sure to have a presence at any community events, such as fairs, town hall meetings, church meetings, etc. Many high-traffic areas also allow organizations to table in public space, though some areas may charge licensing fees or require registration. A presence in such locations allows you to disseminate literature and talk to interested parties. High visibility within a community is pivotal to the success of your awareness efforts.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Employment public awareness campaign volunteer

Task: Identify possible venues for the distribution of campaign literature; attain permits as necessary; distribute literature regarding common the employment problem within the target population with the goal of raising public awareness, eliminating under- and unemployment, and publicizing available services; utilize oratory skills to explain the cause to interested parties

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers must be able to learn about and discuss the employment difficulties facing the military community; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 4: Additional Strategies to Raise Awareness and Combat Unemployment

While raising general public awareness of the unemployment difficulties faced by the military community is always valuable, you may also wish to institute some targeted types of employer and veteran outreach. Doing so will increase the efficacy of your campaign as a whole, and will increase the reach of your future awareness efforts.

- **Highlight high-potential employers:** Not all companies are equally understanding of the unique needs and strengths of the military community. Identify those active within your community, and refer job candidates to those companies. Some of the questions you may wish to consider when evaluating a company are:
 - How many people did the company hire in the last fiscal year, and what percentage were from the military community?
 - Does the company budget specifically for the recruitment of veterans or their spouses?
 - Do they offer any special assistance for veterans, such as mentoring, orientation or training?
 - Do activated Reservists and National Guardsmen receive their full civilian pay, the difference between their civilian and military pay, or a combination, and will they do so for the entirety of the deployment period?
- **Translate military résumés:** One of the greatest roadblocks to employment for veterans is an inability to translate their military accomplishments into civilian terms. Consider recruiting experienced personnel from local military installations or business centers and hosting a résumé workshop. Alternatively, you may wish to publish a simple guide to résumé translation as a part of your campaign materials. While this type of information exists on the web, it is much more effective when associated with the level of support seen in a community initiative. See *Other Resources* for further information.
- **Provide a resource directory:** A simple guide to the resources available to the military community can be of immense value when distributed at the community level. Though a wide array of advocates, organizations and services are available to veterans, service members and their families, they often go underutilized due to low community visibility, stigma, etc. Embracing these as a part of your community initiative will ensure they can be effective and will greatly promote employment. See *Other Resources* for more information.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Community coordinator

Task: Locate events and venues where the public awareness campaign may be able to establish a presence; contact the managers of these events and venues and solicit permission for the public awareness campaign to discuss employment, table and disseminate literature

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should possess excellent oral and written skills, and be comfortable emailing, calling and coordinating with people they do not know; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Measure Your Success

Measuring the success of your public awareness efforts is important. The ability to track the change created by the campaign will motivate your workers and volunteers. Even more important, is knowing which aspects of the campaign were effective and which were ineffective. Future efforts will rely on the lessons they can glean from your first campaign, and so it is important to provide an objective evaluation of the process.

Depending on your available resources, it can be difficult to accurately measure the success of your public awareness campaign. The simplest and most effective way to do so is through surveys. For information on the methodology behind an effective survey, see *Surveying Guideline Tool* (Tool 5.2).

In addition to surveying, you may wish to measure your success in other ways. Here are some supplemental methods you can use:

- **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 provides 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.
- **Assess employment:** Contact local businesses and ask if there was any significant surge in military-related employment in the months following your campaign. Community employment statistics can also be telling, though most public numbers will not provide the level of granularity necessary to be useful in this particular regard.
- **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, etc. did your page receive on Facebook? How many Tweets and 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.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Post-campaign auditors

Task: Analyze the success of the public awareness campaign by participating in surveying efforts, contacting local employers, tracking social media footprint, auditing campaign materials and tracking media coverage

Attributes: Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should be familiar with basic research techniques; experience with statistical analysis is extremely helpful; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Other Resources

- **Afterdeployment.org:** <http://www.afterdeployment.org/>
 - An online resource supporting veterans, service members and their families with common post-deployment concerns. Of particular note is the “Work Adjustment” section, though the site provides self-care solutions targeting a number of other common concerns.
- **Department of Defense (DoD) Social Media Hub:** <http://www.defense.gov/socialmedia/>
 - A DoD-run aggregator of all social media sites having to do with military community. The site is organized by branch of service and type of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.
- **Department of Veterans Affairs YouTube:** <http://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>
 - An assortment of inspirational videos, PSAs and announcements designed and created by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Hire America's Heroes:** <http://www.hireamericasheroes.org/>
 - Hire America's Heroes is dedicated to sharing and promoting sponsor corporations' best practices and success strategies by which America's military service members, upon transition from active duty, are welcomed into the corporate workforce.
- **National Resource Directory:** <https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>
 - A government source “connecting wounded warriors, service members, veterans, their families and the caregivers who support them.” The site provides a wide array of resources, links and support for military community across the country.
- **O*Net Resource Center:** <http://www.onetcenter.org/>
 - A comprehensive aggregator of job listings and occupational information, which allows users to search for jobs by description, by location, by qualification, etc. The site also features Career Exploration Tools, “a set of valuable assessment instruments for workers and students looking to find or change careers.”
- **Military.com Employment Center:** <http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs>
 - A website that aggregates job listings and allows members of the military community to search based on a number of criteria, such as clearance level, reserve status, disability, etc. The site also offers a comprehensive number of job-seeking tools, such as a skills translator, a résumé builder, a listing of military job fairs, etc. It has special sections specifically for veterans and another for spouses.

- **Military Times EDGE:** <http://www.militarytimesedge.com/>
 - Published in print 10 times per year and updated online continuously, Military Times EDGE is “the only publication dedicated to showing soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen the practical and positive actions that can make their lives and careers better – both in the military and beyond.” The website offers a number of employment resources, such as a listing of the most veteran-friendly universities and employers, an explanation of GI Bill benefits, tips for the job-seeking veteran, etc.
- **Real Men. Real Depression Campaign Overview:**
<http://aaronrochlen.edb.utexas.edu/download/PDFs/2005-RMRDOverview.pdf>
 - An analysis of the Real Men. Real Depression program, a highly successful public awareness campaign designed in 2003 by the National Institute for Mental Health. Though this particular campaign was about depression awareness, the overview provides a detailed look at the general methodology of a public awareness campaign.
- **The Warrior Gateway:** <http://www.warriorgateway.org/>
 - The Warrior Gateway Program has been designed to promote easier reintegration into home communities. It establishes a single capability that serves as a trusted and reliable resource for the military community to quickly locate service organizations that satisfy their needs, identify academic programs they are interested in and easily find employers seeking their valuable skills, while enabling improvements in the service provider sector through metrics and collaboration.