

Annual Public Awareness Campaign

Overview

The unprecedented challenges faced by our military over the last decade have been well documented. Never before has an all-volunteer force participated in such a prolonged period of warfare, undergone such a volume of deployments deployed for such lengths of time. Civilian encouragement of, and approval for, the men and women in uniform has been as strong or stronger than in any previous military engagement. Yet while civilian support for the military itself has been admirable, support for the military family has, in some ways, lagged behind.

Recent years have witnessed surging interest in the effects of the military lifestyle on the family unit, and the ramifications of relocation, deployment and reintegration on spouses and children are increasingly well-understood by psychologists and sociologists. Despite this, the general public remains largely unaware of the particular stresses placed on the military family in the modern era and in eras past. Perhaps more distressing is the belief, held by an overwhelming majority of military families, that their contribution to society has not been appropriately recognized. A recent survey conducted by Blue Star Families revealed more than 90 percent of military families feel “the general public does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families.”ⁱ

In order to change this experience and increase the understanding of military families among the public, a greater awareness must be developed at the community level. Raising public awareness of the challenges faced by military families is perhaps the best way to do so. The following document provides an overview of a public awareness campaign.

The goals of this campaign are as follows:

- Raise public awareness about the active role military families play in communities across the country
- Encourage engagement of military families with the communities in which they reside
- Thank them for their service and support, which is critical to the continued function of the military and has long been underappreciated
- Highlight the local services available to these families, many of whom are buckling under the pressures imposed by the demands of military life

Basic activities: 1) Plan the Campaign; 2) Develop Awareness Strategies; 3) Implement the Campaign; and 4) Raise Awareness and Thank Families on an Individual Basis.

Is it being done already? Assess any ongoing efforts within your community prior to initiating your own public awareness campaign. Your local American Psychological Association (APA) chapter, military installations and family service organizations are the most likely to plan such events, and many advertise these online. You may also wish to contact these organizations by 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 the Month of the Military Child (April), Military Appreciation Month (May) and/or Military Family Appreciation Week (November 21-28). 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

The general assessment should have provided a sense of the particular strengths and benefits of your local community. With those in mind, it is time to begin planning the public awareness campaign. Here are a few things to consider:

- **Budget:** Monetary constraints will impose a number of restrictions on your public awareness campaign. Budget early in order to avoid pitfalls later. 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 (PSAs)? 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. 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 your team focused, and will force you to confront the limiting factor(s) outside your control. Volunteers can only work limited hours, for example, and television and radio stations may only provide limited airtime for your PSA. A good schedule will provide you with enough time to consider and work around these hazards.
- **Volunteer recruitment:** Throughout this document, you will see “Volunteer Opportunities.” One of the best ways to defray costs and involve your community is by recruiting volunteers. Local veteran and military service organizations, enlisted and officers' spouses clubs, etc. may be able to provide valuable labor and input. Local schools 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 military family strength with interested parties; create and disseminate campaign literature; organize recruitment drives across the country

Attributes: Enthusiastic, affable, interested in the military community

Who: Volunteers should possess excellent social skills; enthusiasm is of particular importance for campaign recruiters; volunteers should also be willing and able to learn about and discuss the unique family difficulties 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 create a strong, effective public awareness campaign, it is important to decide early on the type of campaign best suited to your community. You must determine what will be most effective, and how best to operate within the constraints imposed by time, funding and participation. Below are tips and broad strategies commonly used by 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 military family strength 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's interest in military family strength 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 difficulties of military families understandable by stressing the impact of those difficulties throughout 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 corollary, 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 military family strength 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. There are the documents volunteers will hand out, that interested parties will take home, and that will point to specific reasons family strength 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 (in this case, the importance of family strength and available services). Stress the reasons family strength should be a priority, and emphasize the availability of family services within the community. See *Other Resources* at the end of this document for an example created by the University of Southern California School of Social Work.
- **Brochures:** Though similar in nature to fliers, brochures should provide a more in-depth look at family strength and available services. Compile a list of high-impact locations where you can distribute your brochures. It may be helpful to coordinate with social workers or family organizations to find events where your message will have the greatest leverage: town hall meetings, gatherings on military installations, meetings of veterans' groups, doctors' offices, VA hospitals, university campuses and so on.
- **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 military family organizations may have ready-made PSAs for use in public awareness campaigns. See *Other Resources*.
- **Approach local media:** Television and radio stations are perfect avenues for the PSAs you have acquired or designed. Approach 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. Again, 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 family strength problems facing the military community; locate successful examples of previous family strength and public awareness campaigns; recommend procedures for raising public awareness and increasing intra-family and intercommunity solidarity; 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; strong writing skills; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 3: Implement the Campaign

Once the infrastructure of the public awareness campaign has been designed and the overall campaign planned, it is time to launch. Some general suggestions are below:

- **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 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 throughout 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 military family strength, provide additional information for those whose interest was sparked by the campaign, and direct military families to useful services and organizations.
- **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 spaces, though some may charge licensing fees or require registration. A presence in such locations allows you to disseminate literature and speak with interested parties. High visibility in the community is pivotal to the success of your awareness efforts.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Family strength public awareness campaign volunteer

Task: Identify possible venues for the distribution of campaign literature; attain permits as necessary; distribute literature regarding family strength within the target population, with the goal of raising public awareness, increasing family solidarity, engaging military families in the community, 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 family strength difficulties facing the military community; members of the military community are encouraged to apply

Hours: Flexible

Step 4: Raise Awareness and Thank Families on an Individual Basis

While the overall focus of the public awareness campaign should be broadly targeted, it is important to provide a means by which individuals can enact change, demonstrate their support of the military family and engage with overall community.

- **Convene a support group:** Support groups are an effective tool for dealing with any emotional trauma, and the difficulties of the military family are no exception. The support group provides a venue for spouses, children, siblings and parents to discuss and work through issues with their peers. Find a venue – again, many schools, businesses and other organizations are willing to provide rooms in the evening for a charitable cause – and start by recruiting a few key families from the local community.
- **Engage military families with the community:** An important aspect of raising public awareness is combating the perception of isolation that many military families endure. Though they may have their own installations, commissaries and other services, most military families live within non-military communities. There are many ways to engage military families with the community, such as highlighting and distributing volunteer opportunities for military families or designing a community event, such as a neighborhood barbeque, fundraiser, etc.
- **Service directory:** An overwhelming majority of military families admit to requiring some form of external support in order to cope with the emotional and logistical difficulties associated with a deployed family member. Compile a list of services available to military families within the community. Services need not be for military family only. This list can be distributed as part of the campaign literature. Some groups may wish to be contacted before their name is associated with the public awareness campaign.
- **Thank you card programs:** Implement a program through which individuals can design thank you cards for military families within the community. There should be two distinct phases to the program: creation and distribution. Local elementary, middle and high schools are usually quite amenable to the creation phase of these programs. Contact local veteran and military family organizations for help locating target families; in many cases, they may opt to perform the distribution themselves.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Volunteer family strength advocate

Task: Work to implement programs benefiting military families on an individual basis; duties shall include, but are not limited to, the convening of a military family peer support group, the establishment of a community solidarity event, the codification of a community service directory for military families, the establishment of a “thank you” card program

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 awareness efforts is important. The ability to track the change created by your family strength efforts will motivate your workers and volunteers. Even more important is knowing what about your campaign worked, and what was ineffective. Future efforts will rely on the lessons they can glean from your steps, 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 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.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Post-campaign auditors

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

- Blue Star Families: <http://www.bluestarfam.org/>
 - One of the leading support organizations for military families, with more than 70 chapters throughout the country. Blue Star Families provides a bevy of resources, and will be an enormous benefit to any campaign relating to the military family.
- 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 and YouTube.
- Joining Forces Campaign: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/joiningforces>
 - Led by first lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, Joining Forces is a comprehensive national initiative to mobilize all sectors of society to give our service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned. Joining Forces provides links to service projects, allows volunteers to pledge hours and supplies interested parties with all sorts of information relating to the military family.
- National Military Family Association: <http://www.militaryfamily.org/>
 - The National Military Family Association has advocated on behalf of military families for more than 40 years, and provides information about benefits and services available to military families, ranging from mental health care to spouse education programs. Their website also provides various toolkits that are sure to be of great value to the public awareness campaign.
- National Resource Directory (NRD): <https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>
 - The NRD is a website for connecting wounded warriors, service members, veterans and their families with those who support them. It provides access to services and resources at the national, state and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration. Visitors can find information on a variety of topics including benefits and compensation, education and training, employment, family and caregiver support, health, homeless assistance, housing, transportation and travel, volunteer opportunities, and other services and resources.
- Project Military Families: <http://www.projectmilitaryfamilies.com/>
 - An ongoing project designed to document the victories and struggles of the military family in the modern era.

- 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. The overview provides a detailed look at the methodology of a public awareness campaign.
- Warrior Gateway: <http://www.warriorgateway.info/about-us/>
 - 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.

i Blue Star Families. (2010). *Military family lifestyle survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.bluestarfam.org/resources/Surveys>