

DVAM and Teen DV Month Awareness Flash Mobs

Definition: A flash mob is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time (typically a choreographed dance sequence) for entertainment, satire or artistic expression, and then disperse in the hopes of raising awareness of a particular issue within the community at large. Often these performances are organized using social media networks, recorded and posted online so that the video goes viral to create a massive guerilla marketing campaign.

Flash mobs have been used for fun and inspiration (see Black-Eyed Peas Oprah 24th Anniversary Flash Mob, http://youtu.be/1aSbKvm_mKA and Lebanon Airport Surprise Dance - Classy People <http://youtu.be/9SyvhO3a3rY>); others have been organized to celebrate the life of someone now passed (see Baylor University Flash Mob Michael Jackson Tribute, <http://youtu.be/rm5tVYyPJs4>) and at other times to raise awareness of a very specific issue such as Equal Pay Day in DC, human trafficking in St. Louis, Missouri or teen dating violence awareness month in Providence, Rhode Island.



The **DC Coalition Against Domestic Violence (DCCADV)**, along with volunteers and advocates took over Farragut Square in Washington, DC to dance and raise awareness about domestic violence in Washington, DC. Even in the rain, advocates and volunteers danced and entertained the crowd and food trucks in Farragut Square!

Other reasons flash mobs are organized include:

- To bring the community together in a show of solidarity
- To raise awareness of harmful, troubling issues within society in a noninvasive and subtle way
- To raise the visibility of advocacy-based, helping organizations in the community

Planning the event

Organizing a flash mob can take up to 1-6 weeks or 2-4 months depending upon how large or intensive the campaign will be. Though a flash mob is open to participation from the public, organizers should specifically include organization staff and volunteers, community allies, educators, students, youth workers, and survivors and their families. Based on the experience of the DCCADV, it is best to have one staff member coordinate the event. Specific tasks include:

- Finalize logistics: find the location, secure the necessary permits, determine the date and time
- Secure and coordinate the routine with a choreographer: the DCCADV reached out to a local dance non-profit group for help teaching advocates and volunteers the dance
- Create a recording of the choreography to disseminate on YouTube and via other social networking outlets with details of the event
- Coordinate dance practices (if organizers will host them)
- Organize speakers and videographers for the day of the event
- Keep dancers and other participants informed of any changes in logistics
- Build the anticipation with community partners by sending periodic reminders

Planning a flash mob may seem time intensive, but marketing the event is not. It is meant to be a surprise for the community so actual publicity is kept to a minimum. It can be helpful to leak specific details of the event to community partners and allies to ensure a supportive crowd. However, using the power of social media to encourage attendance at a 'special event' is the flash mob way. At the end of the flash mob, wrap-up is fairly simple. The organizing staff member can work with the videographer to edit and disseminate the video online with its accompanying campaign materials.

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Learning from our Sisters

The **Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)** public awareness committee had learned of other issues and social movements using flash mobs as a creative way to raise social consciousness. Flash mobs, both large and small, were taking place in shopping centers, train stations and gathering spaces in cities across the world. RICADV's committee decided that organizing a flash mob was a hip modern medium to reach teens and young adults with its teen dating violence prevention message.

Teen DV Month Flash Mob was held on February 18, 2012 in Providence, Rhode Island in Kennedy Plaza (the downtown transportation hub). The event was organized by RICADV in partnership with its six member agencies, Day One (sexual assault resource center), the Katie Brown Educational Program, and the Lindsay Ann Burke Memorial Fund. Approximately 50 Rhode Islanders danced to *Glee's - Survivor/I Will Survive (Mash-up)* while spectators cheered to help raise awareness about teen dating violence and the prevention efforts happening in the state. To view a recording of the RICADV Flash Mob, visit these websites: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk1OWEBINxo> and <http://vimeo.com/37266505>.



Actual execution of the event is very minimal—it literally takes less than five minutes and the flash mob will be over. Advocates and allies may stay in the area to network and talk to spectators or the media about dating and domestic violence but no clean up is required. All equipment (audio and cameras) can quickly and easily be secured and put away. If organizers are not working with a videographer, staff or volunteers can use video editing software, such as Windows Movie Maker or Mac iMovie to create the YouTube video for posting and publicizing via social media.

Lessons Learned

1. **SPACE:** Many shopping centers and gathering spaces prohibit flash mobs; therefore, staff may need to spend some time finding a suitable space. Staff will also need to secure audio equipment for the music, etc.
2. **DANCE:** To RICADV, it was important that the dance routine be comprised of simple moves so that Rhode Islanders, young and old, could learn the routine and feel comfortable participating. Staff will need to discuss this, as well as other considerations with the choreographer early in the planning process before the dance routine is developed.
3. **MUSIC:** Just as above, the same is true with the song selection. RICADV's public awareness

committee selected a song that had a positive message and that would appeal to Rhode Islanders of diverse ages and backgrounds.

4. **PARTICIPANTS:** The informational YouTube video should contain the choreographed routine and logistical information such as location, date, time, rain date, etc., and other necessary information that the viewers need to know about why and where the flash mob is taking place. RICADV asked participants to learn the routine and to wear either purple or red the day of the flash mob. Participants were also encouraged to discreetly share the YouTube video with their friends and family, as the lure of flash mobs is the surprise element. To view the RICADV informational video as an example, access the link here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXVekyUTSIQ>
5. **RECORD:** Staff will need to develop a plan to record the flash mob from different angles that day. Once the recording is edited, staff will need to distribute the link to community partners and allies.
6. **PROMOTE:** RICADV used social networking media sites like Facebook and Twitter to engage Rhode Islanders, along with word of mouth. On RICADV's website there was also a hidden link to access the informational YouTube video.
7. **PRACTICE:** Staff and other known participants will need to practice the routine. RICADV staff and volunteers practiced in the hallways during lunch several times to make sure there were dancers others could follow in case they missed a step during the routine. Unlike DCCADV, the RICADV did not offer or coordinate any practice sessions for the flash mob beyond informal practice sessions as staff. All supporters that participated in the event, learned the dance on their own using the informational video.
8. **MEDIA:** Staff should discuss a media outreach plan. RICADV reached out to RI Monthly Magazine and other news media outlets to promote the recorded flash mob. Organizers may want to consider which news outlets to "leak" the flash mob to on the day before the event.

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