

## The Rhode Island Experience

October, as **National Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM)**, is a perfect opportunity for a comprehensive statewide public awareness campaign, incorporating a unified message, graphic design and theme. This section focuses on planning a public awareness campaign using the example of the **Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV)**.

Prior to 1996, RICADV's efforts for October had focused primarily on events. Several statewide events were held, with each member agency planning its own local activities. Displays that contained various posters, brochures, safety plans, etc., were distributed throughout the state. There was not, however, a unified graphic design, message or theme that tied all the components together. Therefore, the public would not necessarily relate individual components to the larger campaign.

This all changed in 1998. In 1997, RICADV was fortunate, because of a grant, to work with a public relations consultant who introduced program leaders to public awareness campaigns. Leaders learned about developing a design, theme and message that would permeate every aspect of the campaign. They also learned about expanding the campaign beyond an event-only focus. In addition to events, which they still hold, campaigns have grown to include materials (posters, point of purchase displays, palm cards, handbooks with domestic violence information, bulletin inserts for faith communities, purple ribbon cards, stickers, bookmarks and merchandise such as pens, t-shirts, zipper pulls); media (press conference, radio and television talk shows, local feature stories); and advertising (television ad, radio ad, billboard ad, bus ad, print ad, local banners and web site).

This new approach to the DVAM campaign has completely transformed RICADV's public awareness efforts. Developing a comprehensive campaign has dramatically raised awareness and visibility for the issue of domestic violence during October and throughout the year.

Frequency of message is crucial to the success of a public awareness campaign; in fact, some experts say that a message needs to be seen or heard at least seven times for it to be incorporated into someone's consciousness. Varying the avenues utilized to convey the message is also important because individuals receive messages in different ways, i.e. some people never read the newspaper but always watch television, while others may never watch television but listen to the radio. Therefore, the more ways that a message is conveyed, the better chance it has of reaching a large number of people. A comprehensive public awareness campaign provides the general public with numerous opportunities to hear, see or read the message. Following are some of the key ingredients needed to plan a successful public awareness campaign.

## Start Planning Early

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It is never too early to start planning. RICADV begins planning in January for its October campaign. Key to a successful public awareness campaign is careful mapping of the labor time necessary to carry out the campaign, and then matching the size of the campaign to the amount of labor time available. It is important to begin planning early so that the workload can be spread out and accomplished in small pieces. It is also important to remember that a public awareness campaign needs additional planning time because you have the added elements of graphic design, securing funding, etc. At the end of this section is a sample timeline for planning a public awareness campaign.

## Work On A Statewide Level

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The six member agencies in Rhode Island decided early on that the most effective October campaign would be one that was statewide. RICADV has a DVAM committee that is comprised of representatives from the member agencies. Committee members begin their planning in January, deciding on the theme for the year. They also decide what materials are needed and what events are to be held. In addition to the statewide events, which everyone participates in, each member agency holds its own local events. However, by planning together, member agencies know what the others are doing and that helps prevent conflicts with dates, media coverage, etc. A statewide public awareness campaign is not intended to replace the local program's efforts; rather, it should add to and enhance these efforts.

## Find Money For The Campaign Through Sponsorship Or Internal Funds

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In order to do the many things needed for a successful public awareness campaign, funding is needed at some level. RICADV has been successful in securing corporate sponsorship to fund its October awareness campaign. Campaign funding has increased each year. RICADV went from spending \$5,000, when it did events only, to spending \$25,000 in 1998, \$45,000 in 1999 and \$65,000 in 2000. RICADV also found that as its campaigns became more successful, corporations were more willing to support its efforts.

It is important to remember that one of the reasons corporations are willing to give money is they are getting valuable exposure in return, since their name and logo appear on all materials, advertising and at events. RICADV discovered that the corporations were thrilled by the amount of coverage they were receiving for the campaign. Also, sponsors can assist with other aspects of the campaign, in addition to giving direct funds. RICADV has recruited the area's most watched television station as a sponsor for the month and, instead of contributing money, it airs the television commercial for free during the month – a contribution worth thousands of dollars. One of the other sponsors donated its corporation's billboard space and left the board up for a year; another donated a print ad that ran in the state's largest newspaper.

## Work With A Professional Graphic Design Firm

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In order to develop a design and theme, it is important to work with a professional designer. The key to this is finding a firm that can be educated about domestic violence and that is reasonably priced. Many firms will work pro bono or at a reduced rate. RICADV discovered that it was beneficial to approach the firm with a

clear request of what work they were being asked to perform. RICADV also found that the work done by the committee in deciding the theme for the year helped focus the graphic design firm. This benefited the firm by giving staff direction, while also allowing them creative freedom.

RICADV has used the same firm for three years and has formed a close working relationship that has resulted in the development of award winning campaigns. Developing a relationship with a local firm also helps to leverage other contacts. RICADV's firm secured a production company that charged only \$5,000 for a \$50,000 television ad. The design firm also had excellent connections with printers and studios, which helped bring down RICADV's costs.

### **Consider Your Message And Audience Carefully**

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The Domestic Violence Awareness Project recommends using a uniform, repeated slogan/theme/message – *Domestic Violence: It Is Your Business!* Questions to consider include: Is it necessary to use a different theme than last year? Are your messages geared toward victims/survivors, perpetrators, bystanders or all of the above? Is your message inclusive to underserved or alternative populations in your state? A message aimed at perpetrators may need to be placed very differently than one aimed at victims. Change for change's sake may dilute your message – consider these elements thoroughly.

### **Don't Put All Your Eggs In One Basket – Mix Mediums**

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This may be the single most important element for any awareness plan, whether focused on DVAM or otherwise. Varying the avenues utilized to convey the message is critical to a successful public awareness campaign. As stated earlier, people absorb messages in different ways. Using various avenues to convey the message helps reach more people. The use of different avenues also serves as a safeguard so that if one component of the campaign is unsuccessful (no one covers the press conference because a big fire happened at the same time), there are still other means for reaching your audiences. It is also important not to forget the grassroots avenues for reaching people. RICADV's member agencies work diligently within their local communities to distribute posters, palm cards, bulletin inserts, purple ribbon cards, etc. These efforts greatly assist in ensuring message saturation throughout the state. With the grassroots foundation and the addition of the statewide efforts (television, radio, billboards, bus ads), the campaign message is everywhere, or as one of RICADV's allies said, "You would have to be dead not to know October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month."

### **Devote Staff Time To Coordinate Efforts On A State Level**

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RICADV devotes staff time and resources to coordinate DVAM on a statewide level. The staff person oversees the DVAM committee that is comprised of representatives from the member agencies. The committee and RICADV's staff member work closely together throughout the year. RICADV's staff person deals with finding the funding and/or sponsorship. She is also responsible for serving as the liaison with the design firm and all the vendors (printers, media buyers, television and radio producers, etc.). By removing these responsibilities from the individual member agencies, RICADV frees them up to do the important work

of outreach within the community. The involvement of the member agencies in the committee and with the overall planning ensures ownership and prevents RICADV from operating in isolation without member agency input. The member agencies appreciate the fact that RICADV is dedicating part of a staff person's time to make DVAM a reality.

### **Develop A Timeline And Workplan**

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A detailed workplan and timeline are needed to run a successful public awareness campaign. RICADV's staff person is responsible for overseeing the development of both the workplan and timelines, ensuring that deadlines are met and the work is being accomplished. Without the timeline, it is easy to get off schedule, especially given the crisis-oriented nature of domestic violence work. Rhode Island's DVAM committee reviews its timeline at each meeting to make sure everything is on schedule and moving forward as planned.

### **Begin Wherever You Are**

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Don't let the fact that you can't do it all stop you from starting. It would be easy to say, "Oh it's already July, so it's too late to plan early." But it's not too late to start planning now. It may be too late to get a sponsor for this year, but you can start for next year. It may be too late to do a statewide public awareness campaign for this year, but it's not too late to start talking to each other about the possibility of doing one next year. Start where you are and build from there.

The contents of this page were excerpted from the following source: Jeffreys, K., & Shawver, D.B. (2001). Planning a public awareness campaign. In Domestic Violence Awareness Project (Eds.), Domestic Violence Awareness: Tips, Tactics & Resources (pp. 53-63). Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence.