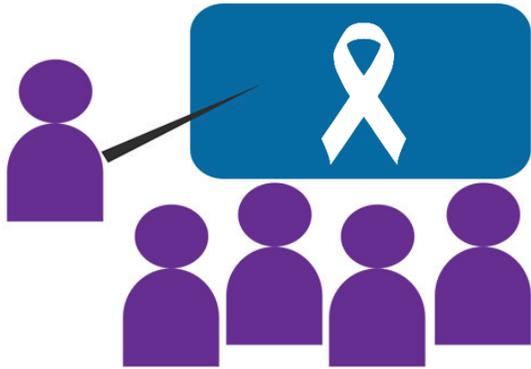


APS Public Awareness: Strategies for Success

Part of the **APS Public Awareness Toolkit** located at <https://apstarc.acl.gov/toolkits>.



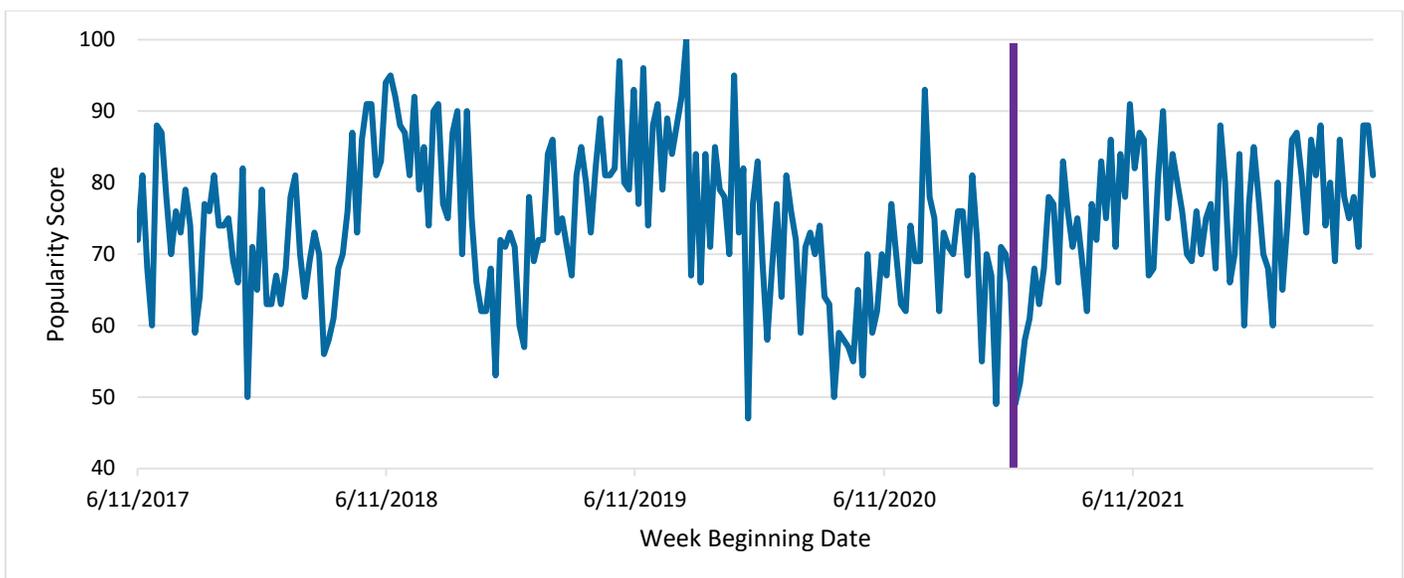
Anetzberger wrote about some progress on the issue, “Public awareness and professional recognition of elder abuse have increased... Still, there is evidence of awareness and recognition everywhere. I see it daily with growth in the number of Google Alerts news feeds I receive about elder abuse and my inability recently to find anyone who has not at least heard of the problem” (Anetzberger, 2022).

A search on Google Trends for the term “adult protective services” in the United States yields interesting results. Google Trends assigns scores of zero to 100 based on the popularity of a search term for any given period. Over the last five years, the term “adult protective services” shows a range from 50 to 100. The most consistently higher scores seen beginning 6/11/2021, where numbers never dipped below 60, as opposed to prior years where scores were lower (Google, n.d.).

Introduction

Public awareness campaigns can be an effective way to raise community awareness on a myriad of issues, from fire prevention (e.g. Smokey the Bear) to breast cancer awareness (e.g. pink ribbons) and beyond. Increased efforts across the elder justice field to raise the public's awareness of adult maltreatment and the role of adult protective services (APS) appears to be working. In an APS Blog post, researcher Georgia

Figure 1 - Weekly Popularity Scores for Search Term "adult protective services"



In 2021, more than \$179 million was made available to APS programs under first-ever, designated, one-time federal funding. Many states and territories are using this infusion of federal funding through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) of 2021 and the America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 to develop public awareness campaigns or to improve already existing public awareness materials.

This brief will examine the benefits and risks of raising public awareness, what to consider in planning for your campaign, and what activities to potentially include. We will focus on raising awareness of the maltreatment of older adults and adults with disabilities and the reporting of such to APS programs.

Benefits and Risks

Many of the benefits to raising public awareness about APS and adult maltreatment are self-evident. From informing the public or a targeted group of individuals that there is an organization that addresses adult maltreatment, to educating individuals on the warning signs, the outcomes can be positive. People who were otherwise unaware of signs of adult maltreatment can become informed on what to look out for if friends, family, or neighbors begin to show signs of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. Of equal importance is the component of educating others that there is an agency, APS, that offers help to these individuals and how to contact them.

There are also risks to public awareness. Reports will certainly increase once your campaign begins, whether you target mandatory reporters or the public. These reports may not always meet the criteria for investigation. Ensuring that both intake staff and investigatory staff are capable and prepared to handle the influx of reports, and to screen them, is important. You must also consider

the number of staff available. If your program is already struggling to handle the number of investigations you complete, you may need to hire staff before beginning your campaign. Existing staff may have concerns about the increase in reports, so developing buy-in to the campaign and allaying fears about the influx should be considered.

Budget

Your budget depends on many factors, not the least of which is the amount of funding available. Public awareness campaigns can be tailored to the budget, and methods of engagement are discussed in this brief, including potential costs. A primary consideration is whether to enlist the help of a marketing and/or advertising firm or utilize internal resources. Marketing firms help their clients develop the concept of the campaign and work with them from start to finish, while an advertising agency will help their clients with the paid execution of campaign strategies (Kremsa, n.d.). Marketing firm costs can vary from \$600+ per hour in large, urban markets to \$300+ per hour in the rest of the US (Beacon Media + Marketing, 2020).

Consider establishing a preliminary budget estimate before conducting the planning process outlined in this brief. Once your audience, message, and means of communicating with them are identified, you can revisit and adjust the budget accordingly.

Planning a Campaign

Adequate planning is a crucial step to any public awareness effort, whether you are simply distributing flyers to community agencies or engaging the public via television or radio. Taking the time to define your audience, tailoring the message and methods, and evaluating your efforts is important for success. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center's document "[It's time...to create a campaign](#)" outlines nine steps in the process of planning your campaign.

1. Identify your Audience
2. Write Objectives
3. Devise Strategies
4. Talk to Your Audience
5. Develop Messages
6. Get Creative
7. Go Back to the Audience
8. Implement Strategically
9. Evaluate

(National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2012)

1 Step 1: Identify your Audience

Selecting an audience for a public awareness campaign may not be as easy as it sounds. Should you consider the general public in your campaign, and use broad media tools to reach them, or will you focus on mandatory reporters only and use more targeted methods? A needs assessment will help you if you have issues defining the audience and with targeting underserved communities. Having a narrow audience means a more targeted campaign that needs to reach fewer people and may be more cost effective.

Using data to define your audience is also important. If available, view reports that show referral source categories to guide decisions on who to target. Also, consider the demographics of your target area and whether your target audience (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation) are represented in your reports compared to the population numbers.

2 Step 2: Write Objectives

Once you decide who the target audience is, come up with written objectives for your campaign. When possible, make these objectives measurable. Metrics can be used in the evaluation portion of the campaign (see Step 9) to determine if it was successful. These objectives will be at the heart of what you want to accomplish with your campaign. Consider a period of public comment on your

Conducting a Needs Assessment

In conjunction with your planning process, consider conducting a needs assessment, or a process to identify the need for or gaps in awareness in your community. A needs assessment may be scaled according to your agency's resources, timeline, and capacity. It can be a portion of a broader assessment of the adult maltreatment landscape in your area or focused specifically on the issue of public awareness, whether that be the identification of adult maltreatment, awareness around reporting maltreatment, or both. It may also help you identify underserved communities in your state or county, so make sure to include

A needs assessment can involve surveys, focus groups, or interviews with stakeholders both internal (e.g., APS investigators) and external (e.g., mandated reporters). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's document [**Improving Professional Development Offerings: Steps to Conduct a Needs Assessment**](#) can be helpful in planning a needs assessment.

objectives, both to gain feedback and to develop transparency.

Tailor your objectives to your target audience. For instance, if you wish to increase the knowledge of the signs of maltreatment in mental health professionals, use that language in your objective. Consider also using an objective that defines a target amount for which you wish to see an increase in reports (e.g., 10% over a six-month period). If you are targeting a specific group, say Latinx older adults, use metrics that incorporate this objective.

3 Step 3: Devise Strategies

After your objectives have been written, consider how you will meet those objectives. A variety of public awareness strategies and materials are discussed later in this publication. Consider your audience and how you will target them. If your audience is mandatory reporting professionals, what

materials and strategies will reach them best? If is the general public, a broad approach that reaches the widest audience may be the best method. If you are targeting a specific community, the Asian community for example, make sure you include language translation of materials.

4 Step 4: Talk to Your Audience

If you haven't conducted a needs assessment, discuss your objectives and strategies with a sample of people from your target audience. You will want to learn whether the objectives resonate with them and are clear. Whether a formal process via focus groups and interviews with target audience members or an informal one via discussions with professional colleagues and community partners closest to the audience about the content, discussing the campaign with others will help you determine if your intent is on target.

5 Step 5: Develop Messages

Once you've spoken to your audience, begin developing the message that you want to send. Incorporate information and feedback that you gained from speaking to the audience and professional colleagues into crafting what you want the audience to know. If you've decided to target raising awareness of a specific form of maltreatment, for instance financial exploitation, then develop your message to address the unique aspects of these cases and target any gaps stakeholders have identified. You may also want to consider enlisting the assistance of a marketing firm to help you develop your message if your budget allows. Professional marketers will help you develop a message that is rooted in research and experience of what's most effective.

6 Step 6: Get Creative

For many, this can be the fun part of the campaign and where you will need a team approach. Consider tapping into the creativity of program staff and hold a competition for the best or most catchy slogan, graphic, etc. Utilizing the creativity of your co-workers is a great way to tap into the talent of staff and to develop buy-in for your campaign.

If posters, magnets, or brochures are going to be part of delivering your message, you will need a graphic designer. If you are using audio or video (e.g., radio or TV ads), then you will undoubtedly need professional assistance. Consider the cost and time involved with procuring these services in your government environment, and whether you must engage in a competitive bidding process for these providers. Costs for various activities are discussed later in this brief.

7 Step 7: Go Back to the Audience

It may seem like overkill to revisit your audience, but it can be critical to test your message with others once it's developed. You would not want your campaign to be derailed by a misguided message or even a culturally insensitive one. This step ensures the integrity of your campaign and that it will resonate with those you wish to target.

8 Step 8: Implement Strategically

Once your message and methods are finalized, it will be time to implement your campaign and spread the word. Consider all the delivery methods at your disposal. If you're distributing flyers or posters, what partners can assist you in ensuring your reach? If a website or social media are an integral component, how will you publicize these and gain followers? Also consider how you can integrate your strategies with each other and develop synergy amongst them. Use social media to recruit people to

distribute flyers or posters. Post any audio or video developed in conjunction with the campaign on your website and social media platforms.

9 Step 9: Evaluate

Finally, evaluate your efforts to determine their effectiveness and how they may be improved. This is where the objectives you developed in step two will come into play. While not all your objectives may be measurable, use metrics wherever you are able. For instance, if an objective was to educate the public on adult maltreatment, you may consider the number of materials distributed to the public. Consider using web analytic services if your campaign includes a website. These services can provide a plethora of data from where visitors live to the number of times a page was viewed. Social media sites typically come with built in analytics to help you measure your reach. If you engaged your campaign with one-time federal funding, showing how successful it was may assist you in securing state funding to enhance the campaign down the road. Sample objectives are included in the next section of this brief.

Types of Public Awareness Activities

There are many options to consider when devising the strategies to use for a public awareness campaign. Your budget and timeline will dictate some of the options available, but other factors discussed in this brief will as well, including who the target audience is and the method that will best reach them. Always consider language translation for any materials produced. You will want to reach all of those in your audience, regardless of what language they speak.

This section outlines some of the types of activities to consider engaging in your campaign and potential costs. It also provides example measurable objectives to use when evaluating each activity.

Brochures & Fact Sheets

There are good reasons brochures and/or fact sheets are a very common public awareness tool. They can be easily created using desktop design software and often printed without professional equipment, making them perfect for small-scale campaigns. Whether you use professional graphic designers or printers may depend on the quantity of brochures you plan to produce and distribute. The number of brochures needed will likely determine the most cost-effective methods. Also consider posting a downloadable version of your brochure or fact sheet to your website, allowing the audience to print their own materials.

Example Objective – Produce and distribute XX brochures/fact sheets to local mandatory reporters.

Posters

Posters are also a very common public awareness tool. They are harder to produce than brochures and fact sheets because they are typically printed professionally. Using a professional graphic designer is also much more important for posters as the images must be of higher resolution due to their size. A graphic designer will also be able to help you create an impactful poster that delivers your message effectively.

Example Objective – Produce and distribute XX posters to all law enforcement offices in the jurisdiction.

Billboards

Billboards require a very targeted approach with professional assistance. Your message must be conveyed in 5-10 seconds to be effective (Leap Innovation, LLC), since your audience will likely be speeding by in a vehicle. It's best to be concise and colorful in your messaging with language that is tailored to the area where the billboard will be

displayed (Morones, 2016). Note that many billboards allow for innovative displays where images spread outside the border of the board or even have lighting. While eye-catching, this will certainly increase costs. Billboards can cost anywhere from \$750 to \$14,000 per month (Signpost, 2021). Billboard advertising companies offer metrics that will assist in measuring your impact through use of certain technologies.

Example Objective – Reach XX people per day for XX months via outdoor advertising.

Events

Virtual or in-person events are a great way to spread awareness. Conferences, workshops, and exhibit booths can all be very successful, especially in targeting a specific audience of professionals. For instance, if your agency has poor communication with discharge planners, consider presenting at the local social work conference and targeting that audience with a presentation on collaboration. You may wish to participate in existing events or host your own. These can be as small as regular workshops in the community to full conferences and the costs will vary accordingly. You may want to offer to speak at “brown bag” presentations or multidisciplinary team meetings, leveraging existing opportunities. Keep in mind that in-person events typically have more associated costs than virtual ones, from registration systems to meeting facilities and beyond.

Example Objective – Educate XX mandatory reporters over an X month period via workshops at hospitals, nursing facilities, and police stations.

Videos

Videos can be a powerful way to convey your message through live-action, graphic design, animation, or a combination of these genres. Depending on the format (online, television, etc.), the length can be very short (e.g., an ad that is 30 seconds) to much longer (e.g., a 10-minute victim story). The broadcast method will often dictate length, as television advertisement costs can vary considerably. Airtime for ads is based on cost-per-thousand, and your ad will cost different amounts on the same station based on when it airs. In 2022, a 60-second ad in Los Angeles, CA can cost \$34.75 per thousand while the same ad can cost \$14.36 in Kansas City, MO (Benitez, 2022). Production costs can also vary quite a bit. A two to three minute professionally produced video can cost from \$2000 to \$7000 per minute (Forte, 2021).

Example Objective – Achieve XX number of people via YouTube views.¹

Websites

You may consider a campaign-specific website for your public awareness efforts. This is a website that is centered solely on your campaign and may be used synergistically with other activities (i.e., printed on your posters, brochures, etc. and displays a video). An example of such a site is the Texas campaign “Everyone’s Business” (www.everyonesbusiness.org). The website uses a single, easily remembered web address and contains resources such as a 30-second video and a downloadable/printable poster. It also provides information in English and in Spanish. Campaign websites may be developed without external support if your agency’s IT department is available to assist. If you must use external help, costs can vary from

¹ YouTube publicly displays the number of times a video was viewed.

\$500-\$5,000 for a freelancer to \$3,000-\$10,000 for an agency specializing in web development (Laurinavicius, 2021). Metrics can easily be measured with various tools that collect views, visitors, etc., many of which are free.

Example Objective – Achieve XX average new visitors per month for a 12-month period.



Social Media

Social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can be excellent add-ons to campaigns or used as a stand-alone method. All can be used without cost and offer metrics to measure your reach. Social media campaigns must be publicized as widely as possible to increase reach. Agencies often have established social media accounts, so building campaign-specific accounts may not be necessary or even in your best interest. Leveraging the existing audience of your greater organization’s Twitter account, with thousands of followers already, may be the best method. In this event, a hashtag (a word or phrase with a # sign added to it) may be all you need. The social media campaign for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, led by the National Center on Elder Abuse, is a prime example of using social media for awareness and uses the hashtag #WEAAD. For the period of June 15, 2022, through June 20, 2022, the hashtag was mentioned in 577 posts from Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and beyond (BrandMentions, 2022). Publicizing your hashtag or social media accounts is an effort that builds over time. A variety of hashtag tracking tools are available at no cost online.

Example Objective – Achieve XX mentions of campaign hashtag over a 6-month period.



Promotional Items

We are undoubtedly all familiar with personalized promotional items such as pens,

magnets, keychains, etc. These items can be given away at events or in shipments and personalized with a reporting number, a website, a tagline, etc. These items can be a good reminder of your campaign when used (e.g., pens) or observed (e.g., magnets) throughout the day. Deciding on promotional items can be a creative and fun part of your campaign. While pens and magnets are good choices, consider novelty items that others may not provide such as plastic magnifying cards or even USB “power banks” with your logo. Of course, costs vary greatly. Depending on the selection, personalized pens can range from \$0.20 each all the way up to \$70, with price breaks contingent on the number of items ordered.

Example Objective – Distribute XX promotional items over a 3-month period.

Conclusion

As outlined in this brief, awareness of adult maltreatment appears to have increased but there is always more work to do to educate communities about abuse, neglect, exploitation, and the role of APS. Additionally, there are many factors to consider when engaging in a public awareness campaign and this brief will help you plan the steps and consider options available regardless of budget. APS programs interested in further assistance can contact us at any time.

APS TARC

Adult Protective Services Technical Assistance Resource Center



What did you think of this brief?

[Take our five-question satisfaction survey](#) to let us know.

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