CAP TIPS #3

To Improve Public Awareness

Creating an Effective NCVRW Planning Committee

Introduction

You are well aware that in order to sponsor successful public awareness and victim outreach activities during NCVRW, a great deal of planning is involved! As such, an *essential element* of preparing for 2010 NCVRW is the creation of a collaborative Planning Committee. Both the membership and management of your Planning Committee are critical to your eventual success this April!

Who Should Be Involved?

It's important to get the right people at your planning table. In order to accomplish this, consider for a moment the various tasks involved with your NCVRW activities and events, which may include but not be limited to:

- Administration and management.
- Event(s) planning.
- Victim/survivor outreach.
- Dignitary outreach.
- Public outreach.
- Lots of writing!
- Managing creation of artwork.
- Media relations (see Previous *CAP TIPS #1, #6, #11, and #12*)
- Ongoing communications to turn out crowds (see Previous *CAP TIPS #8*)
- Printing.
- Collating.
- Pickup and delivery.
- Placing event posters around town (see Previous *CAP TIPS #8*).
- Event set-up.
- Event coordination on-site.
- Event cleanup.
- Following up with thanks to all involved.

The most important potential Planning Committee members are those who are directly involved with crime victim assistance, and who understand and appreciate the importance of NCVRW, and its efforts to generate public awareness about victims' rights and needs. Other members can be identified based upon the scope and specifics of your planned activities (*see the list above*). These include:

- Crime victims and survivors.

- Community-based victim service providers.
- System-based victim service providers.
- Criminal, juvenile, tribal and Federal justice system officials:
  - Law enforcement.
  - Jails.
  - Prosecutors.
  - Courts and judiciary.
  - Probation.
  - Parole.
  - Institutional corrections.
- State and local elected officials.
- Mental health professionals.
- Community service organizations.
- School administrators.
- Colleges and universities.
- Multi-faith-based communities.
- The news media.
- Public relations or advertising professionals.
- Civic organizations.

In addition, please see 2009 *CAP TIPS #5*, "Expanding Your Community Outreach Efforts," which includes an extensive roster of over 130 entities that can be engaged in planning activities and/or tapped to assist with victim and public outreach and awareness.

What Should Your Committee Structure Look Like?

It's a good assumption that few people have the time necessary to attend meetings and engage in ongoing communications that are essential to plan for NCVRW activities. Therefore, it's a good idea to establish a small Steering Committee – less than eight members – who can serve as administrators and coordinators, and possibly as leaders of subcommittees.

Based upon expected planning activities, you can consider creating (at least) the following six subcommittees:

1. Victim/survivor outreach.
2. Public outreach and awareness.
3. Overall communications (in-person, telephone, e-mail and web-based).
4. Special events planning and logistics.
5. Media relations.
6. Volunteer solicitation, management and coordination.

The creation of subcommittees will make communications and the assignment of tasks easier to manage, and will reduce the time commitment required of individuals who volunteer to support your planning activities.

Effective Planning and Subcommittee Communications

An important first step is to create an email distribution list of *all* individuals who are members of your Planning/Steering Committee or any subcommittees that also includes members' names, titles, agencies, telephone numbers and email addresses. Only the most essential information that relates to *all* these volunteers should be sent via this email list (so as not to "burn out" people with too many emails!).

Separate email lists should also be created for your Planning/Steering Committee and subcommittees; and each subcommittee leader should be asked to coordinate and facilitate ongoing communications.

It's a good idea to ask ALL various Committee members to attend *one initial in-person meeting*, where you can:

- Provide an overview of your proposed NCVRW activities and events, along with background information about OVC and your NCVRW Community Awareness Project funding support.
- Collaboratively develop measurable goals that can guide your planning (and evaluation, after NCVRW is over!).
- Develop a list of tasks necessary for success.
- Assign responsibility for various tasks, with clear deadlines and emphasis on group coordination.
- Generate enthusiasm and "buy-in" for your NCVRW activities.

A final in-person meeting during the week of April 12 is also a good idea, in order to make sure that you are fully prepared for 2010 NCVRW.

For the ten-week period in between your initial and final in-person meetings, it's a good idea to attempt to plan for regularly scheduled conference calls or web-based meetings at least every two weeks (for example, at 9 a.m. every other Friday). You can:

- Ask your Committee members if anyone has the capacity to arrange for multi-person conference calls, and allow them to set-up teleconference meetings.
- Ask your Committee members to register for the free Skype service (www.skype.com) that allows you to facilitate multi-person telephone conferences at no cost (however, a computer headset with microphone is required for this type of communication).
- Consider using web-based and audio conference meeting services. Readytalk (www.readytalk.com) offers reduced rates for non-profit organizations which, along with donated software and other resources are available to eligible nonprofit organizations registered with TechSoup (www.techsoup.org).

How to Conduct Effective Meetings

Crime victim advocates spend a considerable amount of time in meetings, as both a sponsor and a participant. Consider for a moment meetings that you look forward to attending, versus meetings that you dread attending. The differences between the two can be summarized in “five Ps:”

1. **P**lanning that creates “buy-in” from participants and ensures that all advance and on-site logistics are adequately addressed.

2. **P**rocess that addresses advance, on-site and follow-on activities, and that ensures that the meeting is conducted in a professional manner.

3. **P**ersonality of a skilled facilitator to adhere to a clearly stated agenda, and engage all participants.

4. **P**articipants who can contribute to achieving the goal of the meeting, and who are willing to assume responsibilities for any follow-on activities.

5. **P**roducts that result from the meeting prepared and disseminated in a timely manner.

Two elements for a successful meeting are to first determine if a meeting is needed; and next to have a clear agenda to guide both participants and the meeting process.

- Don’t call a meeting unless there is business that can’t be conducted by telephone, email communications, and/or on-line meetings

- Always have a concise meeting agenda that includes a clearly stated “meeting goal:”

    - It is helpful to seek input in advance from meeting participants about the goals and objectives to achieve their “buy-in.” A meeting sponsor can also develop a “draft agenda” for circulation to participants to which they can add agenda items.

    - For a two-hour meeting, limit agenda items to four key issues with specified time limitations on each issue.

        - Determine in advance the meeting participants who are responsible for facilitating or contributing to each key issue, and work with them to prepare their presentation within the time allotted.

        - Key components for the written agenda include:
            - “Header” that includes meeting sponsorship, date, time and location.
            - Welcome and introductions (a participant “icebreaker” is optional).

    - Goal(s) of the meeting.
    - "Old Business" (for meetings that are regularly scheduled).
    - Key issues to address or accomplish.
    - "New Business" (if there are any "loose ends").
    - Clarification of any follow-on assignments or activities with deadlines.
    - Adjourn.

- Send the meeting agenda that includes key topics, persons responsible for presentations and discussions, etc. with logistics (date, the beginning and ending time, location and directions) at least one week in advance of the session. It is also helpful to remind participants to bring their calendars or PDAs for scheduling purposes.

On-site Meeting Logistics

If key logistics are identified and addressed, it will increase the likelihood of a meeting running smoothly.

- Seek to hold your meetings at a central location that is accessible by mass transit, has ample parking, and is disability accessible. Provide information about both to participants in advance of the meeting.

- Set up the meeting room in a manner that is conducive to group discussion, i.e., a round table or horseshoe (*not* theater style).

- Provide signage that clearly directs participants to the meeting location.

- Provide a sign-in sheet that documents who is attending the meeting.

- Arrange for audio/visual equipment, which may include:

    - Tear sheet pads and multiple colored felt pens.
    - Overhead projector or LCD equipment and screen (for any presentation of goals, etc.).
    - Audio or video recording equipment (including adequate number of tapes and batteries).
    - Laptop computers to record notations from the discussion.

- Arrange for specific needs of participants, which may include

    - Accommodations for persons with mobility access needs.
    - Sign language interpreters for participants who are deaf.
    - Interpreters for participants who speak a language other than English.

- Arrange for on-site participant resources, which may include:

    - Any written resources or handouts relevant to the discussion.

- Pads of paper.
- Pens or pencils.
- Name tags.
- Name plates on card stock.
- Boxes of tissues.
- Individual work sheets (if applicable).

Key Considerations for Effective Meetings

These considerations for on-site meetings can be easily adapted for on-line or teleconference meetings.

- Never penalize the people who arrive on time to meetings. Start promptly at the time designated on the agenda. End promptly on time as well.

- Keep to the agenda in order to respect participants' time and commitment:

  - Include a "parking lot" for meeting participants on a piece of tear sheet posted on a wall. Provide each participant with "sticky notes" to jot down issues they think about – which may or may not be related to the topic at hand – and post them on the "parking lot." Allow at least 15 minutes at the end of a meeting to address "parking lot" issues, if needed.

- Designate a staff member or volunteer to document the meeting through minutes. It is also helpful to have a "recorder" who documents key issues on tear sheets posted on the walls.

- It is a good idea to have individual work sheets for key issues so that *all* participants can provide their input. This is a good process to engage participants who are less likely to participate verbally, and also to obtain additional data that can address the key issues of the meeting. The facilitator can describe the type of information that is sought; provide a time limit for completing the work sheet; collect the work sheets; and assure participants that their input will be reflected in the meeting's minutes.

- Document proceedings of meetings through minutes that are distributed to participants within one week of the meeting. Either highlight "action items" or include a list at the end of the minutes, with assignments and deadlines for persons who are responsible for each action item and specific deadlines.

Conducting the Meeting

A well-managed meeting always has a designated facilitator or leader. This person should be at the site at least 30 minutes in advance of the meeting to set up the room and welcome participants. Effective meeting facilitation includes:

- Welcome from the sponsor and/or facilitator, and an opportunity for participants to introduce themselves by name and agency affiliation.

- “Housekeeping announcements” (such as where bathrooms are located, information about any reimbursements, etc.)

- If time permits, an “icebreaker” that immediately engages participants. For example:

  - “From the agenda we sent you in advance, I’d like each of you to identify one expectation you have of this meeting.”

  - “From the agenda we sent you in advance, I’d like each of you to identify one challenge to accomplishing our goal.”

- Review of the agenda, with an opportunity for clarification if needed.

- Review of general “ground rules” (which can be posted on a tear sheet on the wall). For example:

  - Everyone’s participation is welcome and encouraged, but nobody is encouraged to over-participate.

  - Please raise your hand when you wish to speak.

  - Please turn your cell phones and pagers to “off” or “vibrate.”

- Facilitation of the agenda that respects time limitations and participants’ contributions (see “Useful Tips for Meeting Facilitators” below).

- Providing time prior to the end of the meeting for summary, clarification and thanking the participants.

Useful Tips for Meeting Facilitators

- In your brief welcoming remarks, attempt to make people feel that you are glad they came, and that their contributions are important.

- Speak slowly and clearly.

- Maintain a positive and friendly demeanor, which is contagious!

- Make the first introduction of yourself (in order to model the type and brevity of the introductions of other participants).

- Provide clear time limits for each agenda item to make the best use of limited time.

- Try to involve all participants in the discussion, and avoid letting any one participant dominate. Comments like, “We haven’t heard from (name) yet on this

- Briefly summarize and provide opportunities for clarification of group discussions following each agenda item.

- Document any "action items" on tear sheets, in the meetings' minutes, and verbally to participants to clarify individuals' responsibilities for follow-on activities.

- Discuss plans for any future meetings.

- Thank people for attending, and for their contributions to the meeting's success. Follow-up with a brief email that offers your gratitude in writing.

Follow-on to the Meeting

It is critical to prepare written minutes as soon as possible for dissemination to participants. Too often, a meeting ends with little or no follow-on, which makes participants wonder "what happened?", "what are the results?" and "was this meeting worth my time?"

For More Information

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