



Best Practice: Funding of Public Education and Awareness

Purpose

The purpose of the document is to provide a best practice template for Auto Theft Prevention Authorities (ATPAs) to consider when funding programs, projects, campaigns and materials for public education, awareness and information to address the threat of vehicle crimes.

Funding

Most ATPAs provide funding to encourage the public to be their own first layer of protection against vehicle crimes. The intent of funding education and prevention programs is to elevate public awareness, increase prevention activity, gain voluntary compliance of laws and strengthen the concerted efforts to reduce or minimize the impact of vehicle crimes within communities. Appropriate funding of these programs can evidence efficient investment value return when simply considering the amount of funds expended to support the program. The following strategies are offered for an ATPA to consider when contemplating the funding of a public education, awareness and/or information project.

Practice Element 1: Define the Nature of the Project

It is recommended that ATPAs develop, solicit, and review projects that use the following classifications:

1. **Public Education (Public Prevention).** Public education concentrates on techniques to modify an observable change of human behavior related to the viable threat, impact or exposure of vehicle crimes. Public education typically engages behavior modification techniques to attempt in decreasing or increasing a particular type of behavior or reaction. These projects are typically aimed at selected populations (e.g., high risk) utilizing classical conditioning and/or operant conditioning methods. The aim for public education is to modify behavior which can be observed, tracked and otherwise evaluated for demonstrated results. Public education projects are typically intense; requiring detailed planning, statistics, analysis, facts, figures, professional evaluation instrumentation and personnel.
2. **Public Awareness (Public Information).** Public awareness is a process of developing and communicating factual information for a selected group or general population in order to increase levels of understanding, attentiveness, alertness or attention. These projects typically involve planning, messaging, relationship building or outreach, paid- or earned-media, and grassroots organizing and engagement. These projects may require minimal effort, contrasted to public education, as the focus is to provide information without measuring an expectation to change or modify behavior.

Practice Element 2: Policies and Procedures

1. ATPAs must identify agency strategic framework, internal policies and procedures prior to engaging in prevention and information activities.
2. The ATPA should review a project proposal in light of their framework



3. Only project agency with established policies and procedures in place regarding roles, responsibilities and procedures of the education or awareness project should be considered.

Established policies and procedures provide clarity in expectations, conformance with laws, professional standards and responsibilities for plans, organization, staffing, budgeting, operation and evaluation. Policies and procedures should be implemented consistent with professional best practices, such as those supported by the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies, IACP Police-Media Relations, National Sheriff's Association, National Broadcasters Association, etc.

Practice Element 3: Project Plan Key Elements

A significant element for ATPAs funding an education and/or awareness project is the ability of the program to demonstrate programmatic impact and financial efficiency. The program must demonstrate at some level that groups targeted received the message or changed behavior at a cost commensurate with the impact.

Practice Element 4: Public Education Key Elements

1. Identifying the Problem. This element is essential in crafting an effective public education project. The problem identification should utilize facts, information, figures, statistics, analysis and other forms of evidence to clearly identify the problem, the groups impacted and causal information.
2. Identify the target audience - such as victims, offenders, public or private groups, or the general public.
3. Developing or Implementing a Focal Message. Public education projects should have a central, simplistic theme message, comprised of content, source, sensitivity, specificity, and branding (logo). The focal message should be professionally developed through careful planning, be clear and convincing, compelling and used as a central foundation for all aspects of the Public Education Plan.
4. Developing a Public Education Plan. Problem identification should provide proper justification for the type of public education effort (media campaign, training, enforcement, etc.), as well as the level of resources to adequately modify observable behavior or inform the target population. The plan must clearly link the causal behaviors to the modified behaviors and knowledge that will minimize, reduce or otherwise prevent a vehicle crime(s). Public education projects typically involve a high level of strategic planning, organizational competencies, coordination, relationship with public and private sectors, time, personnel and funding.
5. Goals, Objectives and Measurements. As public education projects should be geared to observe changes in behavior, successful projects should likewise establish measures for determining the level of behavioral change. As examples: Using pre- or post-campaign polls/surveys to measure a change in compliance, attitude or knowledge of vehicle crime laws (e.g., puffing) within the target audience; Using vehicle crimes data analysis pre- and post- campaign to demonstrate significant reductions in targeted offenses, vehicles or offender patterns; Using crime analytics pre- and post-campaign to assist in demonstrating reduction of repetitive vehicle crime victims.



Practice Element 5: Public Awareness Key Elements

1. Identifying the Problem. Similar to public education, this element is essential. The problem identification should utilize facts, information, figures, statistics, and analysis to clearly evidence the problem. The problem identification should provide justification for why messaging and information is necessary for public distribution. Problem identification should address the level of support and resources needed to inform the community on the problem related to vehicle crimes and alternatives or prevention methods to avoid victimization or offending.
2. Identify the target audience - such as victims, offenders, public or private groups, or the general public.
3. Developing or Implementing Messages. Public awareness programs should be flexible and attentive to changes in vehicle crimes regarding locality, trends, patterns, victimology and offender methodologies. Careful planning should be addressed to understand the target audience, what is needed to elevate awareness, clear and compelling message development, and message framing (context, values, metaphors, tone, visuals, solutions and data proof).
4. Developing a Public Awareness Plan. A public awareness plan should include a strategic plan, coordination, identification of stakeholders and partnerships, coordination and identification of products and means for delivery to the target audience.
5. Goals, Objectives and Measurements. Unlike public education projects, public awareness would not normally measure changes in behavior, but demonstrate distribution efforts of information. As examples: How many followers were on Facebook®, Twitter®, Snapchat®, etc.? How many earned media versus paid media advertisements were produced/published? How many distributed materials were delivered? How many exposures were attained during a broadcast? How many Watch-Your-Car registrants were enrolled? How many coordinated community engagements were performed? These measurements are not typically related to changes in behavior or reduction in criminal activity, but are based on the raw outcomes anticipating increased knowledge or information.

The above strategy is provided to assist in the continuation or initiation of ATPA to use public education and/or awareness projects to prevent, educate and inform the public regarding motor vehicle crimes and elevate the recovery of stolen motor vehicles.