

## *402 Advertising Space Guidance*

Revised: May 2013

# **Guidance for States Using Section 402 Funds for Purchasing Advertising for Highway Safety Messages**

### **Background**

State Highway Safety Offices have had the authority to use funds apportioned to States to purchase advertising in a variety of mediums including television and radio, cinema, digital/internet, social, print, outdoor and sports marketing for highway safety messages. While reports on the purchase of media are not required, media and marketing efforts are subject to significant scrutiny from the Congress and audit/review agencies. Therefore, it is to the benefit of jurisdictions to keep detailed records of media/marketing efforts each fiscal year, including an assessment of their value in contributing to program success.

**This guidance will help States and municipalities that are interested in purchasing advertising media.**

Based on several years of experience in conducting national, regional and local campaigns, NHTSA has developed guidance on implementing a strategic communications approach to promote traffic safety. Research clearly shows that the cornerstone of any successful traffic safety program is high visibility enforcement supported by an enforcement themed communications campaign. The current High Visibility Enforcement (HVE) model of promoting seat belt usage and sober driving issues a few times each year has made record gains possible in roadway safety. For example, several States have achieved safety belt use rates of 90 percent and above and the impaired driving fatality rate is at record low levels for most States and the Nation.

Three enforcement periods will continue to be supported at the national level (May - for Click It or Ticket; August and December - for Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over.)

NHTSA recommends continued involvement in the national campaigns by State and local jurisdictions, in order to maximize the campaigns' reach and effectiveness. In addition, NHTSA advocates the use of a sustained HVE model that focuses on strategic deployment of enforcement and communications resources at targeted times and locations throughout the year based on state problem identification. The objective is to influence and sustain year-round behavioral change while getting higher returns on our investments and greater improvements in traffic safety.

The following is an outline of the revised strategic communications guidelines. These fundamental guidelines can be applied universally to all traffic safety enforcement campaigns:

- Seat belts
- Impaired driving
- Distracted driving
- Child Passenger Safety
- Unsafe Speed and other Aggressive Driving
- Teen driving
- Pedestrians
- Motorcycles

### **Implementation Guidance**

The intent of this document is to provide guidance to any State using Section 402 and other highway safety grant funds to purchase advertising for highway safety messages.

Paid advertising can be a powerful tool when used in conjunction with other known effective countermeasures. Paid media by itself has not shown to have a significant effect on traffic safety related behavior – at least nothing powerful enough to result in crash or injury reductions. However, there are some countermeasures that have been proven to have a bottom line effect on traffic safety related behaviors in a variety of situations. Examples of these include new laws, improved/more enforceable laws, and enforcement itself. However, these countermeasures can work only when the public is aware of them. In order to maximize the effectiveness of paid media, it should be used only in conjunction with proven, effective programs, and when the message of the media is designed to call attention to these countermeasures.

When a state plans to use funds for this purpose the state shall document in their annual Highway Safety Plan (HSP) information describing:

- (a.) what program/policy the advertising is supporting;
- (b.) how the advertising will be implemented to support an operational enforcement program whether it be a periodic crackdown/mobilization or an on-going saturation or roving patrol;
- (c.) the amount allocated for paid advertising; and
- (d.) the measures that will be used to assess message recognition and penetration of the target audience.

As with other activities in the HSP, paid advertising must be part of a comprehensive program designed to address specific highway safety goals identified in the state's Performance Plan. This means that advertising should not be a standalone program or activity. For example, the communications plan should complement an enforcement

plan. If promotional items/giveaways are part of the overall strategy, they must be justified as furthering the program goals and be distributed in a systematic manner. States should consider working with partners to provide promotional/giveaway materials as the private sector has more flexibility in purchasing these materials. While it may be considered an eligible expense to purchase these materials, the perception that we are foolishly spending taxpayer dollars can lead to very unwelcome publicity in the current environment. Similarly, if the state enters into a sports marketing sponsorship agreement with a team, stadium or arena, it must further the achievement of the program's performance targets.

## **Recommendations for Developing State Communication Plans**

- **Conduct Analysis to Identify Priority Markets**
  - Work closely with program staff to understand the program activity that the media will support. Use the enforcement plan to determine the communities where you will place the paid media buy. Use data to identify your target audience. All this information will be used to identify the media mix that allows you to focus resources in a cost effective manner to make the greatest statewide gains.
  - Tighten your focus on strategically targeted markets in your state in order to most efficiently and effectively use your ad budget and enforcement resources.
  - DO NOT assume you need to buy every market or reach every person in the state unless that approach is firmly supported by your State's problem ID.
  
- **Policy, Program & Communications Approach**
  - Review percentage of state's problem
    - FARS and other traffic & enforcement data
    - Census & population data (also track where they live, not just where they died to ensure you will reach them)
  - Assess enforcement resources availability & willingness
  - Identify most appropriate mix of media. Should you use more digital/internet, more radio, etc? The media landscape has changed to dramatically over the past few years, so it is important that we make sure our "buys" reach our target audience in the most effective manner.
  - Establish/review policies specific to the countermeasure
  - Assess political/community support
  - Review Designated Marketing Area (DMA) – size, location, media channels & price

- Price of overall effort (enforcement overtime, ad buy, earned media)
  
- **Conduct Mobilizations**
  - May (Click It Or Ticket), Labor Day and December holidays (Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over) continue as the major National mobilizations
  - Link State enforcement plans to national buy plan and flights
  - Use national tag to brand program for border to border initiatives and interstate campaigns
  - Consider conducting additional well-coordinated supporting mobilizations at strategically selected times of the year in targeted locations that include at a minimum of:
    - 1 week paid advertising flight
    - 1 week of enforcement
    - Earned media
    - Evaluations for each mobilization
    - Refinements for next effort
  
- **Evaluation**
  - Invest in evaluation and attitude and awareness surveys. Without it, we won't know if our message and HVE programs are reaching the intended audience, and helping to drive behavior change.
  - Develop evaluation plan that tracks against your overall program, not just media
  - Consider pre- post DMV surveys for understanding of knowledge and attitude
  - Conduct observation surveys, as appropriate
  - Review citation and adjudication data
  - Monitor press clips
  - Get tracking data on impressions from PR firm
  - Refine – based on evaluation data
  
- **NHTSA Communications Support**
  - [TrafficSafetyMarketing.gov](http://TrafficSafetyMarketing.gov)
  - Strategic Communications Training for states and regions
  - Webinars in partnership with GHSA

Technical Assistance will continue to be available from NHTSA's Office of Communications and Consumer Information (OCCI) on a variety of communication/marketing issues, as follows:

- reviews of creative briefs, scripts and storyboards;
- review of media buy plans;
- advice on cause marketing, sponsorships, and sports marketing; and
- guidance on newly emerging strategies, technologies and tools.

NHTSA will also be available to conduct communication training in regions and states. The training program can be developed to meet your states specific needs.

**Contact your Regional Office to obtain technical assistance from OCCI.**