

# Evaluation of the NC S.A.F.E. Media Campaign

## Executive Summary

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# Executive Summary

## Background

The NC S.A.F.E. Media Campaign, launched in June 2023 by the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP), aims to promote safe firearm storage practices to reduce unauthorized access, firearm theft, and injuries, particularly among children. Developed under the leadership of then-Governor Roy Cooper, the campaign seeks to reduce unsafe firearm storage and foster safer storage behaviors through a strategic communication and education campaign. RTI International conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the campaign to assess its implementation and outcomes, as well as to provide evidence-based recommendations for future initiatives.

## Methods

The evaluation employed a multi-faceted approach, including:

- **Literature Review:** Examined firearm safety attitudes, storage practices, and prior campaign evaluations.
- **Process Evaluation:** Assessed campaign implementation, including campaign delivery, such as reach, frequency, and impressions of media. Conducted interviews with firearm owners in North Carolina to assess the audience's receptivity and comprehension of campaign messages.
- **Social Media Listening:** Analyzed organic engagement across platforms Facebook, Instagram, and X.
- **Outcome Evaluation:** Conducted 2 waves of surveys with firearm-owning adults in North Carolina to measure campaign awareness, beliefs, and behaviors.

The evaluation framework utilized the Audience-Channel-Message-Evaluation (ACME) model and the Theory of Reasoned Action to explore how campaign exposure influenced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Data collection and analysis methods included online surveys, demographic weighting, and regression analyses to identify trends and correlations.

## Key Findings

### Campaign Awareness and Engagement

- **Awareness:** 58.8% of participants reported awareness of at least one campaign ad. 79.9% of participants who recalled seeing the NC S.A.F.E. brand also reported recalling NC S.A.F.E. messaging.
- **Engagement:** Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, were critical in driving impressions and interactions. Earned media mentions totaled 954, with significant contributions from law enforcement and public health organizations.

- **Ad Effectiveness:** Ads such as "Don't Become Their Next Target" were highly motivating, while others like "An Unlocked Gun Is a Tragedy Waiting to Happen" received mixed feedback due to design and emotional impact.

## Behavioral Insights

- **Safe Storage Practices:** Only 16% of participants adhered to all recommended practices (locking firearms, storing them unloaded, and securing ammunition separately). Barriers included cost, quick access needs, and lack of children in the home.
- **Beliefs and Motivations:** Participants exposed to campaign ads were more likely to agree with statements like "Locking up my gun can reduce the risk of suicide." However, misconceptions about "unlocked" storage being safe persisted.
- **Demographic Trends:** Older participants, females, and urban residents were more likely to practice safe storage, while rural and lower-income individuals were less likely to report practicing safe storage.

## Feedback on Campaign Materials

- **Positive Reactions:** Participants appreciated the focus on family safety and the emotional appeal of ads featuring children.
- **Critiques:** Some ads were perceived as judgmental or unclear. Suggestions included adding statistics, emphasizing cost-effective storage options, and tailoring messages to diverse audiences.
- **Suggested Design Improvements:** Recommendations included softer color tones, more noticeable call-to-action buttons, and the inclusion of QR codes for easier access to resources.

## Recommendations

### Expand Outreach:

- Increase funding for ad placements in rural and underserved areas.
- Partner with gun shops, shooting ranges, and community organizations to enhance visibility.
- Diversify media channels, including billboards and in-person events.

### Enhance Messaging:

- Address misconceptions about safe storage, particularly in vehicles.
- Focus on motivators like family safety while addressing barriers such as cost and quick access needs.

- Incorporate personal testimonials from relatable gun owners to resonate with diverse audiences.

### **Incorporate Audience Feedback into Future Campaign Materials:**

- Use clear, actionable messaging with detailed demonstrations of safe storage practices.
- Include statistics and data to emphasize the risks of unsecured firearms.
- Refine ad designs to increase emotional impact and relatability.

### **Strengthen Future Evaluation:**

- Collect baseline data during the planning phase to refine messaging and allow for measurable differences in storage behaviors.
- Conduct continued evaluation to measure long-term behavioral changes and campaign effectiveness.

### **Implications for Future Funding and Evaluation**

The NC S.A.F.E. campaign demonstrates the potential of state-level initiatives to promote firearm safety and reduce risks associated with unsecured firearms. While the campaign effectively increased awareness and influenced beliefs and intentions, further communication efforts are needed to address persistent misconceptions and barriers to safe storage. Further, additional funding and time on the air is needed for the campaign to influence measurable safe storage behaviors. By integrating evidence-based strategies, targeted messaging, and community partnerships, the NC Department of Public Safety can enhance public safety and reduce firearm-related injuries across North Carolina.