



BID Safety Ambassadors in Hospitality Zones: Norfolk, VA

3am Shift End Assists Police, DUI Intervention and Cab Use

Clean and Safe initiatives are staple programs of Business Improvement Districts (BID) to improve the appearance and perception of safety in downtowns and commercial neighborhoods in transition. Norfolk's Public Safety Ambassadors patrol the streets of downtown Norfolk on a daily basis, acting as eyes and ears for police. They also provide information, directions and safety escorts to guests. When late-night businesses asked their help in moving crowds lingering outside venues and managing street crowd, an unintended outcome of extending hours of public safety ambassadors to bar closing was the ability to intervene and provide resources to impaired pedestrians and drivers.

Problem Statement

In place since 1999, Downtown Norfolk Council's Public Safety Ambassador program scheduled their employees in 10 hour shifts until 8:00pm. But as the commercial district gained momentum in 2001, the Friday and Saturday shifts were extended to midnight. However, even as Ambassadors left the streets at 11:45 p.m., they observed that the majority of late-night customers had just arrived within the previous hour. Just as the Ambassadors were clocking out, The District reached its busiest point and the first wave of potentially impaired pedestrians and drivers were just hitting the streets to head home.

Stakeholders

Downtown Norfolk Council, a Business Improvement District, manages the budget for the Ambassador program and designed and printed promotional material.; Public Safety Ambassadors Program reallocated human resources to different times of day and developed pay incentive for late shift.; Norfolk Police Department's Entertainment District Detail embraced a community policing approach in acknowledging and engaging the Ambassadors as resources and partners.

Process

Under contract to the City of Norfolk, the Downtown Norfolk Council (DNC) is the BID that manages the 48-block district, providing services intended to improve the safety, cleanliness and vitality of downtown Norfolk. Norfolk's Public Safety Ambassadors patrol

the streets of downtown Norfolk on a daily basis. While dayshifts are more focused on concierge-type services i.e. providing directions and information to visitors, after dark, the Ambassador provide security escorts to late-night patrons and act as eyes and ears for the police.

In June 2007, some late-night business owners notified DNC's Restaurant Coalition that there were crowds lingering in the street, even well-after the majority of customers left the venues. Police made a greater presence, enforcing trespass laws when applicable. DNC Operations Division was also asked to be a part of the solution.

DNC Operations looked at how to extend Ambassador hours with no extra budget, and found that day service did not suffer by reducing staffing for earlier shifts to move resources to accommodate the greater need at nighttime.

The shift was reworked so that hours from the second shift on Fridays and Saturdays were reallocated to the third shift. The overall operation continued as usual. Four to five Ambassadors patrol a 20 block area. In the night hours, the patrol area is reduced to the three main entertainment areas: Waterside, Main Street and Granby Street. After midnight, it collapses to focus just on Granby Street. Up until midnight, the Ambassadors patrol independently. After midnight, they work in pairs.

Ambassadors report observations and report them to police. In cases of persons seen consuming alcohol on the street or minors in possession of alcohol, Ambassadors ask them to dump out the container. If they don't, the police are contacted. Procedure for contacting the police depends on the urgency of the matter. The first option is to call a non-emergency line. Police now share the names and schedules of the sergeant in charge for the weekend to whom they are to report their observations. The police have also provided the Ambassador Supervisors with the sergeants' cell phone numbers for matters of urgency.

The workers on the new after-midnight shift were surprised to report how busy they kept in the additional two and a half hours, not just in clearing crowds from the District, but in assuring pedestrian and traffic safety as well. Every Friday and Saturday, Ambassadors intersect potentially impaired persons and direct them to a cabstand, sometimes personally escorting them. As a matter of course, they carry with them pocket-sized brochures that map cabstand locations and advertise the Don't Drive, Catch a Ride program, which provides parking discounts to those who leave their car overnight and "catch" a car ride home instead of driving while impaired. They also carry Bluetooth PDAs with mini-printers enabling them to print out step by step directions to cabstands and other locations.

Trained in high standards of customer service, the Ambassadors have a friendly approach in offering a hand to couples or groups, encouraging the non-impaired person in the party to drive and/or use cab service.

Pedestrian risk is reduced as well, by three means. First, hotel guests who walk from Downtown Norfolk's several hotels to the entertainment area comprise a percentage of late-night pedestrians. If identified as at-risk, they are guided to cabs or escorted to their hotel.

Secondly, Ambassadors also work to assure that pedestrians aren't forced out into the street, which would make them at risk of walking into car traffic. They work closely with Off-Duty Officers stationed at the doors of establishments by bringing bottleneck situations to their attention and eliciting police authority to facilitate lines outside of clubs from pushing pedestrians into the street.

Finally, DNC has a brochure promoting personal security escorts. The brochure has a perforated ticket with the Ambassadors' phone number, which may be torn off the brochure and fits into a wallet. The brochures are distributed to District businesses which in turn, distribute to their employees and customers.

Outcome

- DNC operations reallocated hours from earlier shift to ensure no increase in budget.
- Hours of Ambassadors have been extended from Midnight to 3:00am.
- Increased intervention with impaired drivers as Ambassadors intercept impaired people on the way to parking areas and offer alternatives to driving impaired.
- Increased intervention with impaired pedestrians as they are provided with escorts, rides and other assistance.
- Increased pedestrian safety by Ambassadors preventing pedestrians from walking in street due to bottlenecked nightclub lines blocking the sidewalk.
- Ambassadors' actions reinforce community policing goals.
- Presence of ambassadors at the time of day when there is greatest need for public safety prompts strengthening of relationship with police.
- Increased cab usage due to Ambassadors distributing Taxi brochures and physically assisting people to taxi stands.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Because the Ambassador program was previously operational until midnight and had some sense of nighttime challenges, they were able to ease into the extended shift.

One challenge was getting their workers home after the new late shift. Public transportation service, upon which many of the Ambassadors are dependent, ends at midnight, so DNC Operations had a limited pool of employees able to work the later shift. Those who had to work the shift more often felt it was unfair. DNC's board approved a shift differential of an additional dollar per hour pay for those who work after midnight, which has proved to be a fair solution.

Cities who model this program may find a barrier in characterizing their work as DUI intervention. Funding for Ambassadors usually comes from assessments paid by businesses to their Business Improvement District (in this case, DNC) . Their role is therefore typically to perform in a service capacity to the district's customers and police. They are not meant to wield authority or act as enforcers. Downtown management entities in other cities may feel uncomfortable about characterizing their Ambassadors' actions as

DUI intervention. However, interfacing with impaired persons on a service level is a fit with their designated role and an action that Business Districts, in general, could support.

Jurisdiction

Business, District, City

Funding

Ambassadors are funded out of assessments paid by businesses to DNC. Since implementation, an additional \$6-12 per week is used out of DNC's budget to cover a shift differential pay of an extra \$1 per hour for those Ambassadors working after midnight.

Spin-off Projects

DNC would like to provide further training to the Ambassadors. They would like police to provide training in observation skills and in handling difficult people. The Techniques in Alcohol Management (TAMS) and Training for Intervention Procedures (TIPS) programs are being evaluated for their effectiveness for Ambassadors, given their limited role and authority.

DNC plans to provide a door security training, which they hope will reduce the number of intoxicated people leaving clubs, as well as improve communication and collaboration between door security, safety ambassadors and police.

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