

What Do Victims Want?

Effective Strategies to Achieve Justice for Victims of Crime



From the 1999 IACP Summit on Victims of Crime

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Points of view in this document are those of the IACP and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.



FROM THE SUMMIT

As a victim, I felt overwhelmingly powerless. Part of my road to recovery was regaining that power. Information, knowledge, and support help aid in this process.

Lynn Finzel
Guest Speaker and Victim of Violence

Being a victim is involuntary. Being a survivor is mandatory.

Ricardo Wiggs
Guest Speaker and Victim of Violence

You will find that with all the good efforts of police, the justice system, and the community, to date – we still have plenty of ground to cover to satisfy victim needs.

Ronald Neubauer
President, IACP, 1998 - 1999

Victim issues and concerns are becoming an integral part of policing in the 21st century. We have to prioritize this in our law enforcement mission.

Chief Frank Winters
Chairman, IACP Victim Services Committee

We still have a long way to go to ensure that every victim, in every case, in every jurisdiction, is treated fairly and treated compassionately.

Laurie Robinson
Assistant Attorney General

If police, the justice system and communities can offer victims of crime safety, access, information, support, continuity and voice --justice will result.

From the Summit

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Principal funding for the *Victims of Crime Summit* was by the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs. We are grateful for the support and direction provided by the OVC's Director Kathryn Turman, Director of the Special Projects Division Olga Trujillo, Senior Program Specialist Sue Shriner, and Assistant Attorney General Laurie Robinson.

Our deepest thanks and appreciation go out to the members of the victims' panel: Lynn Finzel, Robert Monetti, Nellie Vargas, Ricardo Wiggs, and Steve Young. Their willingness to share compelling accounts of grief and loss lent authenticity and urgency to the task at hand.

Throughout the project, but particularly during the conceptualization and planning stages, the summit benefited from the contribution and collaboration of the Advisory Board, all of whom are recognized individually later in the report.

We are indebted most to the participants who worked so diligently and productively to fashion the recommendations that appear in this report. We hope we have synthesized and conveyed their contributions faithfully and accurately. Each participant is acknowledged individually at the end of this report.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There may be as many as thirty-one million victims of violent or property crime in the US annually – *one out of every seven* Americans. One in twenty-seven Americans may be a victim of a *violent crime* annually. ⁱ Over one and one-half million serious violent crimes were reported to the FBI in 1998:

- ☐ 16,914 Murders
- ☐ 93,103 Rapes
- ☐ 446,625 Robberies
- ☐ 974,402 Aggravated Assaults ⁱⁱ

And these data, compelling as they are, do not reflect much of the nation's victimization, such as that associated with drug abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, child abuse, and abuse of the elderly and persons with disabilities. These data also do not convey the emotional and destructive impact associated with incidents of mass violence such as the Oklahoma City bombing or the Columbine High School shootings. Despite the continuing and welcome decline in crime and violence in recent years, the extent of victimization in the U.S. remains sobering. The declines pose a danger of distracting attention from the problem still very much at hand.

An Evolving Recognition and Response

In 1982 the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime referred to the neglect of crime victims in the United States as a national disgrace. As we begin the 21st century, that characterization of conditions is no longer acceptable. Constructive change is broadly evident.

- ☐ Every state in the nation has enacted victim rights laws.
- ☐ Ten thousand (10,000) victim assistance programs have been developed across the country.
- ☐ Every state has established a crime victim compensation fund.
- ☐ The Federal Crime Victims Fund has been established to fund local services.
- ☐ Over 27,000 crime-victim related state statutes now replace the several hundred victim rights and services laws of the 1980's. ⁱⁱⁱ

While changes in the perception and treatment of crime victims have been revolutionary, there are still areas that will need special attention in the future. Advances in technology, especially the Internet, afford criminals an entirely new venue for victimization, such as cyberstalking and identity theft. It is critical that law enforcement continually reviews and updates their response to these crimes as well as support new legislation that addresses evolving crime patterns.

Unmet Needs

Despite the milestone accomplishments of the past two decades, progress to date has not been enough. The job is not nearly complete. Only a fraction of America's crime victims receive all of the services they need or are entitled to, including emergency financial assistance, crisis and mental health counseling, shelter, information, and advocacy within the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Further, rights of crime victims vary significantly among states, and also between states and the federal government. Victim needs and rights are often ignored. Implementation of victim response programs, based on varying practices of local criminal justice officials, is uneven and inconsistent. Greater consistency would serve victims well. ^{iv}

The Office for Victims of Crime notes that "When a person is harmed by a criminal act, the agencies that make up our criminal and juvenile justice systems have a moral and legal obligation to respond. It is their responsibility not only to seek swift justice for victims, but to ease their suffering in a time of great need."

It is this "great need" that remains substantially unmet on a nationwide basis. The variation in level and quality of service by all components of the criminal and juvenile justice systems is considerable. Clearly, the criminal and juvenile justice systems of the United States sit squarely in the middle of all victims' needs and rights issues. These agencies are strategically positioned and have the power to remain primary agents of change.

What Do Victims Want - The Summit Framework

The summit framework emerged from Advisory Board debate, deliberation, and consensus. Among their many decisions and products, two defined the structure of the summit.

□ Definition of Victims

Victims of crime include not only the immediate targets of violent or threatening behavior, but also their families and members of the group or community to which they belong. Those who witness violent crimes,

including law enforcement and other professionals who deal with the aftermath of crime are also victims. Those who serve on juries for heinous crimes may suffer lingering aftereffects. Many offenders were victims of family violence and sexual abuse as children, and these experiences put them at high risk for criminal behavior. ^v

□ **Needs of Victims**

Victims require a continuum of timely support and service to heal from the trauma they suffer. These components encompass the needs of victims, their families and their communities.

- **Safety:** Protection from perpetrators and revictimization; crime prevention through collaborative problem solving; a restored sense of individual and community safety
- **Access:** Ability to participate in the justice system process and obtain information and services, regardless of individual or family circumstances
- **Information:** Verbal and written information about justice system processes and victim services that is clear, concise, and user-friendly
- **Support:** Services and assistance to enable participation in justice processes, recovery from trauma, and repair of harm caused by crime
- **Continuity:** Consistency in approaches and methods across agencies; continuity of support through all stages of the justice process and trauma recovery
- **Voice:** Empowerment to speak out about processing of individual cases; opportunities to influence agency and system-wide policies and practices

Justice is achieved when all stakeholders are satisfied with the process and the outcome is fair to all participants.

Strategies to Honor Victim Rights and Meet Victim Needs: Recommendations From the Summit

Participants produced a comprehensive 21st century victims' agenda comprising:

- ❑ **Guiding Principles** – to shape policies and practices of victim serving agencies (13 principles)
- ❑ **Promising Strategies** – to implement these principles (38 recommendations)
- ❑ **Methods to Measure Success** – of efforts to meet victim needs (6 recommendations)
- ❑ **A Law Enforcement Action Agenda** – actions law enforcement agencies can take to meet victim needs more effectively (14 recommendations)

Guiding Principles

To uphold victim rights and attend to their fundamental needs, from initial contact with first responders through to final resolution of cases, and for as long as healing and restoration may take, participants recommend the following *basic principles* to shape policies and practices of justice and other agencies.

1. **Respond equally, respectfully and compassionately to all victims.**
2. **Protect victims from further victimization, to the extent possible.**
3. **Refer victims to crisis and support services as soon as possible after victimization.**
4. **Provide a “seamless continuum” of services and support for victims of crime.**
5. **Inform victims about their rights and the timing of justice system processes.**
6. **Empower victims to take part in case processing.**
7. **Schedule investigative, court and post-sentence proceedings to facilitate effective victim participation.**
8. **Ensure continuity of advocacy services.**
9. **Focus on repairing the harm done by crime.**
10. **Notify victims of changes in offender status.**
11. **Encourage victims to tell their stories, and listen to them carefully.**
12. **Provide opportunities that enable victims to assist other victims and to serve the justice system.**

13. Engage victims in policy and protocol development. Promising Strategies to Implement Principles

Participants devised a spectrum of strategies to help law enforcement, the justice system and communities collectively invest resources to promote victim rights and satisfy their needs more effectively. The strategies cluster in six recommended action areas:

- Commit* to crime victim support and assistance.
- Collaborate* across services and agencies.
- Organize* to deliver services and support to crime victims.
- Focus* on victim rights and needs.
- Support* professionals who serve crime victims.
- Engage* communities in addressing crime victim needs.

Participants emphasized the vision of a “seamless continuum” of response and support for crime victims that can be realized only through collective effort toward common goals. Contributors must include:

- Victim assistance professionals
- First responders - including law enforcement and emergency medical staff
- Investigators
- Prosecutors
- Defense attorneys
- Judges
- Corrections agency, probation and parole staff
- Health and social service professionals
- Policymakers and funders
- Community members - volunteers, faith organizations, neighborhood associations
- Employers
- Victims themselves

Putting the guiding principles into action remains a significant challenge. Resources continue to be a problem, particularly in less populous jurisdictions where resources can be scarce. Despite significant progress in recognizing victim rights and addressing their needs, the justice system remains an incomprehensible labyrinth for many victims, and services often remain inaccessible or inadequate to meet their many needs.

Commit to Crime Victim Support and Assistance

- 1. Make firm, collective commitments to honor victim rights and address victim needs.**
- 2. Establish victim assistance as a top priority in all criminal and juvenile justice agencies.**

Collaborate Across Services and Agencies

- 3. Form local coalitions of decision-makers and service providers to lead the planning, operation and evaluation of the continuum of victim services.**
- 4. Formalize victim service, justice system and community partnerships.**
- 5. Create neighborhood-based victim centers to offer single-location services to crime victims.**
- 6. Exploit technology to integrate victim services and enhance communication among providers.**
- 7. Employ the assets and outreach of national associations to promote collaboration.**

Organize to Deliver Services and Support to Crime Victims

- 8. Augment sources of funding to support victim services.**
- 9. Develop and regularly update written protocols for appropriate treatment of crime victims by justice system and allied professionals.**
- 10. Prioritize service delivery based on seriousness of crimes and impact on victims.**
- 11. Ensure that victim services are culturally and linguistically appropriate.**

12. Leverage resources and incentives to create interdisciplinary and culturally and linguistically appropriate services for victims of crime.
13. Optimize use of volunteer victim advocates.
14. Develop shared victim information systems.
15. Establish interagency protocols to ensure that victims receive timely notification of significant events in case processing and changes in offender status.
16. Establish, when feasible, special prosecutorial units that utilize vertical prosecution and provide targeted support to victims with specialized needs.
17. Exercise judicial leadership to support full participation of victims in case processing.
18. Create collaborative corrections, justice and community agency. Provide offender supervision and treatment arrangements to addresses victim safety concerns.
19. Cultivate productive and responsible relationships among justice and victim assistance agencies with the media.
20. Review and revise statutes when necessary to ensure that victim rights are respected and their needs are met.
21. Design a national victim notification database.
22. Support the development and evaluation of a national hotline for crime victims.

Focus on Victim Rights and Needs

23. Contact crime victims as early as possible following victimization.
24. Coordinate victim assistance services for victims for the duration of the justice process.
25. Distribute a comprehensive packet of written information to all crime victims.
26. Encourage and support victims who choose to attend court proceedings.
27. Provide legal advocacy services to all victims regardless of ability to pay.

28. Ensure support by employers of victim participation in the justice process.
29. Seek victim input during processes that affect sentencing or custody status of offenders.
30. Utilize technology that can enhance the safety of crime victims.
31. Ensure that offenders work to repair the harm done to victims, specifically through justice agency ordered programs such as restitution and community service.
32. Ensure that crime victims, particularly those who have reason to fear their offenders, receive information and have the opportunity to intervene at key decision points.
33. Train corrections staff to recognize when past or current victimization is playing a role in the criminal behavior of offenders.

Support Professionals Who Serve Victims of Crime

34. Provide continuous training to all professionals and volunteers who work with victims of crime to enhance their *knowledge*, increase their *skills* and reinforce positive *attitudes* toward meeting victim needs.
35. Establish a national certification program for all professionals who work with victims of crime.
36. Establish employee assistance programs for those who work with victims of crime.

Engage Communities in Addressing Crime Victim Needs

37. Enhance community awareness of crime victim rights and the range of available victim assistance services available.
38. Engage in collaborative problem solving to prevent crime and “inoculate people against victimization.”

Measuring Success

Agencies and individual professionals should be held accountable for attending to victim rights and meeting victim needs. This can be accomplished through evaluations. It is essential for jurisdictions to incorporate an evaluation scheme into the victim

services “business plan.” Evaluations must be designed to reveal ways to improve individual and collective effectiveness. The most useful evaluation strategies feature both quantitative and qualitative dimensions and attend to measurable outcomes and victims’ personal views of the justice system. As the primary customers of the justice system, victims’ opinions and observations are the most important measure of success.

- 1. Define criteria for success clearly.**
- 2. Seek feedback from victims at every stage of the justice process.**
- 3. Conduct a national survey of victim satisfaction.**
- 4. Note and consider all victim complaints and accolades.**
- 5. Assess the training needs of professionals who work with victims.**
- 6. Assess satisfaction of professionals who support victims of crime.**

A Law Enforcement Action Agenda

Police are uniquely positioned to assume a leadership role in promoting victim rights and servicing their needs. Police 911 dispatchers and responding officers are the first justice system representatives that most victims of crime encounter. Accordingly, police have a special opportunity to begin to repair the harm done by crime. Through community policing, law enforcement agencies have developed consummate community and system collaboration skills. Police are the most visible and easily accessed justice agency. To encourage and enable law enforcement agencies to lead community and system inclusive endeavors, summit participants recommended that law enforcement agencies take the following actions.

- 1. Formalize the victim assistance function organizationally.**
- 2. Train all first responders to provide “psychological first aid” to victims of crime.**
- 3. Develop written protocols to enable responding officers and investigators to treat crime victims.**
- 4. Partner with victim assistance professionals to ensure that crime victims receive prompt and effective support.**

5. **Supply written information to all crime victims at the time of first contact.**
6. **Designate individuals within each law enforcement agency that victims may contact to obtain information.**
7. **Develop written death notification policies and procedures, and conduct complementary mandatory training.**
8. **Establish mechanisms to ensure that crime victims and their families receive necessary emergency assistance.**
9. **Coordinate crime scene cleanup as soon as possible after an investigation is complete.**
10. **Ensure that crime victims experience a smooth transition from investigation to prosecution.**
11. **Systematically assemble victim feedback.**
12. **Support officers in dealing with their own stress and trauma.**
13. **Cross train law enforcement and victim assistance personnel.**
14. **Promote regular engagement among victims, advocates, community members, and law enforcement and other criminal justice professionals.**

Summit Follow-Up

The IACP will continue to work closely with the Office for Victims of Crime to help local police agencies throughout the US implement the recommendations of the summit. In collaboration with OVC, IACP will identify agencies in need of improved victim response, and will provide follow-up information, training and technical assistance to a selected number of state, local and tribal agencies throughout the U.S.

I. SEEKING JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS: THE CHANGING PATTERN

There may be as many as thirty-one million victims of violent or property crime in the US annually – *one out of every seven* Americans. One in twenty-seven Americans may be a victim of a *violent crime* annually. Over one and one-half million serious violent crimes were reported to the FBI in 1998 including: 16,914 Murders, 93,103 Rapes, 446,625 Robberies, and 974,402 Aggravated Assaults.

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- Over 27,000 crime-victim related state statutes now replace the several hundred victim rights and services laws of the 1980's.

Changes in the perception and treatment of crime victims, powered by every sector of the justice system, social service agencies and community partners, have been revolutionary. Policy and practice shifts have been driven by a now-matured set of core values and beliefs:

- Anyone can become a victim of crime.
- We are all victimized by crime in our communities.
- Victims are created whenever crimes are committed, even those which are unreported, and those which do not result in arrest or conviction.
- Victims should be the primary customers of the justice system.
- Victims have fundamental rights and identifiable needs.
- Policies and practices that respect victim rights and address victim needs will benefit the entire community and the entire justice system.

Respecting victim rights and addressing victim needs have become guiding principles for local, state and federal justice agencies. Justice professionals increasingly recognize that servicing the interests of crime victims is central to ensuring justice. Addressing the needs of crime victims successfully increases the ability and willingness of victims to participate in justice processes and the likelihood that citizens will report victimization. Placing victims at the center of the justice process enhances an overall sense of safety, restores dignity, and begins the process of repairing the specific and general harm done by crime – to victims, their families, and the community.

Notable Events in Victims Rights

Evolving perceptions and practices are traceable to a series of events, principally legislative, at the federal level, designed to strengthen and improve victim rights and services.

- 1982 – Federal Victim and Witness Protection Act was passed
- 1982 – President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime convened
- 1983 – Attorney General’s Guidelines for Victims and Witness Assistance were issued
- 1990 – Rights extended to victims of juvenile crime
- 1990 – Crime Control Act established first federal bill of rights for victims of crime – Victims Rights and Restitution Act of 1990
- 1994 – Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act created new rights for victims of sexual assault and domestic violence
- 1996 – Megan’s Law passed ensuring community notification of sex offender release or relocation

- ❑ 1997 – Victims Rights Clarification Act passed, reinforcing rights of victims to attend proceedings and deliver impact statements
- ❑ 1997 – Federal Antistalking Law made it a federal offense to cross state lines to stalk another ^{vi}

Again, while these instances reflect progress on the federal level, they set the tone for pivotal legislative changes at the state level. Based on these initiatives, every state now has laws protecting victims. Twenty-nine (29) states have strengthened victim rights by constitutional mandate. Twenty-four (24) states afford victims the right to notification of events and proceedings. Every state now allows courts to consider victim impact statements at sentencing.

Legislative initiatives have inspired, during the past two decades, dramatic change and improvement in victim response programs and policies within the justice system. Many larger police departments, prosecutor’s offices and court systems have formal victim programs that link aggressively to community resources. The policies, protocols and procedures of these agencies now reflect a better understanding of the rights and needs of crime victims.

Unmet Needs

Despite the milestone accomplishments of the past two decades, progress to date has not been enough. The job is not nearly complete. Only a fraction of America’s crime victims receive all of the services they need or are entitled to, including emergency financial assistance, crisis and mental health counseling, shelter, information, and advocacy within the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Further, rights of crime victims vary significantly among states, and also between states and the federal government. Victim needs and rights are often ignored. Implementation of victim response programs, based on varying practices of local criminal justice officials, is uneven and inconsistent. Greater consistency would serve victims well.

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agencies are strategically positioned and have the power to remain primary agents of change.

II. SUMMIT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Since 1994, the IACP has held annual summits on critical issues facing law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Each has brought together police and community leaders, justice system decision-makers, scholars, and others with diverse expertise, to share information, deliberate on issues, and craft recommendations and action plans.

1994: Violence in the United States

Focusing on all types of violent crime, this summit produced a report to the president and Congress that recommended policies to reduce violence in U.S. communities. The report focused on law enforcement strategies at the federal, state, county, and local levels.

1995: Murder in America

This summit examined various aspects of homicide including murders committed in the context of domestic violence, gang activities, robbery, and fights that escalate to murder. Participants developed four classes of strategies to reduce homicide: prevention, intervention, enforcement, and prosecution. The strategies set forth a leadership position for the police.

1996: Youth Violence in America

Youthful victims and perpetrators of violent crime were the central concern of this summit. Participants called for strong relationships among schools, police, religious institutions, and community leaders to fight youth crime and keep youth out of trouble through early and consistent prevention and intervention strategies.

1997: Family Violence in America: Breaking the Cycle for Children Who Witness

Children who witness domestic violence were the focal point of this summit. Participants developed policies and protocols to respond effectively to these children who are at great risk of becoming abusers or victims if they are not successfully protected and supported.

❑ **1998: Hate Crime in America**

Participants explored the nature of hate crime and discussed ways to address it. The report summarized 58 recommendations affirmed as the most promising to prevent and respond to hate incidents and hate crimes.

The 1999 Victims Summit: Objectives

The 1999 Summit was a collaboration among the Office for Victims of Crime, the IACP, and one hundred criminal justice and community stakeholders with a critical interest in influencing progress toward justice for victims of crime. Developing a victims services agenda for the 21st century was the governing theme of the summit. Summit stakeholders were tasked to achieve six objectives:

- ❑ **Prioritize This Critical Problem.** Fashion approaches to motivate law enforcement and justice agencies to increase attention and resources to the problem of victimization and victim needs.
- ❑ **Illuminate the Issues.** Through presentations, discussions, and debate, crystallize knowledge, surface new information, and transform perspectives on victimization.
- ❑ **Achieve Consensus on Effective Approaches.** Forge a consensus on the most promising strategies to respond to victims of crime.
- ❑ **Strengthen Capacity to Advocate and Implement the Consensus.** Return participants to their communities better prepared to devise and implement policies and programs to enhance quality of life for victims – with support from a powerful nationwide network of colleagues.
- ❑ **Motivate Communities Across the Nation to Take Action.** Produce an action plan to alert communities to the needs of victims, enable them to build consensus around critical issues, and implement recommended prevention and response strategies.
- ❑ **Highlight Law Enforcement’s Pivotal Role in Responding to Victims.** Build upon the unique capacities and responsibilities of law enforcement agencies to lead their communities toward improved victim response.

Summit Design

The summit framework emerged from Advisory Board debate, deliberation, and consensus. Among their many decisions and products, two defined the direction and nature of the summit.

□ **Definition of Victims**

The development of a broad definition of victims of crime to help focus all subsequent summit planning. Victims of crime were defined to include not only the immediate targets of violent or threatening behavior, but also their families, as well as members of the group or community to which they belong. Those who witness violent crimes, including law enforcement and other professionals who deal with the aftermath of crime, are also victims. Those who serve on juries for heinous crimes may suffer lingering aftereffects. A growing body of research reveals that many offenders were victims of family violence and sexual abuse as children, and that these experiences put them at high risk for criminal behavior. ^{vii}

The impact of crime on victims depends in part on the degree of violence they experience, feelings of vulnerability, and their relationship, if any, to a perpetrator. Crime may have a more severe impact on victims who are isolated or targeted due to age, disability, language, or economic circumstances, all characteristics that may make them particularly vulnerable. When a perpetrator is a family member, a victim experiences the crime as a profound betrayal of trust that can have a lasting negative impact regardless of its statutory classification. In responding to victims of crime, the justice system and community agencies must consider the meaning of the crime to each individual victim.

□ **Identifying the Needs of Victims**

Victims require a continuum of timely support and services to heal from the traumas they suffer. The Summit Advisory Committee identified the components of that continuum, which were employed to structure the summit. These components encompass needs of victims, their families and their communities.

- **Safety:** Protection from perpetrators and revictimization; crime prevention through collaborative problem solving; a restored sense of individual and community safety
- **Access:** Ability to participate in the justice system process and obtain information and services, regardless of individual or family circumstances
- **Information:** Verbal and written information about justice system processes and victim services that is clear, concise and user-friendly

- **Support:** Services and assistance to enable participation in justice processes, recovery from trauma, and repair of harm caused by crime
- **Continuity:** Consistency in approaches and methods across agencies; continuity of support through all stages of the justice process and trauma recovery
- **Voice:** Empowerment to speak out about processing of individual cases; opportunities to influence agency and system-wide policies and practices

Justice is achieved when all stakeholders are satisfied with the process and that the outcome is fair to all participants.

Summit Proceedings

The summit approach – designed, tested and applied to all IACP summits since 1995 – created a safe forum for information exchange among participants, and synthesis of differing viewpoints. After a traditional opening session, introductory remarks and an evocative and moving presentation from a panel of victims, participants separated into seven breakout groups, consistent with the areas (components) of victim needs identified by the Advisory Group. Developing an agenda to help move victims' services into the 21st century was the governing theme. The groups reconvened the next morning to summarize their discussion and present their recommendations to the assembly who was offered the opportunity to comment and critique.

III. SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS

During the two-day summit participants produced a comprehensive 21st century victims' agenda comprising:

- ❑ **Guiding Principles** – to shape policies and practices of victim serving agencies (13 principles)
- ❑ **Promising Strategies** – to implement these principles (38 recommendations)
- ❑ **Methods to Measure Success** – of efforts to meet victim needs (6 recommendations)
- ❑ **A Law Enforcement Action Agenda** – of actions law enforcement agencies can take to meet victim needs more effectively (14 recommendations)

Guiding Principles

To uphold victim rights and attend to their fundamental needs, from initial contact with first responders through to final resolution of cases, and for as long as healing and restoration may take, participants recommend the following *basic principles* to shape policies and practices of justice and other agencies.

1. Respond equally, respectfully and compassionately to all victims.

Serving agencies should provide the same quality of service to victims regardless of gender, race, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability or sexual orientation.

2. Protect victims from further victimization, to the extent possible.

Obtain orders of protection and no contact when needed, and enforce them vigilantly. Educate victims regarding strategies to avoid revictimization. Encourage media to respect victim rights to privacy in coverage of crimes.

3. Refer victims to crisis and support services as soon as possible after victimization.

Refer victims to an assistance professional or trained volunteer in a timely manner. Offer services at no cost or on a sliding scale so that all victims can access them regardless of ability to pay.

4. Provide a “seamless continuum” of services and support for victims of crime.

Communities, in partnership with the justice system, the business community and service organizations, should take responsibility for ensuring that crime victims have a full range of emergency and ongoing support options available. These services must be provided through the continuum of events, including incident, prosecution, adjudication, and follow-up support. Options should include medical care, clothing, food, temporary housing, care for dependants, transportation, counseling, employment leave, and barrier-free facilities and services.

5. Inform victims about their rights and the timing of justice system processes.

Victims should know what to expect as their cases are investigated and what will happen if brought to trial. A range of information on bail, pleas and release from custody should be provided. If a defendant is convicted, a victim should receive information about sentencing provisions and the appeals process. As appropriate, inform victims about procedures for obtaining and enforcing orders of protection and no contact orders.

6. Empower victims to take part in case processing.

Encourage victims to become involved in the criminal justice process. Reduce or eliminate barriers to participation. Victim involvement can help restore a sense of control and enhance their faith in the justice system. Encourage victims to utilize only those supports and services they feel will be beneficial. The right of victims not to participate in court processes or support services should be respected.

7. Schedule investigative, court and post-sentence proceedings to facilitate effective victim participation.

Provide sufficient advance notice of events to enable victims to arrange to be present. Support efforts to arrange for care-giving and work coverage. Address constraints of the victims’ schedules.

8. Ensure continuity of advocacy services.

Advocates should be available to accompany victims to court, assist in preparation of impact statements, and refer victims to other sources of adjudication and post-adjudication support.

9. Focus on repairing the harm done by crime.

Ensure that victims are fully apprised of corrective options. Some victims opt to participate in victim-offender mediation. Nearly all victims are interested in having offenders understand the impact of their crimes and act to repair harm through restitution or community service. Victim compensation benefits and reimbursements should be maximized.

10. Notify victims of changes in offender status.

Notify victims whenever defendants are released from pretrial detention, convicted offenders are released from incarceration or community supervision, or appellate processes result in changes in offender status.

11. Encourage victims to tell their stories and listen to them carefully.

Voicing experiences can help victims with the healing process. Provide opportunities to victims to describe what happened to them and to express the impact the crime has had on their lives. Opportunities should be maximized from first response through trial and sentencing to correctional decision making.

12. Provide opportunities to enable victims to assist other victims and to serve the justice system.

Crime victims can be highly effective advocates for other victims. Their inclusion on state compensation boards and victim impact panels can help them to heal while also making a significant contribution to society.

13. Engage victims in policy and protocol development.

Justice and victim assistance agencies should consider the perspectives of victims of crime when drafting or changing statutes, revising policies and procedures, or developing action plans. Victims can help the justice system and communities become more effective in addressing their needs and honoring their rights by providing advice to policymakers, planners, evaluators and funding bodies.

Promising Strategies to Implement Principles

Participants devised a spectrum of strategies to help law enforcement, the justice system and communities to collectively invest resources to promote victim rights and satisfy their needs more effectively. The strategies cluster in six recommended action areas:

- Commit** to crime victim support and assistance.
- Collaborate** across services and agencies.
- Organize** to deliver services and support to crime victims.
- Focus** on victim rights and needs.
- Support** professionals who serve crime victims.
- Engage** communities in addressing crime victim needs.

Participants emphasized the vision of a “seamless continuum” of response and support for crime victims that can be realized only through collective effort toward common goals. Contributors must include:

- Victim assistance professionals
- First responders – including law enforcement and emergency medical staff
- Investigators
- Prosecutors
- Defense attorneys
- Judges
- Corrections agency, probation and parole staff
- Health and social service professionals
- Policymakers and funders
- Community members – volunteers, faith organizations, neighborhood associations
- Employers
- Victims themselves

Putting the guiding principles into action remains a significant challenge. Resources continue to be a problem, particularly in less populous jurisdictions where resources can be scarce. Despite significant progress in recognizing victim rights and addressing their needs, the justice system remains an incomprehensible labyrinth for many victims, and services often remain inaccessible or inadequate to meet their many needs.

Commit to Crime Victim Support and Assistance

- 1. Make firm, collective commitments to honor victim rights and address victim needs.**

The dimensions of safety, access, information, support, continuity, and voice, with the overarching goal of justice, should be recognized by justice agencies and the community as fundamental needs and rights of victims. The principles outlined earlier should guide implementation of practices that can address needs of victims most effectively. With a comprehensive vision of best practices, agencies and community groups can better guide the evolution of victim services.

- 2. Establish victim assistance as a top priority in all criminal and juvenile justice agencies.**

The priority should be formalized in written policies and guidelines and pursued through investment in a dedicated staff. When resources are scarce, agencies should include cost and staff sharing arrangements in their requests.

Collaborate Across Services and Agencies

- 3. Form local coalitions of decision-makers and service providers to lead the planning, operation and evaluation of the continuum of victim services.**

A local coalition is best suited to engineer the continuum and blend the experience and expertise of professionals, community members and crime victims to develop strategies tailored to local priorities and needs. Diverse groups that represent many perspectives are best equipped to respond to changing circumstances with creativity and flexibility.

- 4. Formalize victim service, justice system and community partnerships.**

Local justice system and community agencies should adopt written partnership agreements that specify roles and responsibilities for victim services and support. Collaborations are most effective when partners are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and when structures exist for ongoing negotiation and maintenance of mutual commitments.

- 5. Create neighborhood-based victim centers to offer single-location services to crime victims.**

Centers can house counselors, advocates, victim self-help group representatives, and many other services and resources. These arrangements supply victims with easier access to a range of services, in more normalized community settings, while enabling service providers to coordinate their efforts better.

6. Exploit technology to integrate victim services and enhance communication among providers.

Computerized information systems make it easier for service providers to share information relevant to particular cases, complete comprehensive needs assessments and conduct outcome evaluations. Internet e-mail and web sites can help to eliminate communication barriers that often impair joint functioning.

7. Employ the assets and outreach of national associations to promote collaboration.

National associations can establish model frameworks and assist their members to develop working partnerships with all those that must collaborate to support and serve victims of crime. National professional associations such as the IACP should take the lead.

Organize to Deliver Services and Support to Crime Victims

8. Augment sources of funding to support victim services.

Effective multidisciplinary strategies to meet crime victim needs cannot rely on single-source funding. Agencies that serve should explore new potentials in both the public and private sector and engage the business community to support victim services that contribute to community safety and quality of life. For example, state Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds can be utilized for victim services in criminal justice agencies.

9. Develop and regularly update written protocols for appropriate treatment of crime victims by justice system and allied professionals.

Values and goals should be translated into policies and procedures for all agencies that address victim rights and needs. Protocols should formalize commitment to interdisciplinary approaches and serve as guidelines for the range of professionals who must collaborate to serve crime victims effectively.

10. Prioritize service delivery based on seriousness of crimes and impact on victims.

Because resources will always be scarce, victim advocates must have systematic schemes to triage cases to ensure that victims with the greatest need will receive the most intensive service. This requires that first responders collect and record information to assess the impact of crimes on victims. A victim's age, economic status, relationship to perpetrator or interest in receiving services exemplify types of information required.

11. Ensure that victim services are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

For crime victims to have equal access to services and participate in justice system processes, serving agencies should provide interpreters, as needed, and ensure that written information is available in the primary language of victims. Justice and victim assistance agencies should incorporate respect for diversity in staffing and management approaches and encourage staff to develop the knowledge and skills required to serve diverse cultural and ethnic groups.

12. Leverage resources and incentives to create interdisciplinary and culturally and linguistically appropriate services for victims of crime.

The federal government already provides "seed money" to enable state and local governments to implement and evaluate the impacts of innovative victim service approaches. Jurisdictions can also benefit from various types of technical assistance funded and coordinated by federal agencies.

13. Optimize use of volunteer victim advocates.

Community volunteers can assist professionals in many ways and can be particularly helpful in providing language-appropriate and culturally sensitive victim services. Volunteers require training, ongoing support and coordination by professional staff.

14. Develop shared victim information systems.

Justice professionals should do everything possible to avoid asking victims and witnesses the same questions repeatedly. This should include reliance on systems that gather information about crime incidents from victims and witnesses that build continuously from earliest contact with the justice system. It will also entail collaborative design of interview and record keeping formats, shared coordinated management, and cost sharing. Information-sharing

protocols that respect the confidentiality of victim information should be developed.

- 15. Establish interagency protocols to ensure that victims receive timely notification of significant events in case processing and changes in offender status.**

Key decision points in investigation and court processing include arrest, initial bail-setting or pretrial release, trial dates, case disposition, and sentencing. Law enforcement agencies and prosecutors should provide regular updates rather than waiting for victim requests for information.

- 16. Establish, when feasible, special prosecutorial units that utilize vertical prosecution and provide targeted support to victims with specialized needs.**

By allowing prosecutors to remain with a case from charging through sentencing, vertical prosecution builds greater rapport with victims and enhances continuity of information and support services. Victims of sexual assault, family violence, child abuse and elder abuse can benefit greatly from this approach, which compassionately facilitates full participation in the justice process.

- 17. Exercise judicial leadership to support full participation of victims in case processing.**

Judges should collaborate with victim assistance staff to explain court protocol and process, court orders and sentencing options. Victim safety may be enhanced by orders of protection or no contact orders. Judges should also hold other criminal justice agencies accountable for fulfilling responsibilities to victims.

- 18. Create collaborative corrections, justice, and community agency. Provide offender supervision and treatment arrangements to address victim safety concerns.**

Specialized probation and parole case treatments for domestic violence and sex offenders can enhance victim safety. These offenders should be required to participate in offense-specific treatment (for batterers or sex offenders, for example) with certified treatment providers. Community corrections staff should consider whether community notification in sex offense cases will have unintended negative consequences for victims.

19. Cultivate productive and responsible relationships among justice and victim assistance agencies with the media.

Agencies should consider developing “media teams” to coordinate coverage of high profile cases. Guidelines that mandate consideration of victim safety, confidentiality, and potential for further traumatization should structure agency decisions concerning release of information to the media. To protect their cases, guidelines should be provided to help victims structure interactions with media representatives.

20. Review and revise statutes when necessary to ensure that victim rights are respected and their needs are met.

Federal and state constitutional amendments are one way to guarantee that victims have a voice in justice system proceedings. State statutes can also be strengthened to provide victims with opportunities to obtain information, appear and submit statements at court proceedings, and receive notification of any significant changes in defendants’ status.

21. Design a national victim notification database.

Victims who reside in jurisdictions other than those where they are victimized should still have ready access to information about progress of their cases and about the custody or supervision status of offenders. For victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, child abuse and elder abuse this information can be vital to their personal safety. Concerns over the feasibility and funding for such a project are substantial and merit considerable further study.

22. Support the development and evaluation of a national hotline for crime victims.

Hotlines have been established to serve domestic violence and sexual assault victims. Victims of other types of crime do not have such a service. Participants feel that this is an important gap in support services. Federal agencies should lead this initiative.

Focus on Victim Rights and Needs

23. Contact crime victims as early as possible following victimization.

Ideally, a “crisis team,” which includes victim advocates would be available at the crime scene. When this is not possible, first responders should refer victims

to victim assistance staff, which should be available 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

24. Coordinate victim assistance services for victims for the duration of the justice process.

Victims should receive continuous and consistent support for the duration of the justice process and trauma recovery period. When resources or policies do not permit a case management approach, agencies should construct joint protocols to ensure smooth handoff from one agency to the next. If possible, victim-witness assistance services should be neighborhood-based.

25. Distribute a comprehensive packet of written information to all crime victims.

Though victims of crime appreciate verbal reassurance and information at the crime scene, written material provides greater certainty that they will remain informed of likely steps in investigation and adjudication of their case. The information packets should include names of contacts in the police and victim assistance agencies who can provide explanation and further information when needed. Victims who are not proficient in English should receive information in native languages, with referrals to contacts who are fluent in those languages.

26. Encourage and support victims who choose to attend court proceedings.

Many advocates feel strongly that victims should attend all court proceedings. This may require reconsidering the automatic exclusion of victims who are also witnesses. Victims should be informed when evidence to be presented may have traumatic impacts (such as autopsy or crime scene photos) and should have the option of being accompanied in court by an advocate.

27. Provide legal advocacy services to all victims regardless of ability to pay.

Some victims may require legal advice to navigate the court system. Some may choose to pursue civil remedies for harm done by crime. Victims should be referred to low- or no-cost sources of legal aid when necessary.

28. Ensure support by employers of victim participation in the justice process.

Employment leave policies should allow victims to participate in critical justice process events without jeopardy to compensation or job status.

29. Seek victim input during processes that affect sentencing or custody status of offenders.

Threat to victim safety should be a primary factor in assessing eligibility of perpetrators for pretrial release. Victims should be informed of plea bargaining negotiations before offers are extended to defendants. Victims should have the opportunity to present impact statements prior to sentencing.

30. Utilize technology that can enhance the safety of crime victims.

Pagers, bracelets and cell phones are used to add security for domestic violence victims. The Internet is a means to communicate with and support victims who may otherwise have difficulty accessing information or services.

31. Ensure that offenders work to repair the harm done to victims, specifically through justice agency ordered programs such as restitution and community service.

Corrections staff should encourage and support reparative conditions such as restitution and community service. Victims should be kept informed of offender progress in making restitution.

32. Ensure that crime victims, particularly those who have reason to fear their offenders, receive information and have the opportunity to intervene at key decision points

Victims should receive routine updates on the custody or supervision status of offenders, be invited to submit or present impact statements at parole hearings, and be notified when offenders are released from incarceration and complete their sentences.

33. Train corrections staff to recognize when past or current victimization is playing a role in the criminal behavior of offenders.

Many women and some men now under justice system supervision were victims of physical and/or sexual abuse in childhood. Corrections agencies can contribute significantly to community safety by successfully recognizing and addressing victimization as a factor that contributes to criminality.

Support Professionals Who Serve Victims of Crime

- 34. Provide continuous training to all professionals and volunteers who work with victims of crime to enhance their *knowledge*, increase their *skills*, and reinforce positive *attitudes* toward meeting victim needs.**

Justice and victim assistance personnel should be cross-trained. Training must be respectful of and credible to its target audiences, and should include, at a minimum, the following topics:

- Knowledge:** victims' rights; available victim assistance resources and how to access them; other information that should routinely be provided to victims
 - Skills:** communicating effectively and compassionately with victims and witnesses; crisis intervention techniques; assessing degree of trauma and victims' needs for supportive and medical services; collaborating with other professionals and volunteers
 - Attitudes:** toward victims, cultural diversity, and other professionals
- 35. Establish a national certification program for all professionals who work with victims of crime.**

Certification should be established for a wide range of justice and allied professionals, including all first responders, investigators, prosecutors, judges, victim advocates, and health care professionals in order to standardize training and ensure high quality services for all victims.

- 36. Establish employee assistance programs for those who work with victims of crime.**

Programs should focus on the impact of crime intervention and victim assistance on workers, when help is needed, stress reduction techniques, secondary victimization, and counseling and support group referral options.

Engage Communities in Addressing Crime Victim Needs

37. Enhance community awareness of crime victim rights and the range of available victim assistance services available.

Jurisdictions can use a variety of methods to inform citizens about victim rights, needs and services, including Internet web pages, public service announcements, school curricula, flyers, posters, and other written materials. Media support is a valuable asset in developing a successful public information campaign.

38. Engage in collaborative problem solving to prevent crime and “inoculate people against victimization.”

Community policing provides a promising model for engaging citizens in effective crime prevention through neighborhood safety planning and other local initiatives. It also tends to increase citizens’ trust in law enforcement, so that those victimized by crime are more likely to report it and seek remedies for the harm they experience.

Measuring Success

Victims are the primary customers of the justice system and their opinions and observations are the most important measure of success. Agencies and individual professionals should be held accountable for attending to victim rights and meeting victim needs. This can be accomplished through evaluations. It is essential for jurisdictions to incorporate an evaluation scheme into the victim services “business plan.” Evaluations must be designed to reveal ways to improve individual and collective effectiveness. The most useful evaluation strategies feature both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, attend to measurable outcomes, and solicit victims’ personal views of the justice system.

1. Define criteria for success clearly.

All agencies and programs within a jurisdiction should employ the same yardstick to evaluate victim assistance efforts. Criterion options are many. Measurement of physical, emotional and economic should be primary.

2. Seek feedback from victims at every stage of the justice process.

Victim satisfaction surveys should pose such questions as:

- Do you feel respected? Safe?

- Did you receive sufficient and accurate information? At the right time?
- Were you asked what you needed? Did you receive the services you needed in a timely manner?
- Did you understand the processing of your case, including the timing of processing and the length of time it took?
- If mediation or restitution were utilized, did they satisfy your needs?
- Did you feel justice was done?
- Suggestions for improvement?

3. Conduct a national survey of victim satisfaction.

Items relevant to victim satisfaction could be included as part of the ongoing national victimization survey process, providing much-needed feedback regarding crime victim views at a national level. Local jurisdictions could also use this survey process as a guideline for designing their own assessments of crime victim needs and experiences as well as assessing national certification for helping professionals.

4. Note and consider all victim complaints and accolades.

Victim feedback should always be taken into account when assessing the strengths and weaknesses of victim services.

5. Assess the training needs of professionals who work with victims.

Knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding victims should be evaluated systematically before and after participation in training.

6. Assess satisfaction of professionals who support victims of crime.

Results of staff satisfaction surveys can guide actions to improve individual and agency performance and suggest ways to enhance staff retention and effectiveness.

A Law Enforcement Action Agenda

Police are uniquely positioned to assume a leadership role in promoting victim rights and servicing their needs. Police 911 dispatchers and responding officers are the first justice system representatives that most victims of crime encounter. Accordingly, police have a special opportunity to begin to repair the harm done by crime. Through

community policing, law enforcement agencies have developed consummate community and system collaboration skills. Police are the most visible and easily accessed justice agency. To encourage and enable law enforcement agencies to lead community and system inclusive endeavors, summit participants recommended that law enforcement agencies take the following actions.

1. Formalize the victim assistance function organizationally.

Dictated by resource availability, every agency should staff a victims assistance unit or designate a victim assistance specialist. The central responsibility of the unit or specialist should be to design, develop, conduct, and evaluate a comprehensive, agency-wide victim assistance program.

2. Train all first responders to provide “psychological first aid” to victims of crime.

Dealing with emotionally traumatized crime victims is a challenge. Law enforcement officers must be prepared, through basic and in-service training, to impart the reassurance and affirmation that victims require.

3. Develop written protocols to enable responding officers and investigators to treat crime victims.

Guidelines should articulate preferred methods to:

- Conduct safety assessments to ensure necessary steps are taken to protect victims and their families
- Inform victims of their rights and of services available to them
- Obtain information that is relevant to the impact of the crime on victims, witnesses and communities

4. Partner with victim assistance professionals to ensure that crime victims receive prompt and effective support.

Law enforcement agencies should have formal working relationships with victim assistance coordinators, either in-house or community-based professionals. Responding officers should provide victims with up-to-date information on services and assistance available.

5. Supply written information to all crime victims at the time of first contact.

Victims need both verbal reassurance and written information. Resource packets should include information on victim rights; compensation and support services available, what to expect during investigation and court proceedings, contact information for victim assistance professionals, and an individual within the law enforcement agency who can provide further information.

6. Designate individuals within each law enforcement agency who victims may contact to obtain information.

Victims of crime need a single point of contact in each law enforcement agency to obtain information and referrals to other services. Victim assistance units fill this role in agencies that have them. In larger jurisdictions, several individuals may share responsibility for providing case update information and for responding to victim inquiries. Ideally a staff member should be paired with a victim for the duration of the victim's involvement with the agency.

7. Develop written death notification policies and procedures and conduct complementary mandatory training.

Death notification is one of the most stressful aspects of victim-officer interaction. Officers and victim assistance personnel should be supported by written policies and appropriate training to ensure they are prepared to handle this difficult task compassionately and professionally. Officers should be accompanied by victim assistance personnel when making death notifications, whenever possible.

8. Establish mechanisms to ensure that crime victims and their families receive necessary emergency assistance.

Crime victims may need food, clothing, temporary shelter or housing, dependant care or transportation. Law enforcement agencies can help coordinate availability and access to such assistance as part of their larger community safety planning responsibilities.

9. Coordinate crime scene cleanup as soon as possible after an investigation is complete.

To minimize trauma to victims, their families and other community members, law enforcement agencies should coordinate community efforts to restore victim surroundings.

10. Ensure that crime victims experience a smooth transition from investigation to prosecution.

In some jurisdictions, one victim assistance professional or unit serves victims of crime from first contact through final resolution of their case. Where this is not the case, law enforcement agencies should provide victims with a specific contact in the prosecutor's office, and pass on information to prosecutors about the victim's needs and services that have been provided.

11. Systematically assemble victim feedback.

Victim satisfaction surveys should be designed to supply police agencies with information that is useful for upgrading quality of their interactions with and services to victims. Survey findings should be included in annual reports and may be used for officer performance appraisals.

12. Support officers in dealing with their own stress and trauma.

All who work with crime victims experience the stress generated by witnessing traumatic events. Law enforcement personnel should be required to participate in agency-sponsored stress-reduction and secondary victimization or trauma training and be offered opportunities to participate in peer support groups and individual counseling, when needed. Officers should also have opportunities to debrief after witnessing or dealing with the aftermath of violent crimes.

13. Cross train law enforcement and victim assistance personnel.

Shared training experiences that focus on each others' roles and responsibilities can enhance mutual understanding and respect between police and victim assistance professionals. The IACP and other national professional associations should encourage cross training.

14. Promote regular engagement among victims, advocates, community members, and law enforcement and other criminal justice professionals.

Law enforcement agencies should encourage continuing collaboration in crime prevention and victim services. Town halls, community forums and public school events work well. Internet web pages keep communities informed about law enforcement activities, safety concerns, prevention initiatives, and volunteer opportunities.

IV. SUMMIT FOLLOW-UP

The IACP is committed to serving as a resource for local law enforcement agencies as they work to address crime victim needs more effectively. In collaboration with the Office for Victims of Crime, the IACP will work with local agencies to implement Summit recommendations. Technical assistance will be available to a select number of small, medium and large police agencies. The menu of services may include:

- Model policies** - guidelines for officers and investigators who work with crime victims
- Information packets** - models of materials to provide to crime victims at first contact with police
- Curriculum** - for cross-training police and victim assistance personnel
- Survey tools** - to enable law enforcement agencies to assess victim satisfaction and to assess officer satisfaction with their victim support role
- Employee assistance programs** - design assistance to develop strategies to help officers deal effectively with their own stress and trauma
- Promising victim assistance approaches** - information on successful practices employed by law enforcement agencies across the country

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Sourcebook for Criminal Justice Statistics 1998, Bureau of Justice Statistics, page 172

ⁱⁱ FBI, Crime in America, 1998

ⁱⁱⁱ New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century, 1999, Office for Victims of Crime.

^{iv} Ibid

^v IACP Family Violence Summit Report, 1997

^{vi} New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century, 1999, Office for Victims of Crime.

^{vii} IACP Summit on Victims of Crime, 1999