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INTRODUCTION

Victims are best served when law enforcement agencies have strong internal partnerships and work closely with external community organizations. Many local organizations are designed to support long-term healing. Law enforcement can leverage these partnerships to support victim and community well-being.

EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS:

- Understand each other’s work—Discuss each other’s roles in serving victims, what each can and cannot do, and successes and challenges in meeting victims’ needs.

- Set and meet expectations—Identify what each hope to gain from the partnership and assign responsibilities. Establish success indicators. Keep commitments and meet expectations critical to maintaining the partnership.

- Communicate clearly and regularly—Maintain open lines of two-way communication, in person and by phone or email. Collaborate to address issues as they arise. Provide regular updates about new initiatives and service changes.

- Share information—Establish clear parameters around confidentiality and information access. This may require changes to established practices. Consider granting access to the agency and information in new ways.

- Engage in joint training and networking—Train together to support ongoing education and group problem-solving. Share ideas and resources. Joint training can help validate the professional roles, skills, and need for each partner in victim response.

“Internally, there was reluctance to pursue equal partnerships with community agencies and to open the doors to other organizations. Externally, community agencies were also reluctant to partner with the police department because there was not an established relationship and some uneasiness with partnering with a department that had struggled maintaining community trust in the past.

It is extremely important to walk the walk and follow through on the commitments you’ve made internally and with the community. Attend and participate in community events and meetings and allow for multiple staff to have opportunities to engage with community members outside of calls for service. This minimized any reluctance with collaboration in the future—not only for current partners but for agencies that are now exploring the idea of partnering with the department.”

Saginaw Police Department
PARTNERING

Reciprocate efforts—Engagement and input should be balanced and support a shared goal. Offer and ask for assistance to support mutual goals.

Formalize partnerships—Formalize internal partnerships through policies and protocols. Formalize external partnerships through memorandums of understanding (MOUs) or other interagency agreements. Establish roles and responsibilities, identify shared goals, assign tasks, and allocate resources. This helps ensure partnerships endure beyond personnel and administrative changes.

Engaging in relationships, being intentional about making ourselves available, and readily available. Not just passing out a card and saying, “Call me if you need anything.” But perhaps proactively calling some of our community leaders in specific parts of the city and saying, “How are things going? Just checking in.” Not waiting until there’s a problem, but proactively searching for ways to connect with them.

Chattanooga Police Department

INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Everyone at a law enforcement agency has a role in victim response. Like community-oriented policing, victim response efforts should not belong to a single, specialized unit. Everyone, regardless of rank, discipline, or assignment, should participate. Internal partnerships should be established between sworn and professional personnel at multiple levels (e.g., patrol, investigators, supervisors, command staff) and across disciplines (e.g., victim services, crime scene, SWAT, dispatch, records, front desk). This multidisciplinary model encourages cross-agency collaboration. It includes the voices and perspectives of multiple internal stakeholders in decision-making.¹

INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS MAY INCLUDE

- Agency executives
- Command staff and mid-level management
- First-line supervisors
- Trainers (e.g., academy, in-service, onboarding)
- Field training officers
- First responders (e.g., officers, investigators)
- Agency-employed victim services personnel
- Communications personnel

¹ International Association of Chiefs of Police, Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: What Are the Key Considerations? (Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV), 2019).
Establishing cross-department victim response policies and protocols can help sustain internal partnerships. For example, families of homicide victims and individuals who have died by suicide are routinely asked to come to the police department to retrieve their loved one’s clothing, jewelry, and other possessions. Agencies are encouraged to establish policies and protocols that outline how families will be supported in this process.

**EXAMPLE**

One demonstration site identified a separate room away from the existing evidence room where property could be returned in a trauma-informed way. They developed a protocol to outline roles and responsibilities for the departments involved, including front desk, victim services, and evidence personnel.

**ELERV RESOURCES**

Roles and Opportunities—Internal Partnerships
Sample Internal Partnership Protocol—Victim/Witness Interviews

One demonstration site developed an internal partnership between their command staff, victim services personnel, and their public information officers. They assessed how information was shared with the media and the public following high-profile incidents. They focused on when, how, and what victim information would be shared. Through research and collaboration, they modified their practices and established parameters for press releases, social media posts, web content, and publications. They prioritized victim safety and privacy. They decided to no longer release victims’ identifying information except in limited circumstances. They worked with their local media outlets to share information in a trauma-informed way and protect victim privacy.
EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

Building on the principles of community policing, the ELERV Strategy emphasizes strong community partnerships. These partnerships help build trust and mutual respect between police and the communities they serve. Research suggests that positive, nonenforcement encounters can improve community trust in law enforcement. Agencies are encouraged to create opportunities for contact and joint learning between law enforcement personnel and community partners. For example, agencies can invite community partners to participate in ride-alongs with officers and other agency departments. They can also make agency personnel available to participate in sit-alongs at community partner agencies.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS MAY INCLUDE

- Crime victims, survivors, witnesses, and co-victims
- Community members
- Community-based victim services agencies
- Advocacy organizations representing victim interests
- Criminal justice agencies
- Human services and health care agencies
- Child/Adult Protective Services
- School systems, colleges, and universities
- Research partners
- Elected officials
- Businesses
- Faith communities
- Media

Example

One demonstration site added a component into new intimate partner violence investigator training that included a sit-along at the local domestic violence shelter and victim services provider. This provided agency personnel from both sides of the partnership with first-hand experience and opportunities to ask questions and better understand roles.

External partnerships should be formalized through memoranda of understanding (MOU), cooperative agreements, or other interagency agreements. This may seem like a daunting task early in a partnership. However, this does not have to involve developing complicated legal documents. Begin with a simple statement of shared values and mutual goals. Expand into more complex agreements as the partnership develops. These agreements are not intended to be detailed procedural documents. They are meant to outline what each agency will contribute, parameters for information sharing, and other foundational aspects of the partnership. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to consider granting access to the agency in new ways. Partners should discuss what is working well and address any areas of concern as they arise. Partnership agreements should be reviewed and revised periodically.

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Agencies should set clear expectations for participation in events and outreach efforts. Agencies may see more requests for law enforcement personnel presence at events, meetings, and working groups. Agencies must be realistic about their capacity to participate without jeopardizing their primary duties or their partnerships. Striking a balance is key.

**Example**

One demonstration site used their social media platforms to highlight the services available through their community partners. Understanding that not all crime victims report to law enforcement, they used this form of outreach to provide information to the community. This demonstrated that the police department cares about the well-being of its community members. Community partner agencies reciprocated and posted information about police department initiatives on their social media platforms. This helped both partners expand their outreach. It did not require significant time commitment from either partner, and it demonstrated a community-wide approach to serving victims.

External partnerships can help meet victims’ needs and expand personnel capacity. For example, strong partnerships exist between many law enforcement agencies and community mental health providers. These partnerships allow officers to follow a streamlined referral process for individuals with mental health needs. They can feel confident returning to duty, knowing the community agency will provide specialized services.

Agencies are encouraged to think outside the box and seek nontraditional partnerships to meet victims’ needs.

**Example**

One demonstration site used to hold victim interviews in the same rooms where suspects were interrogated. The rooms were stark white and had bright fluorescent lights and meager metal furniture. The agency recognized that this was an inappropriate environment for victims. They decided to create a soft interview room. A room immediately adjacent to the lobby of the building was identified. They partnered with a local furniture store that donated soft couches, chairs, and decorations. Volunteers painted the room in soothing colors and added soft lighting. They decorated the space to be inviting and calming.

Now, victims do not have to walk through the police department to meet with investigators or victim services personnel. This change has had a positive impact on victims and cost the agency only limited personnel and volunteer time. Moreover, this victim-centered practice shows that the agency differentiates between suspect interrogation and trauma-informed victim interviewing, even in the physical space where interviews are held.
Another partnership that was nontraditional in nature during the ELERV process was the one that was formed between the CPD and the city’s public library to develop The Blue List. Every six months CPD officers submit book titles that they would like to recommend to their fellow officers. The library and executive staff, along with the Victim Services Director, then select three titles. Those titles are brought to the department and sent out to the officers with instructions on how they can check out a copy of a single title or in some cases, all three.

This partnership is a direct result of the findings from our research partners as well as general findings from the field of criminal justice. Through their focus groups with the cadets, our research partners discovered that formal education was seen as less important than training received from the department and veteran officers (e.g., FTOs, mentors). However, research indicates that higher education levels are correlated with lower use of force rates. After cross-referencing these national findings with those of the research partners locally, the Victim Services Director approached the library with the idea for what would eventually become The Blue List. The list was structured in a way to satisfy both the expressed preference for department sanctioned, peer led training and education with the need to incorporate research and job-related learning into ongoing training.

Overall, the partnership has functioned quite well. There have been instances where entire patrol teams or a higher-ranking leader required that their chain of command collectively read a title from the list and then held discussions. This has been one of the most unexpected but refreshing partnerships of the entire ELERV process.

Chattanooga Police Department

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CONCLUSION

Effective victim response requires strong internal and external partnerships. Agencies can serve victims by working with internal personnel trained to meet specific victim needs and external victim services providers who can offer long-term support. Formalizing partnerships can help sustain these efforts and lay the groundwork for partnership expansion.