

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy

SECOND EDITION

INTRODUCTION TO THE ELERV STRATEGY



LEADERSHIP



PARTNERING



TRAINING



**PERFORMANCE
MONITORING**

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The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is indebted to many experienced, knowledgeable, and committed individuals who made the *Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy*, 2nd edition, possible. The scope of contributions, insights, and perspectives provided by professionals representing different organizations and points of view is tremendous and extends far beyond what can be acknowledged in this section.

We are grateful to the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), for supporting IACP's efforts to enhance law enforcement response to victims through a partnership that has spanned more than 20 years. Much has been learned about the needs of crime victims, how law enforcement agencies can support victims at various intersection points, and the ways they can institutionalize enhanced victim response into their daily duties of protecting and serving communities. Through ongoing encouragement and guidance by OVC, the IACP has produced this comprehensive guide. It reinforces that every person working in a law enforcement agency has a role in victim response.

Early in the partnership, national forums were held. Law enforcement agencies, victim service provider organizations, and victims of crime provided insights and perspectives. These critical conversations culminated in the foundational ELERV Strategy concepts. Leadership and personnel at three law enforcement agencies played a pivotal role in putting theory into practice by field-testing the original ELERV Strategy. This positioned the IACP to select eight law enforcement agencies to validate the ELERV Strategy in preparation for national release.

To further document the effectiveness of the ELERV Strategy, OVC provided ongoing financial and program support to three law enforcement agencies: Casper Police Department (WY), Chattanooga Police Department (TN), and Saginaw Police Department (MI). These agencies were paired with research partners to conduct process evaluations of implementation efforts: St. Cloud State University (Casper PD research partners), University of Tennessee-Chattanooga and Southern Adventist University (Chattanooga PD research partners), and Saginaw Valley State University (Saginaw PD research partners).

We express our sincere appreciation for personnel from these agencies. They demonstrated commitment to the ELERV Strategy by embracing the seven critical needs of victims and the four core principles of leadership, partnering, training, and performance monitoring. They have demonstrated that law enforcement plays a pivotal role in effectively responding to the needs of crime victims.

Finally, the IACP would like to thank all the individuals who took time away from their duties to contribute valuable insights during the review of this material. These individuals were chosen for their knowledge and expertise. Their contributions have been synthesized in this comprehensive resource that will be priceless to law enforcement professionals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2009, partnering with the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) released *Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV): A 21st Century Strategy* and three accompanying resource documents (Implementation Guide, Resource Toolkit, and Training Supplemental). *The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy*, 2nd edition, was released in 2020 and includes comprehensive updates to the original ELERV Strategy package. Valuable information and lessons learned from the three agencies who implemented the ELERV Strategy 2014–2019 are highlighted.

This publication includes in-text links to a variety of resources:



ELERV Resources — These customizable samples and templates can be used to enhance agencies' response to victims.



IACP Resources — Each resource has been carefully selected to support enhanced victim response.



Resources from the Field—These resources were developed by national organizations to support law enforcement's role in serving victims of crime.

Every person working in a law enforcement agency has a role in victim response. The ELERV Strategy can be implemented across all ranks and disciplines. Federal, state, local, campus, and tribal law enforcement leaders are introduced to benefits, challenges, and methods for adopting victim-centered, trauma-informed philosophies and enhancing their response to crime victims.

This publication discusses the evolution of enhanced victim response and identifies the seven critical needs of victims: **Safety, Support, Information, Access, Continuity, Voice, and Justice**. Law enforcement agencies can address these needs by focusing on the four core principles of the ELERV Strategy:



LEADERSHIP

Law enforcement leaders are responsible for conveying benefits of enhanced victim response to all staff. They must develop and sustain agency infrastructure that prioritizes enhanced victim response. They foster ongoing communication and partnerships with community stakeholders.



PARTNERING

Law enforcement agencies can better meet victims' needs by developing strong internal and external partnerships.



TRAINING

Ongoing victim response training must be incorporated at all career stages and across all ranks and disciplines.



PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Law enforcement agencies should document baseline information about the quality of their current victim response. Analyzing this information can help agencies develop strategic goals and performance measures to assess progress.

ELERV PROJECT HISTORY



PILOT SITES

Agencies selected as Pilot Sites:

- ▶ Beaverton (OR) Police Department
- ▶ Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Police Department
- ▶ Mundelein (IL) Police Department

VALIDATION SITES

Agencies selected as Validation Sites:

- ▶ Broken Arrow (OK) Police Department
- ▶ California State University at San Bernardino (CA) Police Department
- ▶ Denver (CO) Police Department
- ▶ City of Flint (MI) Police Department
- ▶ Hastings (NE) Police Department
- ▶ Loudoun County (VA) Sheriff's Office
- ▶ New York State Police Department
- ▶ Sumner (WA) Police Department

DEMONSTRATION SITES

Agencies selected as Demonstration Sites:

- ▶ [Casper \(WY\) Police Department](#)
- ▶ [Chattanooga \(TN\) Police Department](#)
- ▶ [Saginaw \(MI\) Police Department](#)



DEFINITIONS

Adopting a shared understanding of frequently used terms is essential to providing high-quality services to crime victims. Throughout this document, the following definitions will apply:

AGENCY – federal, state, local, campus, or tribal police department or sheriff’s office.

PROFESSIONAL STAFF – agency personnel who are non-sworn including victim services, front desk, crime scene, records, communications/dispatch, and others.

TRAUMA-INFORMED – approach involving educating victims, service providers, and the general community about the impact of trauma on the health and well-being of victims; attending to victims’ emotional and physical safety; and using resources, services, and support to increase victims’ capacity to recover.¹ To fully develop a trauma-informed response, all disciplines must be involved in response efforts (dispatch, patrol, investigators, supervisors, nurses, prosecutors, legal services, agency-employed and community-based victim services personnel, and others providing services to victims).

VICARIOUS TRAUMA – emotional and psychological cost to people working and volunteering in law enforcement, victim services, emergency medical services, fire services, and other allied professions, due to exposure to victims of trauma and violence; related terms

include compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress.²

VICTIM-CENTERED – approach placing the victim at the center of all decisions regarding victim recovery and involvement with the criminal justice system, focusing on the victim’s choice, safety, and well-being and how the needs of the victim are everyone’s concern.³

VICTIM, WITNESS, SURVIVOR, CO-VICTIM – any person (minor or adult) who directly experiences or is impacted by a crime or criminal activity.

- ▶ **VICTIM** – An individual who is an independent participant in the criminal case under federal or state victims’ rights laws, denotes a person’s legal status (unavailable to the general public), and defines the level and extent of participation that the individual is entitled to in the criminal matter.
- ▶ **WITNESS** – An individual who has personal knowledge of information or actions that are relative to the incident being investigated.
- ▶ **SURVIVOR** – This term is often used interchangeably with ‘victim’ when conveying context related to resilience and healing.
- ▶ **CO-VICTIM** – An individual who has lost a loved one to homicide, including family members, other relatives, and friends of the decedent.⁴

1 National Institute of Justice, *Notifying Sexual Assault Victims After Testing Evidence* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2016).

2 Office for Victims of Crime, “Glossary of Terms” in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*.

3 National Institute of Justice, *Notifying Sexual Assault Victims After Testing Evidence*, 2.

4 International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Template Package 1: Getting Started*, Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (Alexandria, VA: 2019); Center for Victim Research. *Losing a Loved One to Homicide: What We Know about Homicide Co-Victims from Research and Practice Evidence*, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

From 2015 to 2018, the number of victims of violent crime rose from 2.7 million to 3.3 million. There were significant rises in the number of victims of rape/sexual assault, aggravated assault, and simple assault.⁵ These numbers do not include the millions of others impacted by crime, including witnesses, families, and communities impacted by mass violence.

The victims' rights movement began in the 1970s, defining and giving legal status to crime victims. Proponents of this movement changed state and federal statutes to define victims' rights and create pathways for upholding these rights in the criminal justice system.⁶ Major milestones are the Victim and Witness Protection Act in 1982, the Victims of Crime Act in 1984, the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, and the Justice for All Act (which included the Crime Victims' Rights Act) in 2004. Currently, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government have some form of constitutional, statutory, and/or rule-based protections for crime victims.⁷

Despite progress in establishing federal and state crime victims' rights legislation, only a small percentage of victims obtain the services and information they are entitled to receive.⁸ In addition, the criminal justice system has historically focused on apprehending, prosecuting, adjudicating, and punishing offenders. As a result, the critical needs of crime victims are often unmet. The emotional devastation and disruption felt by victims is

compounded when the criminal justice system fails to adequately respond to their needs.

There is also an increased awareness of the impact of vicarious trauma on first responders and others who serve victims and the subsequent impact on effective response to victims. By recognizing that addressing vicarious trauma is an element of effective victim response, law enforcement agencies can ensure that all personnel are prepared for their respective roles.



5 Rachel E. Morgan and Barbara A. Oudekerk, *Criminal Victimization, 2018* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, September 2019).

6 National Crime Victim Law Institute, "[Fundamentals Of Victims' Rights: A Brief History of Crime Victims' Rights in the United States](#)," *Victim Law Bulletin*, November 2011.

7 Office for Victims of Crime, *Landmarks in Victims' Rights and Services*, 2019.

8 Heather Warnken "[What Does the Data Tell Us About Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services?](#)" *Police Chief Online*, April 4, 2018.

ENHANCING LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO VICTIMS

Law enforcement agencies are uniquely positioned to address victims' needs immediately after a crime. Agencies across the United States are prioritizing victims' early access to information and supportive services, putting victims on the path to healing as soon as possible.

The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy provides guidance for agencies working to uphold victims' rights and address the needs of victims in the communities they serve.



ELERV RESOURCES

[Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims \(ELERV\) Initiative History \(1999-2020\)](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

“To not embrace the ELERV Strategy is to not embrace police work. We’re there to help people in their time of need, in their worst possible moments, we’re there. The difference we can make by the way we treat those people in that moment of crisis is huge. That’s why we get into police work.”

Chief David Porter
DeWitt Iowa Police Department
*IACP Victim Services
Committee Chair*

WHAT IS THE ELERV STRATEGY?

The overall goal of the ELERV Strategy is to create an agencywide philosophical shift that concentrates on identifying and responding to victims' needs. Federal, state, local, campus, and tribal law enforcement leaders are introduced to concepts and benefits of enhancing their response to victims of all crimes. The ELERV Strategy can be customized to fit any law enforcement agency.

The ELERV Strategy illustrates how every person in a law enforcement agency has a role in victim response. This includes recruits, officers, agency leaders, and professional staff. Agencies can start small and build on their

efforts over time. Improvements in any area of the ELERV Strategy can improve an agency's overall response to victims. The ELERV Strategy also recognizes that meeting the full spectrum of victims' needs requires collaboration among stakeholders. Establishing and maintaining strong partnerships is critical.

Implementing the ELERV Strategy should be a catalyst for lasting culture change within law enforcement agencies. It is not a project with a start and end date. Rather, enhancing response to victims should be assessed and integrated at every level of the agency and across all disciplines. Progress should be monitored over

time. Adjustments should take place as needed. Implementation also requires agencies to take an honest look at their current victim response practices and invest in the needed changes. Agencies must be willing to participate in this evaluation process and receive (and act on) honest feedback, whether positive or negative. For some agencies, implementing the ELERV Strategy may require only minor adjustments to already robust practices. For other agencies, this may require a complete shift in their approach to meeting victims' needs. While agencies may approach the ELERV Strategy as a way to respond to negative attention, true implementation should not be approached as a "quick fix" or response to a public relations crisis.

“Leadership has to take a posture of humility when introducing something like victim-centered philosophies into their agency. It’s based on the recognition that we’ve done great work, but we know we could do better.”

Chattanooga Police Department

The ELERV Strategy does not replace the role of a law enforcement-based victim services unit. Rather, it enhances the work the victim services unit is already doing. An established victim services unit should be a key component to the agency's overall victim response plan, *not the only personnel responsible for this work*. Victim services unit personnel cannot and should not be expected to fulfill all the responsibilities of enhanced victim response. Everyone in the agency, whether directly or indirectly, encounters victims and plays a role in enhanced victim response.



“While the department was moving in the right direction with the creation of its law enforcement-based Victim Services Unit (VSU), we did not fully grasp the fundamental principles involved in victim services. The missed opportunity was not a result of anything that was unique to the Casper Police Department; rather, it is a systemic problem with the culture of law enforcement nationwide. The failure was that the department did not put victims at the center of the decision-making process in their own cases or provide them the necessary information to understand the criminal justice system and all the components that intersect.

The Casper Police Department is a much better department today than it was prior to the implementation of the ELERV Strategy. The department is now aware of the seven critical needs of victims and uses those needs to adjust its response to cases accordingly. Procedures, protocol, and communication have all been improved to ensure an enhanced response to victims, department- and community-wide. Our VSU is now an integral part of our department, with VSU often being the first call after a scene has been stabilized. All statistics related to work with victims have seen an increase as well. It should be noted that the amount of complaints from citizens related to victim response has also seen a decline. While our officers and professional staff have always strived to help those in need, the ELERV Strategy has allowed them to expand the scope of service to accomplish our mission in more professional and meaningful ways.”

Casper Police Department

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING THE ELERV STRATEGY

Implementing the ELERV Strategy benefits law enforcement, victims, and communities.

“We have seen new things come and go over the years. A lot of times it is a lot of effort with not a lot of yield, but that was not the case with ELERV.”

Chattanooga Police Department

BENEFITS TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement personnel have vital roles in responding to and supporting victims of crime. Crime victims are key stakeholders in policing. They hold unique perspectives and valuable insights into the criminal justice system. They often have strong feelings about criminal behavior and are a key component for case resolution. Enhanced response to victims contributes to

- ▶ **Increased Crime Reporting and Case Resolutions** — Victims who are treated with sensitivity and respect are more likely to participate in investigations. They may be more willing to report future crimes. Moreover, some community members may be indirectly impacted by crime or may have been uncomfortable reporting crimes in the past. They may be more likely to report to law enforcement when they see increased transparency and positive changes being made. This can increase the likelihood that offenders are arrested and successfully prosecuted.

- ▶ **Improved Effectiveness and Efficiency** — Enhanced response to victims can help establish more effective collaboration between law enforcement and victim services personnel (agency employed and community based). These partnerships can increase victims’ access to support and compensation. This can free officers to focus on investigating crimes. This may also lead to increased victim participation throughout the criminal justice process.
- ▶ **Improved Morale and Job Satisfaction** — A law enforcement agency can improve its reputation with stakeholders by building relationships with the community. Building these connections can also heighten job satisfaction. All personnel have a role to play in effective victim response. Fostering new skills in personnel who have not historically received training in victim response can help them feel more prepared to identify and address victims’ needs. This promotes an increased sense of efficacy and confidence in job performance.

“So much information comes through during those encounters with community members that we missed out on before. The investigations come together so much faster because citizens feel comfortable interacting with our officers. Now we get text messages, emails, social media contacts, random calls that we did not get before.”

Chattanooga Police Department

- ▶ **Increased Community Confidence and Trust in Law Enforcement** — Transparency encourages community trust. Serving as a resource, even during non-enforcement interactions, can increase law enforcement legitimacy and community confidence. Additionally, providing effective response to victims by addressing their needs, regardless of case outcome, sends the message that the law enforcement agency values those they serve.

BENEFITS TO VICTIMS

Law enforcement personnel are often a victim's first point of contact in the criminal justice process. Effective victim response can increase confidence and trust in law enforcement. Other benefits to victims include

- ▶ **Expanded Knowledge of and Assistance in Exercising Victims' Rights** — All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the federal government have enacted constitutional, statutory, and/or rule-based protections for crime victims.⁹ Criminal justice professionals (law enforcement, prosecutors, victim services personnel, etc.) must be aware of victims' rights. Educating and assisting victims in exercising their rights is essential.¹⁰ In doing so, law enforcement agencies can recognize and support the central role victims play in the criminal justice process.
- ▶ **Increased Knowledge of and Access to Victim Services** — System-based (e.g., law enforcement, prosecutor's office) and community-based victim services personnel have unique and complementary roles. Recognizing the importance of both, law enforcement agencies can ensure victims have access to a broad array of services to meet their needs. Services may include crisis intervention; help navigating the criminal justice system and with crime victim compensation claims; updates on cases; direct advocacy; and other resources focused on safety, housing, mental health, legal support, and overall well-being of crime victims.

“I grew up in a very abusive household, so at a young age, my mom and I were jumping around from shelter to shelter. Thankfully, we were able to get away. I sometimes think, if this kind of training or policing was implemented back then, how much would my life be different?”

Officer, Saginaw Police Department

9 National Crime Victim Law Institute, “[Fundamentals of Victims' Rights](#),” 2.

10 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), [Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: What Are the Key Considerations?](#) (Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV), June 2019).

- ▶ **Greater Ability to Participate in Investigations** — Crime victims often lack information about investigation and prosecution processes. This can make it difficult to participate in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement agencies can help crime victims access and understand important information, including law enforcement reports, investigative actions, and prosecution decisions. This helps victims make decisions, assess the risks and benefits of participating in investigations, and view law enforcement personnel as working on their behalf.¹¹ Crime victims who experience secondary victimization (i.e., victim-blaming, indifference, or disregard of victims' needs and wishes) are less likely to continue participating in reporting and prosecution processes.¹² When law enforcement agencies take a collaborative posture and openly communicate with victims, they generally feel more positive about participating in these processes.
- ▶ **Improved Ability to Engage in Post-Victimization Activities** — A criminal investigation is only part of a victim's life. Victims are also employees, military service members, students, and family members. They have obligations related to their health, livelihood, families, faith communities, and even social groups. While the criminal event may cause victims short- and long-term disruption and harm, the impact can be lessened. Law enforcement's professional conduct and flexibility when assisting victims can help. Victims are more likely

to seek law enforcement assistance in the future if they can re-engage in life events and activities after victimization.

- ▶ **Improved Ability to Heal Post-Victimization** — Crime victims may experience physical, financial, and emotional harm. Physical harm can be wide-ranging and result in varying needs. Financial harm can result from medical bills, property loss and damage, employment disruption or loss, mental health needs, and participating in the criminal justice process. Emotional harm may result in a range of physiological and psychological reactions. This could include temporary difficulty with coping and functioning. Stress reactions may persist for a long time after the crime. Victims benefit from information and connection to resources that address these harms. Law enforcement has a critical role in conversations about how communities can best meet victims' needs. Enhanced response to victims can improve victim healing and contribute to overall public safety.¹³

11 National Crime Victim Law Institute, *Meaningful Crime Victims' Rights Require Discovery of Case Information and Records*, 2016.

12 Karen Rich and Patrick Seffrin, "Police Interviews of Sexual Assault Reporters: Do Attitudes Matter?" *Violence and Victims* 27, no. 2 (2012): 263–279, doi:10.1891/0886-6708.27.2.263; Amy Hardy, Kerry Young, and Emily A. Holmes, "Does Trauma Memory Play a Role in the Experience of Reporting Sexual Assault during Police Interviews? An Exploratory Study," *Memory* 17, no. 8 (2009): 783–788, doi:10.1080/09658210903081835.

13 Warnken, "What Does the Data Tell Us About Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services?"; Lauren B. Cattaneo and Lisa A. Goodman, "Through the Lens of Therapeutic Jurisprudence: The Relationship Between Empowerment in the Court System and Well-Being for Intimate Partner Violence Victims," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 25, no. 3 (2010): 481–502.

BENEFITS TO COMMUNITIES

Implementing the ELERV Strategy can have a profound impact on communities. Prioritizing victim-centered philosophies and practices can enhance overall confidence in and engagement with law enforcement. This can be seen during enforcement situations (e.g., increased willingness to report crimes and participate in investigations) and during partnership opportunities aimed at making communities safer. Enhanced response to victims can support mutual trust and increased feelings of safety throughout communities. Not all crime victims report their victimization to law enforcement. Identifying and understanding the barriers that prevent reporting can be valuable.

“By promoting trauma-informed culture and practices, the Chattanooga Police Department has created a community that is feeling safer, and victims are more willing to engage in the criminal justice system, minimizing further victimization. The Chattanooga Police Department has more than exceeded our expectations. Changes like these are a reflection of the leadership that Chattanooga Police Department and their dedication to the people they serve. The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) initiative has made a huge difference in our community and its impact will be long-lasting.”

**Chattanooga Police Department
Community Partner**



CHALLENGES

Agencies implementing the ELERV Strategy may face challenges. Barriers to progress should be anticipated and addressed as they arise. Challenges may come from internal and external sources.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES MAY INCLUDE

- ▶ Competing priorities
- ▶ Budgetary constraints
- ▶ Difficulty establishing buy-in
- ▶ Limited training funds and resources
- ▶ Turnover in key staff
- ▶ Difficulties in measuring success

EXTERNAL CHALLENGES MAY INCLUDE

- ▶ Perceptions of competing goals of victims, law enforcement, and criminal justice partners

- ▶ Differences between victim services provider and law enforcement perspectives
- ▶ Strained community-police relations
- ▶ Media coverage and negative portrayals of law enforcement
- ▶ Competition for limited resources
- ▶ Turnover in key staff at partner agencies

Agencies are encouraged to address challenges and perceived barriers head-on. Often, challenges are the result of inadequate information, a misunderstanding of roles and responsibilities, and ineffective communication. Agencies' victim-centered mission, vision, and values should continually guide decision-making. This will promote agencywide commitment to successful implementation.

SEVEN CRITICAL NEEDS OF VICTIMS

Law enforcement plays a significant role in ensuring that victims' needs are broadly understood and consistently met. The seven critical needs of victims provide a foundation for implementing enhanced victim response in law enforcement agencies. Each step of implementation should be based on the goal of meeting these needs. Agencies can eliminate or reduce identified barriers and support victims' participation in the criminal justice system.

“Today, the department begins by teaching its officers and professional staff the seven critical needs of victims. By using this as a starting point, the department demonstrates the expectation that victims are informed and included throughout their interaction with our department and the criminal justice system.”

Casper Police Department

1 SAFETY

Victims, especially those impacted by violent crime, are generally at a higher risk of revictimization in the future.¹⁴ Law enforcement can address the immediate safety concerns of victims. They can also recognize that those concerns may extend to children, family members, friends, and others connected to victims. Law enforcement can provide information to victims about risk reduction, likelihood of revictimization, and actions to take when experiencing intimidation and fears about future harm. Law enforcement should also provide information about processes and services aimed at enhanced safety.

Law enforcement can also meet emotional and psychological safety needs of victims. Agencies can create an environment where victims feel safe reporting crimes and providing information necessary for investigations. In this safe environment, victims can express their thoughts, fears, and needs without experiencing blame or guilt. This can include their views on the impact of the crime and overall response from law enforcement.

Law enforcement can address victim safety concerns by working with community members and partners. Together, they can develop crime prevention and response strategies. Law enforcement can also ensure all personnel who have contact with victims have a general understanding of available community resources.

2 SUPPORT

Opportunities for connecting victims with the help they need are often missed. According to data from the 2018 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), only 11 percent of violent crime victims reported receiving services after reporting the crime to law enforcement.¹⁵ Law enforcement can meet victims' needs by allowing support persons (chosen by victims) to be present when possible. Asking a victim if they want to bring a support person to an interview with an investigator is an example. When this is not permissible, law enforcement can explain why.

Most victims need assistance navigating the criminal justice system and connecting to services. Law enforcement can connect victims with victim services personnel who provide ongoing support and assistance. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to develop partnerships with agency-employed and community-based victim services personnel. Access to holistic support services throughout their participation in the criminal justice system can be beneficial for victims.

“Our officers have learned the importance of rapport building and better understand that their interactions may set the tone for how victims proceed in the criminal justice system from that point forward.”

Saginaw Police Department

14 Barbara A. Oudekerk and Jennifer L. Truman, *Repeat Violent Victimization, 2005-14* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017); Katie Ports, Derek Ford, and Melissa Merrick, “Adverse Childhood Experiences and Sexual Victimization in Adulthood,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 51 (January 2016): 313-322.
15 Morgan and Oudekerk, *Criminal Victimization, 2018*, 10.

3 INFORMATION

Victims benefit from information about their rights, available resources, and future points of contact in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement should inform victims of their rights during the first contact. Agencies can also provide guidance about how to exercise those rights.

Concise information about criminal justice system processes is critical. This information can help victims participate and make decisions. Additionally, law enforcement is responsible for keeping victims informed of the status of investigations. Periodic updates, even when no significant action has taken place, can help victims stay engaged. Updates should include new information, actions taken by law enforcement, decisions made by criminal justice system professionals, next steps, and choices available to victims. Access to information may be the only measure of justice for victims when investigations do not result in arrests and prosecution.



IACP RESOURCES

[Law Enforcement's Role in Victim Compensation](#)



RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIM LAW INSTITUTE

[Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Victims' Rights Profiles](#) (*victims' rights profiles by state*)

4 ACCESS

Victims need opportunities to fully participate in criminal justice system processes. This includes victims with unique needs like

- ▶ limited transportation,
- ▶ limited access to technology,
- ▶ language access needs, and
- ▶ developmental or physical disabilities, diminished competency, or mental illness.

Law enforcement agencies should ensure easy physical access to buildings. This can include ramps, doorways, and parking. Technology can also be used to reduce access barriers for victims. Allowing victims to participate in interviews virtually is an example. Providing information in the languages used by community members is also essential. Language access needs should be considered for multiple formats and for both spoken and sign languages.

Victims who have geographic, language, cognitive, or physical access needs often face challenges in the criminal justice system. They may also be more vulnerable to victimization. From 2010 to 2014, the rate of serious violent crime against people with disabilities was more than three times higher than the age-adjusted rate for people without disabilities.¹⁶ Law enforcement agencies can enhance access for victims by addressing physical, communication, and programmatic barriers.

16 Nancy Smith, Sandra Harrell, and Amy Judy, *How Safe Are Americans with Disabilities? The Facts About Violent Crime and Their Implications* (New York, NY: Vera Institute of Justice, April 2017).

RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

[Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\): A Federal Interagency Website](#)

[OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES AND VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE](#)

[Overcoming Language Barriers: Solutions for Law Enforcement](#)

[Bridging the Language Divide: Promising Practices for Law Enforcement](#)

[Engaging Police in Immigrant Communities: Promising Practices from the Field](#)

[National Resource Center for Reaching Victims](#)

[VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE](#)

[Culture, Language, and Access: Key Considerations for Serving Deaf Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#)

5 CONTINUITY

Law enforcement should collaborate with other criminal justice professionals, community agencies, and victim services personnel (agency employed and community based). Completing an inventory of community agencies serving victims is a place to start. Understanding services, processes, and the roles of professionals in these agencies is important. Ride-alongs and sit-alongs between law enforcement and community agency personnel can be beneficial.

Other ways to support continuity are sharing data, promoting research-informed practices, and developing consistent approaches. Using victim-centered, trauma-informed practices across agencies can help meet victims' needs.

Crime victims encounter multiple professionals and processes as their cases move through the criminal justice system. This can be confusing and make it difficult for victims to participate. Law enforcement can address the continuity needs of victims by maintaining solid partnerships to ease transitions.

6 VOICE

Crime victimization involves direct or threatened physical, emotional, or financial harm because of actions taken by others. The response to crime victimization also involves decisions and actions by others. Law enforcement can help victims have a voice by encouraging them to ask questions and listening to their concerns.

Law enforcement can support victims' voices by including them in case-related discussions. In some cases, victims can also be included in discussions about agency practices. Asking for victim feedback can help ensure that policies, protocols, and response efforts are guided by the views, preferences, and choices of victims.



7 JUSTICE

An offender arrest, conviction, and sentencing are often seen as the measure of success for law enforcement. Victims do not always measure success or justice in this way.¹⁷ Law enforcement can help victims find justice by asking for their input on case-related decisions and resolutions. Not all victims define justice in the same way.

Law enforcement can also ensure all personnel have the necessary skills, training, and resources to complete thorough, offender-focused investigations. This allows everyone in the agency to do their part to hold offenders accountable. Law enforcement can also ensure access to procedural justice. This promotes a sense of fairness by allocating resources objectively and being transparent about how decisions are made.¹⁸ Procedural justice may be the only form of justice that some victims receive in the criminal justice system. Law enforcement can use this approach to improve their work, enhance relationships, and improve outcomes.¹⁹



“Due to training, department staff has a better understanding of what justice means and that it can mean something different to each victim. This is taken into account when supporting victims throughout the process and allowing for each path to justice to be custom tailored. This shift in perspective occurred during the transition of becoming a trauma-informed and victim-centered department.”

Saginaw Police Department

RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ORIENTED POLICING SERVICES AND THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC SAFETY AND JUSTICE

[Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement:
An Overview](#)

17 IACP, *Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services*, 7.

18 Ibid.

19 Matthew D. Kenyon, “Rethinking Procedural Justice: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Framing,” *Police Chief Online*, October 16, 2019; Laura Kunard and Charlene Moe, *Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement: An Overview* (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).

CORE PRINCIPLES OF ENHANCED VICTIM RESPONSE

The four core principles of enhanced victim response are leadership, partnering, training, and performance monitoring. Applying each principle to victim response efforts is necessary. However, they can be tailored to meet agency and community needs.



LEADERSHIP

A law enforcement agency working to become more victim-centered is embarking on cultural change. Agency leaders must be at the forefront of these efforts. Leaders have the power and authority to shift agency priorities. They can set new policies and standards and establish agency infrastructure. Law enforcement leaders play a pivotal role in the success of ELERV Strategy implementation. Their buy-in and commitment from the beginning of implementation are critical.

Personnel from all ranks and disciplines also hold considerable influence as informal agency leaders. For example, an informal leader could be a star academy cadet whom others respect. Another example is a professional staff member in the records division who ensures victims have access to case-related documents. Including a diverse mix of sworn and professional staff in leadership roles during ELERV Strategy implementation is essential. This ensures multiple points of view are considered and can facilitate agencywide buy-in.

Changing an organization's culture takes time. Leaders must commit to an ongoing process. Through this commitment, law enforcement leaders can guide their agencies to long-term success.

Key components of effective leadership include:

- ▶ incorporating victim response strategies into the agency's vision, mission, core values, policies, and procedures;
- ▶ highlighting the benefits of enhanced response to victims;
- ▶ emphasizing that every member of the agency has an important role to play;
- ▶ developing agency infrastructure that prioritizes victim response;
- ▶ fostering partnerships with victim services personnel (agency employed and community based) and other community partners;
- ▶ ensuring all personnel receive victim response training;
- ▶ including victim response knowledge and skills assessments into personnel performance evaluations, promotional processes, and hiring practices; and
- ▶ sustaining long-term agency commitment to enhanced victim response.





PARTNERING

Ideal victim response often requires expertise, resources, time, personnel, authority, and technology that many law enforcement agencies do not have on their own. These challenges can often be addressed through external partnerships. Having a broad range of partners can strengthen an agency's overall response to victims. Partners may include

- ▶ agency-employed and community-based victim services personnel;
- ▶ other criminal justice professionals (e.g., prosecutors, probation/parole officers);
- ▶ human services agencies;
- ▶ health care agencies;
- ▶ child/adult protective services;
- ▶ community-based organizations;
- ▶ schools;
- ▶ researchers;
- ▶ elected officials;
- ▶ businesses;
- ▶ faith communities; and
- ▶ media professionals.

Law enforcement agencies can also partner with victims and community members to enhance services and public safety.

Strong internal partnerships are equally important. Personnel of different disciplines should work together to meet victims' needs. For example, communications personnel should be encouraged to work with agency-employed victim services personnel. Victim services personnel can identify key community resources that communications personnel can discuss with victims or community members during non-emergency calls.

Ride-alongs and sit-alongs can foster relationships among internal and external partners. These activities allow individuals from

different disciplines and agencies to spend time together. This encourages all parties to better understand each other's roles and responsibilities..

Key components of effective partnering include:

- ▶ understanding each other's roles and responsibilities;
- ▶ establishing common language;
- ▶ sharing information and networking;
- ▶ creating joint training opportunities;
- ▶ agreeing on indicators of success;
- ▶ formalizing agreements (e.g., memoranda of understanding); and
- ▶ assessing and fine-tuning partnerships over time.



TRAINING

Ongoing training for all personnel is necessary. Consistent training can help ensure everyone stays current on best practices in victim response. Best practices change as technology, crime analysis, investigation techniques, research, and resources evolve. Training helps keep skills sharp. New research and developments in the field can also be incorporated into practice through training. Therefore, ongoing training on victim response skills, knowledge, and tools must be required at all career stages and across ranks and disciplines.

Victim response training and related topics should be integrated into all basic and advanced training curriculum. Agencies are encouraged to develop multidisciplinary training for these topics. This helps ensure multiple points of view and expertise are included in instruction. Victim services personnel (agency employed and community based) can be valuable contributors of training information and material.

Key components of effective victim response **training** include:

- ▶ reviewing current training curriculum, schedules, instructors, and evaluation methods to ensure victim response topics are included throughout;
- ▶ ensuring victim response training is available for all personnel; and
- ▶ prioritizing co- and cross-training opportunities (e.g., law enforcement training with victim services personnel).

“We cannot stress enough how critical training has been within our department in order to transition the culture. When employees are given relevant information in training and then allowed to put that training into practice, the results speak loudly.”

Casper Police Department



PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Performance monitoring processes must be established to track progress. Before implementing the ELERV Strategy, law enforcement agencies should determine how success will be measured. Baseline data should be gathered to gauge the quality of current victim response. This data can be used to develop goals and implementation strategies.

An implementation plan is essential. This roadmap should include victim response goals, resources needed, and action steps. It should also outline desired short- and long-term outcomes. Using this plan, law enforcement leaders can clarify how victim response strategies should work and the desired effect. Leaders should also identify progress indicators that can be monitored as the initiative evolves. Some agencies may choose to work with a local



research partner. Research partners can help collect baseline data and develop goals. They can also help agencies get feedback from victims and community members. Research partners can evaluate trends and progress and identify gaps in services. Data can be used to make mid-course corrections as needed.

Performance monitoring can also be included in hiring practices, personnel performance evaluations, and promotional processes. Assessing victim response knowledge and skills at regular intervals is encouraged. This can help solidify victim-centered approaches into daily practice.

Key components of effective performance monitoring include:

- ▶ collecting baseline data about current victim response;
- ▶ defining data-driven victim response goals;
- ▶ determining needed resources;
- ▶ identifying desired short- and long-term outcomes;
- ▶ analyzing data trends;
- ▶ making mid-course corrections as needed;
- ▶ gathering feedback from victims and victim services personnel (agency employed and community based); and
- ▶ incorporating victim response knowledge and skills into hiring practices, performance evaluations, and promotional processes.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The following considerations helped enhance victim response at agencies implementing the ELERV Strategy. They can be applied to all four core principles.

USE OF LANGUAGE

Words used to talk to and about victims are vitally important. Many law enforcement agencies have their own “language,” where everyone at the agency has a shared understanding of what key terms, phrases, and acronyms mean. It is common for personnel to revert to a shared language when speaking with those outside the agency. This may include community partners, community members, victims, and witnesses. To avoid confusion, personnel should be prepared to explain the words and definitions used in the agency. Law enforcement personnel may need to change their language when speaking with victims to ensure understanding. The criminal justice system involves complex concepts and decision-making processes. Law enforcement

personnel are encouraged to continually check in to make sure victims understand what participation entails.

Agencies are encouraged to adopt victim-centered, trauma-informed language as part of ELERV Strategy implementation. Using this language can decrease shame and encourage reporting and victim engagement. One example is the historical use of the word “uncooperative” when talking about victims. Using forms of the word “cooperation” in this context can imply intentional disengagement. It also implies an unequal relationship with one party setting the rules and parameters for the other. There are many reasons victims do not engage with law enforcement following their victimization. For some, continued engagement could put them at risk of further harm. A victim-centered approach recognizes that victims are the experts in their own lives. They should be provided with all available options, not only those that system professionals believe are in victims’ best interest

or that could further the legal case. Victims who choose not to participate in the investigation should not be labeled “uncooperative.” Their decisions should be documented factually in the case record. Victims sometimes re-engage with law enforcement after time has passed, safety concerns have been resolved, or other pressing needs are addressed. It is important to keep the avenue of engagement open to victims. Victim outreach letters and other materials should also be worded in a way that conveys support of victim participation. Agencies are encouraged to replace the term “cooperation” with more neutral and empowering terms such as “engagement” or “participation.” These words reflect a victim’s choice in their path through the criminal justice system.

Victim-centered language should also be used when writing reports or documenting interactions with victims. For example, an officer who is trained on the impact of trauma on memory can provide context around why a victim may be unable to give a concise, linear report of a crime.²⁰

This context can be included in an incident report so others are not left to interpret limited information later in the case. It is also important to note that victims’ access to some services and resources (e.g., victim compensation, U-Visa application) are dependent on their participation in the investigation. Therefore, clearly documenting participation and any known barriers to participation (such as safety concerns) is critical. Victim-centered language should also be included in agency policies and training. This institutionalizes expectations around use of appropriate language. It can also support the use of victim-centered language in daily activities and conversations. Victim-centered language should be used by all personnel in all communications, both internal and external.



²⁰ Rebecca Campbell, “[The Neurobiology of Trauma: Webinar Series](#),” *Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Toolkit* (January 12, 2018).

“Examples of enhanced victim response can be seen in our officers’ reports and feedback from victims regarding their on-scene interactions. Officers are more aware of how important their language use or terminology is when submitting a strong report. This was accomplished through training provided through the ELERV initiative. In reports, officers describe the victim, scene, and suspect in great detail to ensure that those reading the report get a clear picture of what occurred and can limit their questions to the victim that may revictimize them. These subtle yet enhanced responses to on-scene work is felt at multiple levels. Victims provide feedback that indicates they noticed support and extra attention from the officer, which made them more comfortable and safer when reporting the crime. When they receive a copy of the police report, those feelings are reinforced. Investigations and prosecutor’s office staff are also better prepared when pursuing the case.”

Saginaw Police Department

ELERV RESOURCES

SAMPLE VICTIM LETTERS (VERSIONS FOR AGENCIES WITH/WITHOUT AGENCY-EMPLOYED VICTIM SERVICES PERSONNEL)

[Case Status Letter \(with victim services\)](#)

[Case Status Letter \(without victim services\)](#)

[Property Letter \(with victim services\)](#)

[Property Letter \(without victim services\)](#)

[Unsolved Case Letter \(with victim services\)](#)

[Unsolved Case Letter \(without victim services\)](#)

[Victim Contact Letter \(with victim services\)](#)

[Victim Contact Letter \(without victim services\)](#)



VICARIOUS TRAUMA

“ Unless other agencies wishing to implement ELERV philosophies have an emphasis on officer-staff wellness and organizational health, any efforts around victim services and trauma-informed response will not be as impactful due to burnout and compassion fatigue. Essentially, you cannot take better care of victims if you are not taking care of yourselves.”

Chattanooga Police Department

Training on vicarious trauma and professional wellness were identified as an important component of ELERV Strategy implementation. Sworn and professional staff should have a clear understanding of how their work impacts them as employees and individuals. Vicarious trauma is defined as an occupational challenge for people working and volunteering in law enforcement, victim services, emergency medical services, fire services, and other allied professions, due to their continuous exposure to victims of trauma and violence. Exposure to the trauma of others can change the worldview of these professionals. If unaddressed, it can put people and organizations at risk for a range of negative consequences.²¹ However, training on vicarious trauma can be beneficial and support organizational change.²² The following tools can help agencies understand

the warning signs of vicarious trauma, assess their capacity to address work-related exposure to trauma, identify strengths and gaps, prioritize needs, and develop agencywide training and support plans.²³

RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

[Vicarious Trauma Toolkit](#)

[Vicarious Trauma—Organizational Readiness Guide \(VT-ORG\) for Law Enforcement](#)



IACP RESOURCES

[Employee and Family Wellness Guide](#)

[Officer Safety & Wellness resources](#)

“ We wish we would’ve started with education around vicarious trauma. When we understand as individuals the importance of something and it resonates, it relates to us, it makes us much more open to recognize that in everyone else experiencing a difficult or traumatic situation. I think that would have enhanced and sped up the understanding of the importance of victim support.”

Saginaw Police Department

21 Office for Victims of Crime, “[Glossary of Terms](#).”

22 Brian L. Mishara and Normand Martin, “Effects of a Comprehensive Police Suicide Prevention Program,” *Crisis* 33, no. 3 (2012): 162-168.

23 Office for Victims of Crime, “[What Is the VT-ORG?](#)” in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*; Office for Victims of Crime, “[Introduction to Vicarious Trauma for Law Enforcement](#),” in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*, Training and Professional Development.

CONCLUSION

Agencies can use the ELERV Strategy to incorporate victim-centered, trauma-informed practices at all levels. This resource can be adapted to fit the needs of law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. The benefits of implementing the ELERV Strategy are many and far-reaching. Agencies can build on the seven critical needs of victims and focus on the four core principles of enhanced victim response to provide high-quality services to those impacted by crime.

RESOURCES

Resources are linked throughout the ELERV Strategy, 2nd edition documents. Additional resources to support enhanced victim response are included in the documents below.

[IACP Resources](#)

[External Resources](#)



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