

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Our agency is already enhancing victim response through our victim services unit, so why do we need this strategy/approach?

The victim services unit cannot be expected to carry the burden of an agency's enhanced victim response alone. Everyone has a role to play in the agency's response to victims, whether it is direct or indirect. The ELERV Strategy promotes an enhanced response from all personnel. This will strengthen your victim services unit's effectiveness.

If we are being victim centered, doesn't that mean we are being biased against suspects?

Securing rights for victims does not mean fewer rights for suspects. A victim-centered approach empowers victims to participate in the criminal justice process. This is a process they did not choose to be a part of and frequently involves barriers to participation. Supporting victims does not create bias against suspects. Both victims and suspects have legal status in the criminal justice system, and law enforcement must simultaneously uphold the rights of both. Law enforcement is required to pursue all facts and evidence wherever they might lead. Enhanced response to victims will often lead to additional information and avenues of investigation that might otherwise be unavailable. Consequently, this can lead to a more robust, complete, and fair investigation. Investigators should follow best investigative practices consistent with professional ethics and legal obligations. Investigators should be prepared to thoroughly explain those practices and procedures to all parties. Such a response not only is free of bias, it is supportive of an enhanced response to victims and leads to better outcomes.¹

I believe in the ELERV Strategy, but I'm having trouble getting my colleagues to buy-in. What can I do to encourage their participation?

Encouraging participation in setting goals, assessing the current status of victim response, and developing strategies for improvement can help create buy-in. A sense of ownership in the initiative can increase commitment, willingness to assume accountability for results, and opportunities to receive credit for individual and agency accomplishments.

We end up with a lot of turnover in key staff members. How can we keep this effort going when key staff members leave?

Turnover can impact implementation efforts. Agencies are encouraged to institutionalize implementation efforts whenever possible. This can be achieved by writing ELERV Strategy components into agency policies and procedures and ensuring accountability checks are in place. This can also be done by developing onboarding expectations around victim response for each position within the agency. These expectations can include familiarity with ELERV Strategy components, specific actions of the identified position, and accountability measures. Developing standardized onboarding expectations can ease the inevitable disruption of staffing changes due to hiring, transfers, and promotions. These expectations can also be reinforced by top agency leaders, promote buy-in by all personnel, and further support clear goals and implementation strategies.

¹ International Association of Chiefs of Police and National Crime Victim Law Institute, "[Victims' Rights Sworn Staff Webinar](#)," March 2019.

How does our organization achieve sustainability when implementing the ELERV Strategy?

Leadership should build sustainability into their organization from the start. Sustainability can be supported internally by including victim-centered philosophies and practices into

- ▶ the agency's mission, vision, and values statements;
- ▶ policies and protocols;
- ▶ training curriculum (in-service, new hire, and ongoing);
- ▶ hiring practices; and
- ▶ promotional testing.

Sustainability can be supported externally by

- ▶ maintaining ongoing and formalized relationships with key stakeholders and community partners,
- ▶ integrating victim advocacy partners into the agency's response, and
- ▶ publicly highlighting positive outcomes to maintain community and political support.

How can my agency address cultural and language needs of victims?

The ELERV Strategy emphasizes strategic partnerships. These may be beneficial for improving your agency's response to victims' cultural and language needs. All law enforcement agencies should have stand-alone Limited English Proficiency policies and protocols. Meeting language access and cultural needs of victims can also be supported through partnerships with agencies and groups serving identified communities. All resources and materials available to victims should be translated into languages represented in the community, including spoken and sign language. Increasing the diversity of the agency's workforce and using available translation and cultural awareness training resources can also be effective.

How does our agency offer adequate support to victims of nonviolent crimes if our victim services partners in the community handle only violent crime victims?

Victim services resources should be discussed and made available from the initial response through case resolution. In many cases, support is defined by how victims perceive the treatment they receive from law enforcement personnel, both sworn and professional. Even if offenders cannot be apprehended, victims appreciate receiving frequent information updates. This helps them understand what is likely to happen with their cases. For many victims, having timely, accurate, transparent information about their case is the only measure of justice they will receive. Victims of nonviolent crimes should receive the same level of service.

How should my agency handle a difference of opinion between our agency and our victim services partners in the community?

Bridge differences in perspectives with collaboration and communication. This helps limit miscommunication or even mistrust. Acknowledge the different perspectives of each agency or discipline. Activities such as ride-alongs (victim services partners with law enforcement), sit-alongs (law enforcement agency personnel, both sworn and professional, with victim services partners), and cross-training can increase understanding of roles and responsibilities.

How should law enforcement respond to victims who are unwilling or unable to participate?

Some victims are not able to participate with first responders or investigators. This may be due to mental illness, developmental disabilities, substance use, fear, the significant impact trauma can have on an individual, or a combination of these and other factors. Victims may choose not to participate in the criminal justice system. Sometimes their continued engagement may put them at risk of further

harm. Law enforcement is encouraged to recognize that victims are the experts in their own lives and are entitled to make independent decisions in the criminal justice process. This can feel frustrating to law enforcement personnel working to keep communities safe. Acknowledging this reality and discussing the situation is important. It can reduce frustration and remind personnel that the agency serves all victims, whether they participate in the criminal justice process or not.

It is also important to work closely with victim services personnel and know the resources available in the community. Training provided by victim services personnel (agency employed and community based) can help prepare everyone in the agency to respond more effectively to victims. Many victim services personnel will be interested in collaborating with law enforcement. Partnerships can help streamline referral processes for ongoing case management, 24-hour crisis intervention, and other supportive services that may enable victims to participate in criminal justice processes.

How can my agency handle negative press coverage of high-profile crime incidents?

Negative press coverage can be challenging. As stated throughout the ELERV Strategy, transparency fosters trust. Establish communication plans that include frequent, open communication with the community about what the agency is doing to address victim and community safety. Providing positive examples of victim response successes can also help defuse the negative impacts of sensationalistic coverage of high-profile incidents.

What if community, local, or state leadership changes due to an election?

Elections that bring new state, county, or city, leadership can affect an agency's progress toward victim response goals. Cultivating strong working relationships with elected officials at local and state levels may help maintain forward momentum during times of transition. Law

enforcement agencies can work with policy makers and funding sources to educate them on important issues and the agency's victim response goals. Consistent communication can help ensure that collaboration continues with newly elected officials.

Our agency has limited funding. Can we still implement the ELERV Strategy?

Limited funding remains a challenge for most law enforcement agencies. Many strategies for enhancing victim response do not require additional funding. For approaches that may require additional personnel or other resources, law enforcement agencies can help educate policy and budget decision makers. Highlighting evidence of positive impacts of enhanced victim response can be beneficial. Additionally, potential funding sources for hiring victim services personnel follow.

- ▶ Your state's Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) office receives money from the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) each year to help crime victims in your state. Most states allocate these funds for grant programs tailored around specific goals. However, new or promising practices that help victims may also be financed through state VOCA funds. Agencies are encouraged to meet with their state VOCA administrators to discuss funding opportunities, application processes, and grant requirements.
- ▶ Federal grants and state grants may also be an option. Key federal agencies that routinely fund victim services efforts include the **Office for Victims of Crime (OVC)**, **Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)**, **Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)**, and **Community Oriented Policing Services**.
- ▶ State, regional, or local foundations and organizations, both public and private, can also be explored. In some cases, corporations may fund victim-related initiatives.