

# Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services

## Advocacy Parameters



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## Introduction

Victim-centered responses and services are vital to the safety, stability, and healing of crime victims, as their use can ultimately reduce and prevent future victimization.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, to support the development of law enforcement-based victim services in the United States, to strengthen their capacity, and to support partnerships with community-based programs, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) launched the [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services & Technical Assistance Program \(LEV Program\)](#). Providing training and technical assistance

for the LEV Program, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) aims to enhance the capacity of law enforcement-based victim services by providing guidance on promising practices and policies to support victims' access to their legal rights and the services and responses they need.

This publication series seeks to enhance law enforcement-based victim services and as a result, the overall field of victim advocacy. Community-based advocates reading these publications may need to account for statutory, legislative, and policy differences.<sup>2</sup>

## Advocacy Parameters

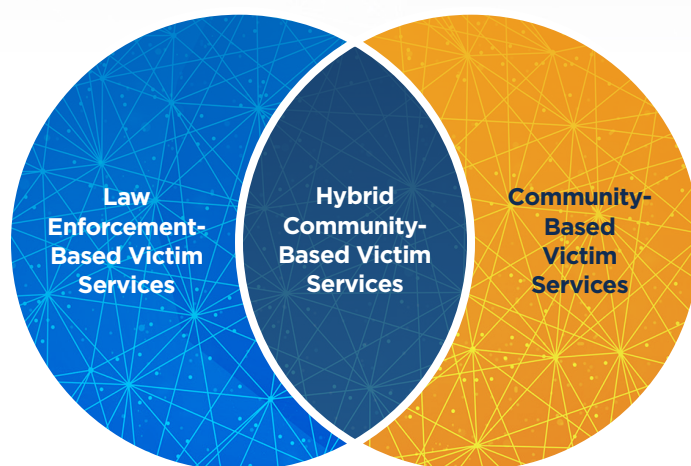
Law enforcement agencies are uniquely positioned to lead a multidisciplinary, trauma-informed response to victims that is coordinated, collaborative, and culturally responsive, ensuring that victims' needs are prioritized. Including dedicated victim services personnel in law enforcement agencies can be a positive step toward achieving this goal. This endeavor does not take place without challenges. Agencies are encouraged to openly address historical relationships between law enforcement and victim advocacy. Mutual understanding must be established that the primary role of law enforcement is to be objective fact finders who conduct bias-free investigations of criminal activity. Likewise, an understanding must be established that the primary focus of victim services personnel is advocating for the rights and needs of victims regardless of the outcomes of investigative processes. Defining these roles and establishing mutual respect for each discipline will support a shared understanding of how advocacy will be conducted within the agency and ultimately ensure optimal service to victims.

To reinforce established advocacy parameters, agencies should consider hiring and selection; reporting structure; supervision practices; span of responsibility; and ethical, culturally responsive approaches to providing victim services.

### Models of Service Provision

Multiple models of victim services provision exist. Becoming familiar with these different models can increase overall understanding of victim advocacy.

*What model of service provision is used?*



Models of service provision include:

- **Law enforcement-based victim services**—victim services personnel are employed by a law enforcement agency (this can include student interns and volunteers), and service provision is for victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims of crime within the jurisdiction. These personnel are subject

1 Brian A. Reaves, [Police Response to Domestic Violence, 2006–2015](#) (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2017).

2 For more information, see the [Models of Service Provision](#) section of this publication.

to rigorous background check processes and training, receive access to both the agency's record management system (RMS) and Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS), and are representatives of the law enforcement agency.

- **Hybrid community-based victim services**—victim services personnel are employed by a community-based organization that is engaged in a formal agreement (e.g., contract and/or memorandum of understanding or cooperative agreement) with a law enforcement agency to jointly dictate the role of victim services personnel in serving victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims of crime who are engaged with the law enforcement agency. These personnel may have access to RMS and CJIS after a proper background check is cleared but are not representatives of the law enforcement agency.
- **Community-based victim services**—victim advocates are employed by a community-based organization, and the community-based organization may or may not have an agreement (e.g., memorandum of understanding or cooperative agreement) with a law enforcement agency dictating partnership contributions. These advocates do not have access to RMS or CJIS and are not representatives of the law enforcement agency.

Community-based advocacy benefits from decades of development, research, and formation of best practices. Law enforcement-based advocacy has experienced less research and development, leading to a need for more specific promising practices.

Additionally, differences in agency and community cultures, values, goals, service needs, and mandated responsibilities per state laws, tribal codes, and federal statutes (related to concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of minors and older or vulnerable adults) exist. Despite these differences, guidelines to standardize common practices of law enforcement-based victim services are needed.

## Span of Responsibility

Agencies should focus on manageable goals when establishing or enhancing victim services programs. Early goals should focus on policy development and consistent service delivery. Agencies are encouraged to start small and build over time.

***How are victim services personnel expected to provide services (e.g., phone contact; office appointments; letter, email, or text communication; on-call response)?***

Decisions about how victim services will be provided should include a balance of what is practical for current victim services personnel capabilities, what mode of contact will provide equitable access to services, and what supports safe and ethical contact with victims. Regardless of mode of contact, agencies should ensure language access needs are addressed.<sup>3</sup>

Training should include developing active listening skills; using plain language and personalized communication; providing adequate, balanced information to facilitate informed choices; explaining complex processes and procedures; making referrals to other support services; maintaining ethical standards; and summarizing conversations.<sup>4</sup> Training promotes understanding and increases professionalism. Agencies should assess victim services personnel's workspace to ensure the necessary levels of privacy when providing services to victims by phone.

### Consider providing victim services personnel with agency-owned cell phones and laptops/tablets.

- This can increase accessibility to contact victims (e.g., text or email) while removing privacy concerns for victim services personnel (e.g., personal cell phone subpoenaed after texting a victim in a case).
- This allows for easy transition to work off-site (e.g., in-field response, on-scene response, temporary remote work).

3 For more information and resources on providing language access, see [Critical Language Access Needs of Victims, Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking Language Access Protocol Checklist, and Language Access, Interpretation, and Translation – Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence](#).

4 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package V – Training](#) and [Victim Assistance Training \(VAT\) Online](#).

For most agencies, phone contact will be the primary way services are delivered. When considering service delivery through office appointments, agencies should incorporate victim-centered and trauma-informed processes for victims to travel to and enter the building, identify private meeting space, and adjust schedules to allow meetings to occur or extend after traditional work hours. Including safety considerations for both victims and victim services personnel is essential.

Services can also be delivered through written communication, including letters and electronic communication (e.g., email and text messages). When considering this mode of service delivery, agencies should think through associated safety and privacy factors for victims. Using agency letterhead, providing position titles, and including report information can pose safety risks for victims of certain crimes (e.g., domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse). Written communication can also be received or intercepted by people other than the victim. Agencies should consider the age of victims, preference of victims, and victims' access to needed equipment when delivering services in this way. Guidelines for written and electronic communication should be included in documentation policies.<sup>5</sup>

Agencies considering including an on-call response by victim services personnel should think about whether those responses will be in the field (e.g., at a hospital, on scene), by phone, or a combination. Some situations could more readily prompt in-person on-call responses. Trauma-informed response to victims in crisis and delivery of time-sensitive criminal justice system information may be enhanced through in-person contact. While safe and ethical services to victims should always be prioritized, agencies also need to consider—

- compensation for personnel taking on this responsibility (e.g., overtime, comp time);
- access to needed equipment (e.g., cell phone, radio, vehicle);
- response time to identified locations;
- need to develop processes for multiple simultaneous requests;
- safety of victim services personnel while in the field;
- appropriate training for intersections with crime

scene and investigative practices (e.g., crime scene safety practices, crime scene processing steps); and

- impacts of in-person service delivery associated with other assigned responsibilities (e.g., regular case assignments, follow up from on-call responses).

Likewise, some situations may more readily prompt on-call responses by phone. Victims may be more willing to engage over the phone to enhance privacy around law enforcement involvement. They may also prefer this option due to convenience and their need to manage multiple personal responsibilities.

### ***What factors have been considered when determining how victim services personnel will provide services?***

In determining how victim services should be provided, agencies are encouraged to consider potentially lengthy travel time, intermittent or insufficient phone and internet services, or minimal transportation options, among other factors. These issues may be common, especially in rural and tribal communities, and could impact the availability or consistency of certain service delivery methods. Another related consideration is how victim services personnel will be notified of new victims and reports. For example, will incident numbers and case information be provided to victim services personnel to review and assess for contact? Will investigators make requests for victim services to contact victims? Will victims request services directly? Likely, agencies will blend all these possibilities. Agencies are encouraged to establish criteria to assist with assessment and triage for victim services response. Ensuring consistent services while considering the realistic capacity of victim services personnel is vital. Agencies are strongly encouraged to include victim services personnel in all decisions around response modes, capacity thresholds, and triage and assessment standards.

Agencies should develop contingency plans for victim service delivery during unexpected or crisis events (e.g., inclement weather, natural disasters, mass casualty events, pandemics, technology failures, lack of vehicle or equipment availability). These circumstances may require a different mode of service delivery and use of technology (e.g., virtual communication among victims, investigators, and victim services personnel; virtual attendance at court hearings) to ensure continued

5 For more information about communicating with victims through email and text messages and other virtual platforms, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Using Technology to Communicate with Victims](#).

service provision. Agencies must consider victim safety and privacy when using technology.<sup>6</sup>

***Is there a specific time frame for victim services personnel to make initial contact with victims (e.g., within 48 hours, the business day after the report was received, dependent on crime type and lethality factors)?***

- Contact with victims, both initially and periodically, may promote continued engagement with the criminal justice process.<sup>7</sup> Agencies should determine when initial contact will be attempted, how many contact attempts will be made, the frequency of contact, and when contact will be discontinued. These decisions will support equitable, ethical, and professional service delivery.
- The timing of contact may be different for different crime types. For example, when safety concerns are identified in the initial police report (e.g., a victim of intimate partner violence lives at the same residence as the suspect), the agency may determine that victim services personnel will attempt to contact the victim only on the victim's cell phone and that a letter will not be sent. Timeframes for initial and ongoing contact, and any exceptions, should be included in policies and documented.

***Are victim services personnel expected to serve more than one law enforcement agency or jurisdiction (e.g., federal, state, tribal)?***

Agencies that engage in a shared service provision model (e.g., victim services are provided to multiple agencies) should have extensive conversations that include cost-sharing parameters, agency-specific policies and practices, access to agency records, personnel schedule and leave practices, shared use of equipment, availability of workspace, and training for victim services personnel. Agencies should develop detailed agreements that cover processes for cross-agency delineation of contributions, responsibilities, and actions in writing and ensure all associated personnel are familiar with the shared expectations. Partnering agencies are encouraged to have regular conversations about jurisdictional changes (e.g., population growth, crime trend changes, budgetary impacts, what is

working well, and what changes may need to be made to the agreements).

“By initially providing services to victims of gun-related crimes in identified neighborhoods, we were able to establish effective practices and build solid partnerships both internally and externally. With that foundation in place, we’ve now expanded services to gun-related crimes citywide including homicides. Luckily, my agency provides the support needed to make effective programmatic decisions.”

**Maggie Barone**  
Victim Advocate  
Gun Crime Intelligence Center  
Saint Louis Metropolitan Police Department  
St. Louis, MO

***Are victim services personnel expected to provide services to—***

*Victims of all crime types? Those impacted by non-criminal crisis circumstances (e.g., suicide, traffic fatalities, family disputes not deemed criminal)?*

Agencies respond to all crime types and routinely respond to crisis circumstances (e.g., suicides, non-criminal traffic fatalities). Plans for victim services delivery should be developed. Agencies should consider budget (both agency budget and grant funding), realistic personnel capacity, and data on victimizations reported and calls for service in the jurisdiction.

Grant funding commonly used for victim services programs may require services be provided for specific victimization categories and often prohibits using funding to respond to noncriminal events.<sup>8</sup> As a result, agencies should ensure that expectations for victim services personnel align with funding requirements. Agencies can use victimization data to help prioritize and support the need for appropriate staffing levels.

6 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Using Technology to Communicate with Victims](#).

7 Debra Patterson and Brenda Tringali, “Understanding How Advocates Can Affect Sexual Assault Victim Engagement in the Criminal Justice Process,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 30, no. 12 (July 2015): 1987–1997; Karen Rich and Patrick Seffrin, “Police Officers’ Collaboration with Rape Victim Advocates: Barriers and Facilitators,” *Violence and Victims* 28, no.4 (2013): 681–696.

8 For more information on funding options, see [Strengths and Challenges of Funding Sources](#).

As part of the planning process, agencies are encouraged to proactively determine expectations of victim services personnel during complex situations. Statutory obligations, agency policies and practices, and victim services code of ethics should be taken into account. Consider the following examples:

- During a regular day off, an officer was assaulted by their spouse, resulting in physical injuries requiring medical treatment and the arrest of the offender.
  - Consider how to provide safe and ethical contact with the officer who also meets the statutory definition of a victim with attached victims' rights and services.
  - Consider how to establish equitable response expectations consistent with those for other victims of physical violence by a spouse.
- During the execution of a search warrant, an investigator exchanged gunfire with a suspect resulting in critical injuries to the suspect and the death of a third party who was in the home.
  - Consider if and how to provide safe and ethical contact with family members of the deceased who also meet the statutory definition of a victim with attached victims' rights and services.
  - Consider how to establish equitable response expectations consistent with those for other victims of gun-related incidents.

#### *Victims who reside outside of the jurisdiction?*

Agencies should consider how to provide services to victims who live outside of the jurisdiction but whose case is being investigated by the agency (e.g., the crime occurred in the agency's jurisdiction, but the victim lives in another state). While a case is pending in the agency's jurisdiction, victims are likely to return to their homes. This may be relevant to some agencies more than others. For example, agencies in locations with high numbers of tourists (e.g., Las Vegas; Orlando; Washington, D.C.; Yosemite National Park) should be prepared to support victims who live outside the area, state, or even country. To support victims who live outside the agency's jurisdiction, attempts should be made to assist victims in locating services in their place of residence through law enforcement agencies or community-based organizations. Some sources of information may include—

- local law enforcement agencies or prosecutor's offices;
- [state victim assistance academies](#);
- state associations focused on specific crimes (e.g., sexual assault, human trafficking) or victim advocacy;
- national victim assistance organizations (e.g., [National Organization for Victim Assistance](#), [National Center for Victims of Crime](#); [Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network](#)); and
- consulate offices.

#### *For tribal agencies, tribal members residing off-reservation or out of the local area? non-tribal members residing on the reservation or in the local area?*

Tribal agencies must also determine their service population. In some communities, agencies may provide services only within reservation boundaries and only to tribal members. In others, agencies may serve tribal members as well as all other residents within the reservation or community. Some agencies may also provide services to tribal members who reside off-reservation or outside the local community. Agencies should develop clear guidelines on who they will serve and procedures for connecting victims not in the service population with alternate assistance. Depending on the model used, agencies may also need to establish additional coordinating policies and procedures with outside organizations to ensure timely and appropriate service to victims that cross jurisdictional boundaries.

#### *Has a clear delineation been established between victim services and—*

#### *Other agency programs (e.g., peer support, programs to support employees, chaplains, or spiritual programs)?*

Many agencies are increasing their focus on overall wellness of employees through agency-supported programs such as employee assistance programs (EAP), insurance plans with behavioral health components, flexible leave policies, peer support programs,<sup>9</sup> chaplain or spiritual programs, formal debriefings following critical incidents, and routine discipline-specific supervision. This increased focus has also prompted agencies to explore ways to maximize personnel skills and expertise.

9 Police Psychological Services Section, "[Peer Support Guidelines](#)" ratified at the 124th IACP Annual Conference and Exposition (San Diego, California, 2016).

While victim services personnel may seem like natural employees to task with wellness activities, they are often affected by the very stressors that impact sworn personnel. They may benefit from participating in wellness initiatives and should be included as recipients. Victim services personnel often experience challenges to setting limits when asked to assist colleagues in ways that are outside the scope of their role (e.g., peer support, behavioral health referrals). Remaining focused on the core responsibility of victim services personnel serving victims and witnesses of crime will assist in role clarification.

### Professional Role Clarification



Agencies should establish and communicate a clear delineation between victim services and other agency programs throughout all ranks and disciplines of the agency.<sup>10</sup> This clarity will ensure that agencies are considering the long-term professional wellness of all employees and will allow victim services personnel to reinforce agency expectations when approached individually.

*Mental health co-responders and personnel assigned to conduct outreach to identified populations (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, people with substance use disorders)?*

Just as victim services personnel may seem like the natural employees to task with wellness activities, they may also seem like a natural fit to take on mental health co-response or outreach activities. However, these functions are often outside the scope of the victim services role as mental health co-responders are not focused solely on serving victims and witnesses of crime. For example, not all victims have mental health or substance use resource needs. While some professional activities may look similar (e.g., crisis intervention, emotional support, resource referral), these roles are different and should not be combined.

Mental health co-responders often have specialized training and licensure (e.g., licensed social workers, licensed chemical dependency counselors) that guide their work.<sup>11</sup> These professionals are also frequently employed by public or nonprofit mental health organizations (not law enforcement agencies), which allows for discipline-specific supervision and organization-supported malpractice insurance. Additionally, the laws and rulings that govern interactions between law enforcement personnel (e.g., *Brady* disclosure requirements) and victims and those that govern interactions between mental health practitioners and clients (e.g., HIPAA, counselor-client privilege) differ. In many cases, victim services personnel operating in both roles would create a conflict of interest and potentially violate victims' rights (e.g., right to privacy).<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, victim services personnel should not be tasked with the primary responsibility of conducting outreach to identified populations who are not victims (e.g., people experiencing homelessness, people with substance use disorders). The primary focus of victim services personnel should be serving victims of crime. While they can be included in some outreach efforts (e.g., those that increase awareness of victim services and victims' rights), they should not be solely responsible for general community outreach as this is outside the scope of their role within the agency.

10 OVC, [Achieving Excellence: Model Standards for Serving Victims & Survivors of Crime](#) (2016); IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Model Policy: Civilian Personnel](#) (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 1993).

11 IACP / UC Center for Police Research and Policy, "Assessing the Impact of Co-Responder Team Programs: A Review of Research," in *Academic Training to Inform Police Responses Best Practice Guide* (Cincinnati, OH: University of Cincinnati, 2021). For more information on the intersection between victim services role and professional licensure, see the [Victim Services Personnel Hiring and Selection](#) section of this publication.

12 For more information about HIPAA and other legal intersections, see [Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Documentation Standards](#).

## Victim Intersection Points



Victims enter into and progress through the criminal justice system in different ways. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to expand victim-centered practices to all victim contact points (e.g., 911, front desk, property room, records). Victim response should be an agencywide priority, and policies and training should be developed to guide practice throughout the agency. Mapping intersection points helps agencies focus on strengthening existing processes and identifying areas where victim services personnel should be incorporated.

*Have victim services personnel worked with other agency divisions to promote victim-centered response throughout a victim's interaction with the agency (e.g., through cross-training or joint policy development)<sup>13</sup>, including during—*

*Initial contact (e.g., 911 calls, walk-in reporting)?*

Communications personnel (e.g., 911 dispatchers) and those who take walk-in reports are often the first people victims speak to when reporting a crime and help set the stage for the victim's involvement with the agency. Victim services personnel can collaborate with these internal partners to develop trauma-informed processes (e.g., ensuring privacy when victims make a report, identifying basic victim needs, providing information on victim services, connecting victims with community

resources). These professionals can also participate in cross-training to build skills and better understand each other's roles. This can help identify gaps in services or barriers that can be addressed to support victim engagement.<sup>14</sup>

*Investigative interviews (e.g., using soft interview rooms)?*

Victim services personnel can partner with investigators to develop victim-centered processes for interviews and other related activities (e.g., photographs of injuries). One way agencies can incorporate trauma-informed practices is to use soft interview rooms. These rooms can be designed to help victims feel more comfortable during these sometimes-difficult processes rather than using the same rooms where suspects are interviewed. Additionally, many states require law enforcement personnel to offer victims the option of having an advocate present with them during investigative interviews.<sup>15</sup> While victim services personnel are not investigators, their experience and knowledge of trauma-informed practices can be helpful to victims and the investigative process. Together with the investigator, having a victim services staff member present during an investigative interview can help victims better understand what will happen during the interview and next steps. It also gives victim services personnel another opportunity to discuss victims' rights and provide resource information to victims.

*Evidence collection (e.g., obtaining photographs of injuries)?*

Evidence collection can be traumatic for victims. Collecting evidence (e.g., taking photographs, collecting biological evidence, obtaining text messages or images directly from a victim) is outside the scope of the victim services role and should not be conducted by these personnel. However, agencies should ensure victim services personnel are familiar with and available to support victims through this process. Victim services personnel can partner with crime scene personnel and investigators to help victims understand what to expect, the roles of each person involved, and what will happen with the evidence after it is collected. Consider the following examples:

<sup>13</sup> For more information on maximizing internal partnerships, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships and Roles and Responsibilities – Internal Partnerships](#).

<sup>14</sup> International Association of Chiefs of Police and Office for Victims of Crime, [Partnering](#), Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> For more information about state-specific victims' rights, see [Victims' Rights Jurisdiction Profiles](#).

- An investigator may request comparison samples (e.g., buccal swabs, fingerprints) from a victim or photographs of a victim's injuries. When evidence is requested, investigators and victim services personnel should ensure victims are made aware of how, where, and why this evidence will be taken; who will be collecting it; what equipment will be used (e.g., sterile cotton swab, rulers to show the size of injuries, specialized cameras); where the evidence will be stored; and who may have access to it.
- Prior to an investigator obtaining a cell phone from a victim, victim services personnel should partner with the investigator to help explain to the victim why the cell phone is being requested as evidence, how long before it can be returned, what information will be obtained from it, how the information may be used in the case, and who will have access to the information. Victim services personnel may also need to help develop a safety plan if the phone is the victim's primary mode of communication.

Victim services personnel can also partner with crime scene personnel and investigators to develop written information about these processes to give to victims. Providing this information may decrease a victim's distress during this process and support their participation in the case. These collaborative processes can also be formalized through joint policies that outline roles and responsibilities.

#### ***Property return (e.g., returning property to the family of a homicide victim)?***

Many investigations involve removal of property from victims for evidence. Most agencies have standard processes for returning these items when they are no longer needed for the investigation. In most states, a basic victim right is to have the property returned in a timely manner.<sup>16</sup> Victim services personnel should know agency policy and practices to provide accurate information to victims and family members. Victim services personnel can partner with personnel who manage evidence (e.g., evidence technicians, crime scene personnel, investigators) to ensure return processes and interactions are victim centered and trauma informed. For example, evidence is usually stored in paper or plastic bags. Rather than returning items in these bags, agencies are encouraged to return

items in clean containers and take time to answer questions. These simple changes can make a significant difference for victims or family members who receive the items. Victim services can also be made available to accompany victims or family members when they receive the items to provide support and resource information if needed.

#### ***Records requests (e.g., victims requesting copies of police reports)?***

Victims should have access to information about their cases and be informed about records request processes. Victim services personnel should partner with records personnel to understand the parameters around releasing records. For example, there may be different requirements for the agency to release a copy of a police report depending on whether the investigation is open or closed. There may also be a cost associated with record requests. Victim services personnel should assist victims with options that do not place the burden for those costs on the victim. Additional rules may govern the release of reports involving children or victims of sexual assault, among others. Victim services and records personnel can work together to develop policies and processes to help streamline victims' access to information and for referrals between the two units. For example, victim services personnel can train records personnel on recognizing signs of trauma and asking about basic victim needs. Records personnel can then refer victims who come in to request a police report to victim services when needed. Similarly, records personnel can train victim services personnel on when and how records can be released, and victim services personnel can explain the steps in the process to victims.

#### ***Media involvement (e.g., agency press releases or conferences)?***

Many agencies work collaboratively with the media to get information out to the communities they serve. Some agencies have public information officers (PIOs) or media teams, while others assign this as an ancillary duty to a sworn or professional member. Victim services personnel and PIOs can partner to ensure victim-centered, trauma-informed, culturally responsive language and practices are used when releasing information to the media. They can jointly connect victims and their families with resources to help

<sup>16</sup> For more information about state-specific victims' rights, see [Victims' Rights Jurisdiction Profiles](#).

them understand their rights and manage publicity.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, they can work together to ensure victims and families are informed before information is released to the media and provide them with an opportunity to participate, or support their decision not to participate, in press conferences or interviews, as appropriate. This trauma-informed approach ensures steps are taken to reduce retraumatization as much as possible. Victim services and PIOs can also partner on matters unrelated to specific cases, such as publicizing victim services and sharing information about victims' rights with the broader community.

### ***Have all personnel (both sworn and professional staff) received training on—***

#### ***Victim services role?***

Successful law enforcement-based victim services programs rely on agency integration. To support this integration, all personnel at the agency should receive training on the role of victim services. This training should be conducted by both victim services and sworn personnel whenever possible. This can help all personnel understand how victim services may be beneficial across disciplines at the agency. Ensuring everyone has this training not only helps victims get connected to services faster, but it also gives personnel outside of victim services a resource when they encounter victims who have needs beyond the scope of their role (e.g., when a victim of financial fraud picks up a police report and records, personnel can determine if the victim needs additional assistance documenting losses for their insurance company). Victim services personnel are encouraged to prepare short scripts for other agency personnel to use when describing victim services. This helps ensure consistent information is shared with victims regardless of who they interact with at the agency.

#### ***Victim-centered, trauma-informed practices?***

All personnel should have a foundational understanding of victim-centered, trauma-informed practices. Regardless of role, these principles can be incorporated into all victim interactions. For example, training for officers on use of body-worn cameras should include discussions about victim privacy and access to footage.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, training for investigators on interviewing victims should include information about the impact of trauma on memory and ways to make the interview process trauma informed (e.g., allowing the victim to determine where the interview will take place, taking breaks, encouraging victims to ask questions).<sup>19</sup> Training on these topics can occur as stand-alone sessions (e.g., in-service training, roll calls) and can be incorporated into existing training (e.g., investigation strategies, evidence collection).

#### ***Cultural responsiveness?***

Cultural responsiveness is an important component of training for all personnel. Agencies should incorporate discussion of cultural practices and customs that may arise during a victim's participation in the criminal justice process. For example, agencies can proactively identify ways to respect culturally specific practices during death investigations (e.g., timing of burial, body preparation practices). Additionally, agencies can provide training on ways to maintain flexibility around cultural norms during investigative activities (e.g., allowing support persons to be present during investigative interviews, accommodating communication norms between genders during routine follow-up conversations). Identifying and providing all personnel with training on culturally responsive practices can further support a victim's engagement with the criminal justice system and their individual healing following victimization. Culturally specific organizations in the community can be important partners in providing this training and an ongoing resource when questions arise.

### **Victim Services Personnel Hiring and Selection**

Agencies are encouraged to begin by reviewing current hiring and selection processes. These processes may need to be modified to secure qualified and suitable candidates for victim services positions. While some agencies can substantially modify hiring and selection processes, others may be restricted by local, state, tribal, and federal guidelines, regulations, or collective bargaining agreements.

Position descriptions that accurately describe the role, assigned responsibilities, and minimum education and experience requirements should be developed. Some

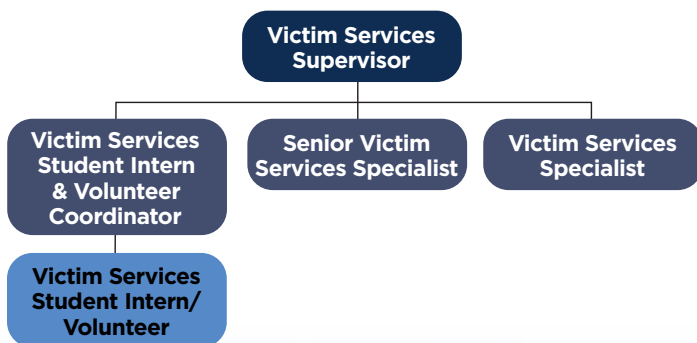
17 International Association of Chiefs of Police and Office for Victims of Crime, [Partnering](#), Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 2020)

18 For more information, see [National Forum on Body-Worn Cameras and Violence Against Women](#).

19 For more information, see [Successful Trauma Informed Victim Interviewing](#).

agencies may be restricted to existing position titles and descriptions. If flexibility exists to tailor the position title and description, human resources personnel should be involved to ensure compensation alignment with similar positions. Agencies should also consider including skills needed to serve specific populations represented in the community (e.g., language/cultural fluency) in position descriptions. Blinding the application review process by removing applicants' names and other potentially biasing information may add objectivity by focusing on skills and experience. Agencies should inform applicants how disputes resulting from screening processes may be resolved. In addition to initial applicant screening, agencies are encouraged to perform repeat background checks at regular intervals (e.g., every two years).

### Multilayered Victim Services Unit



If more than one victim services position will be staffed at the agency, consider creating a hierarchy structure. This establishes professional growth opportunities for victim services personnel to seek leadership positions and expand skill sets. For example, consider establishing a senior-level victim specialist position to provide promotion opportunities and acknowledge advanced skills. While there are myriad ways to establish a multilayered victim services unit, some ideas include creating a victim services supervisor role tasked with overseeing the general operation, functioning, and vision of the victim services unit; victim services volunteer, and student intern coordinator role tasked to supervise and coordinate these personnel, and a victim services specialist senior position to designate experience. Agencies are encouraged to consider classifying supervisory positions in a manner that conveys value and legitimacy in the agency (e.g., victim services supervisor classified as a division director or sworn staff equivalent).<sup>20</sup>

Open positions should be posted within the agency, to larger government systems, and externally to maximize the applicant pool. Consider identifying local social services job boards and working with local partners like prosecution offices, family justice centers, domestic violence, and rape crisis centers, child advocacy centers, colleges and universities, and organizations that offer general mental health or trauma response services to post open positions. [State Administering Agencies \(SAA\)](#) responsible for pass-through Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) funding can also help post and disseminate information about open positions. Also, become familiar with human resources screening processes and expectations for application review.

### *Have interview questions been modified for victim services personnel applicants?*

After selecting candidates to interview, identify interview questions that elicit information about knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to complete the specific responsibilities of these positions, including language and cultural skills identified in the position description. Incorporate questions that prompt relevant information from each applicant, such as education and a summary of related experience. Include behavioral or scenario-based questions to show each applicant's aptitude and approach to common tasks based on experience (e.g., "Can you tell me about a time when you experienced conflict at work?"). These questions may provide information about overall attitude and work ethic. Situational questions prompt how each applicant would respond to specific scenarios that may occur in the role (e.g., "You are assigned Task A, Task B, and Task C. How would you prioritize these tasks and why?"). These questions may provide information about instincts, confidence, and decision-making abilities. Including an exercise that demonstrates a skill associated with victim services positions (e.g., for a victim services specialist senior position, ask applicants to write sample documentation that reflects services provided after reading a scenario) is also helpful.

When establishing a multilayered victim services unit, agencies should select questions that are appropriate for each role (e.g., focusing on budget management or previous supervisory experience for a victim services

20 For sample position descriptions, including the layered positions described above, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started](#).

supervisor or inquiring about direct victim services experience for a victim services specialist role).<sup>21</sup>

### *Are questions regarding applicant cultural responsiveness included in the interviews?*

Victim services specialists will serve victims from a variety of cultures. Their understanding of, experience with, and ability to establish relationships with individuals from these various cultures will impact how, and if, victims engage with services, law enforcement investigations, and court processes. Agencies should create questions to assess all victim services candidates for skills in cultural responsiveness (e.g., “Describe your professional experience working with the LGBTQ+ community.”).

### *Are there procedures in place to recruit well-qualified victim services personnel reflective of the communities they serve (e.g., tribal members, people of color, people of all gender identities)?*

Victims of crime from historically marginalized groups may feel more comfortable working with victim services personnel who are or identify as members of the same cultural group or are familiar with the cultural group’s practices, norms, traditions, language, and systems. Agencies should work to identify methods to recruit victim services personnel from within the diverse communities they serve. One way to achieve this is requesting that job postings be shared in culturally specific newsletters, listservs, or websites. Ultimately, all personnel should practice cultural responsiveness and treat those they serve with dignity and respect.

### *Are professionals familiar with the role of victim services included on the interview panel?*

Agencies commonly use panel interviews to make hiring decisions. The interview panel should be diverse and include people who bring different experiences and perspectives to the interview process. Select panel members who know the organization and its culture well. To select the best applicants, interview panels should include personnel who understand the role of law enforcement-based victim services.

Agencies are also encouraged to invite panel members from external organizations to ensure that various competencies and perspectives are included on the interview panel. Reaching out to local community-based victim services organizations, prosecutors’ office

victim/witness divisions, or universities with subject matter experts may meet this objective. This also supports relationships with community partners.

### *Will the agency consider applicant experience in lieu of training or education?*

Agencies in small, rural, or tribal jurisdictions may have smaller pools from which to draw qualified applicants. To increase the applicant pool, agencies may consider whether they will accept candidates without formal education but who instead have demonstrated experience in providing victim services. Agencies are encouraged to define the amount and type of experience and training victim services positions require or other skills that applicants can demonstrate in lieu of formal degrees.

### *Do job duties align with education and training required for this role?*

Applicants for victim services positions often have educational backgrounds in social or behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology, social work, sociology, counseling) or criminal justice administration. Upon speaking with an applicant, asking questions about terminology or titles in their resume may be helpful. Different jurisdictions and states may use a different term to describe similar work, such as a program specialist, ombudsman, or victim advocate. Similarly, it may be helpful to ask questions about reasons for employment transitions. Demonstrated longevity in prior employment has historically been seen as positive. However, victim services personnel commonly change roles within and between organizations to expand their professional capacity.

Hiring supervisors are encouraged to conduct research to understand the applicants’ experiences and be proactive about asking candidates for more information or supporting documentation. Working collaboratively with human resources personnel to develop a selection matrix related to the education and experience of applicants can be helpful.

Tasks and responsibilities for victim services personnel are often extensive. Some examples include—

- **direct services to victims**—crisis intervention, safety planning, assessing needs, and connecting victims with resources and information;

21 For sample victim services personnel interview questions, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started](#).

- **community and criminal justice partner advocacy**—crime victim compensation assistance and criminal justice system navigation assistance;
- **consultation with other professionals**—child and adult protective services, civil and criminal legal representatives, and health professionals;
- **training development and provision**—agency personnel at multiple levels, community and partner organization personnel, and community members;
- **constitutional and statutory compliance**—victims' rights education and opportunities to exercise rights;
- **agency representation**—multidisciplinary team participation, policy committee participation, and media communication;
- **complex program oversight**—personnel management, policy review, and program evaluation; and
- **financial and grant management**—budgetary compliance; identification, application, and management of external funding; and reporting (internal and external).

Agencies should align their high standards during the hiring and selection process with the assigned responsibilities and provide appropriate training and support.

#### *Have background checks been completed for victim services applicants to access law enforcement records upon employment?*

Access to law enforcement records requires agency personnel to pass background checks. This access is essential to victim services personnel's role and function and to fully incorporate victim services personnel into agency processes. Victim services personnel must understand the context and details of circumstances impacting victims. Agencies should determine who will be responsible for providing access and training for identified systems (e.g., records management systems).

Background check processes can encompass a variety of screening tools, such as—

- criminal history checks (local, state, tribal, and federal);
- sex offender registry checks;

- motor vehicle record checks;
- state child and adult welfare agency involvement (for each state of residence);
- drug testing;
- reference checks (personal and professional);
- social media account checks; and
- verification of employment and education.

Agencies should determine which screening tools will be used, ensure legal compliance with each tool's use, and preserve applicants' rights. Agencies should ensure each screening tool is appropriately applied to the law enforcement-based victim services position (e.g., modifying polygraph questions if needed).

#### *Have victim services personnel completed required training for access to law enforcement and court records (e.g., National Crime Information Center [NCIC], Criminal Justice Information Services [CJIS])?*

Agencies are familiar with Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) and utilize them in daily operations. Access to CJIS information typically involves a contract between the agency and the federal government pertaining to “information security requirements, guidelines, and agreements reflecting the will of law enforcement and criminal justice agencies for protecting the sources, transmission, storage, and generation of Criminal Justice Information (CJI).”<sup>22</sup>

Agencies must require personnel with access to CJIS information to pass background checks and participate in regular training. The signed contract and associated federal policy guide the management and dissemination of CJIS information. Dissemination is typically reserved for information exchanges between agencies with originating agency identification numbers (ORIs). Compliance audits are conducted periodically, and the ultimate consequence for mismanagement of CJIS information could be the loss of the agency's access to the system. Agencies should discuss background check processes with human resources and CJIS compliance with agency administration.

<sup>22</sup> Criminal Justice Information Services Division, *Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) Security Policy*, 5.9, CJISD-ITS-DOC-08140-5.9 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020).

Records management systems (RMS) involve a system chosen by the agency to record and capture agency information related to assigned responsibilities. CJIS information is typically redacted prior to dissemination to any parties without ORI numbers. Dissemination of RMS information is typically regulated through state Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and other statutes. Consequences for mismanagement of CJIS and RMS information are significant and could include criminal or civil litigation.

In considering victim services personnel's access to records and other systems, agencies should assess based on the model of service provision—

- **Law enforcement-based victim services**—typically subjected to the same background process and training requirements as other agency personnel. As a result, there is no concern with access to CJIS or RMS information.
- **Hybrid community-based victim services**—the background process will depend on the agreement between the hiring organization and the law enforcement agency.
  - Access to CJIS and read-only access to RMS information is reserved for specific personnel who pass the established background process and regularly participate in required training.
  - Agencies should include required background processes and training requirements for persons who are granted access in the agreement.
  - Agencies should include consequences for sharing information with persons who have not completed required background and training requirements in the agreement. Consequences may include termination of the contract and possible criminal charges if supported by state statute.
- **Community-based victim services**—law enforcement agencies do not conduct background checks for these advocates. As a result, access to CJIS and RMS information is not permitted.

### *Have selection processes been established for student interns and volunteers?*

- As agencies plan for programmatic activity and responsibilities assigned to victim services personnel, plans to include student interns and volunteers should also be considered. Agencies who elect to pursue grant funding to support victim services personnel should be aware that some grants require the use of volunteers. Often, this requirement can be met by student interns, volunteers, or a combination of both.
- Agencies are encouraged to consider responsibilities mutually benefiting the agency, student interns, and volunteers. Developing position descriptions that accurately describe the roles, assigned responsibilities, and minimum requirements for both student interns and volunteers can establish a solid foundation for selection processes.

Establishing consistent selection criteria and background processes for student interns and volunteers will augment the high standards agencies set for victim services personnel. Agencies should review the motivation of applicants to become student interns or volunteers within a law enforcement setting.

Agencies must ensure that personnel who supervise student interns and volunteers have adequate credentials, experience, and time to provide oversight to protect agency interests, ensure effective grant funding management, and create a meaningful environment for shared contributions.<sup>23</sup>

### *Has the distinction between the role of law enforcement-based victim services and use of professional licensure (e.g., social work, mental health clinicians) been discussed?<sup>24</sup>*

Frequently, applicants for victim services personnel positions are professionals who have or are seeking mental or behavioral health licensure (e.g., licensed social worker, licensed counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist) through their employment or have other professional licenses (e.g., registered nurse, attorney, certified interpreter). Each of these

23 For information and templates for recruiting, screening and selection, training, supervision, and other agency considerations for student interns and volunteers, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package III – Student Interns & Volunteers](#).

24 For more information, see [Considerations Regarding the Obligations of Law Enforcement-Employed Victim Advocates with Social Work Licenses and Law Enforcement-Associated Victim Service Providers and the Brady Rule: Legal Background and Considerations](#).

disciplines has different codes of ethics, parameters around confidentiality and privilege, mandated reporting obligations, and licenses regulated through an authorized state-level entity. For example, certified interpreters often rely on ethical standards focused on maintaining neutrality with emphasis on facilitating communication between individuals who do not speak the same language. In contrast, victim services personnel rely on ethical standards focused on supporting the needs and desires of victims. Providing a clear understanding of the parameters of law enforcement-based victim services during the application and interview processes is critical. This clarity will assist applicants who are licensed or seeking licensure in making informed decisions about possible employment. For many applicants seeking mental or behavioral health licensure, the requirements include documentation of a designated number of hours of clinical work while seeking formal supervision under a licensed clinical professional. Agencies should be aware of these requirements and decide if victim services personnel seeking licensure are permitted to discuss cases and victim contact with external clinical supervisors. Distinctions between roles are also necessary when bachelor's and master's level student intern applicants are interested in internships with the victim services program.

While many overlapping skills are used in mental, behavioral, and physical health disciplines and law enforcement-based victim services, there are clear distinctions. Providing clinical or therapy services

requires licensure (or supervision under a licensed professional) and malpractice insurance coverage. **Because law enforcement-based victim services do not involve clinical or therapy services, licensure and malpractice insurance coverage are not required nor provided by the agency.**

As law enforcement-based victim services is not a clinical role, including clinical credentials on outward-facing communication (e.g., business cards, email signature, website) and introductions in verbal communication is discouraged and may conflict with professional codes of ethics (e.g., social work, counseling). Ongoing oversight to distinguish between the roles of clinical work and law enforcement-based victim services is essential. Consider the following example:

- Victim Services Specialist, a licensed social worker, provides therapy services through a private practice outside of routine business hours.
  - While performing assigned responsibilities as a Victim Services Specialist, no references to licensure are involved in any communication with victims, colleagues, and community organizations.
  - While performing therapy services, malpractice insurance is in place, and victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims who received services through the law enforcement agency are not accepted as therapy clients and are instead referred to other therapy services.

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services Personnel	Community-Based Victim Services Personnel	Mental Health Practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Communication with victims and documentation of services typically not confidential (<i>depends on state legislation</i>)</li><li>■ Malpractice insurance not provided by the agency</li><li>■ Not permitted to diagnose or treat mental health conditions</li><li>■ Short- or long-term advocacy relationship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Communication with victims and documentation of services typically not confidential or privileged (<i>depends on program structure for hybrid community-based programs</i>)</li><li>■ Malpractice insurance not provided by organization for victim services personnel</li><li>■ Not permitted to diagnose or treat mental health conditions</li><li>■ Short- or long-term advocacy relationship</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Client communication is confidential or privileged</li><li>■ Covered by malpractice insurance</li><li>■ Able to diagnose or treat mental health conditions (<i>depends on licensure and state legislature</i>)</li><li>■ Short- or long-term therapy relationship</li></ul>

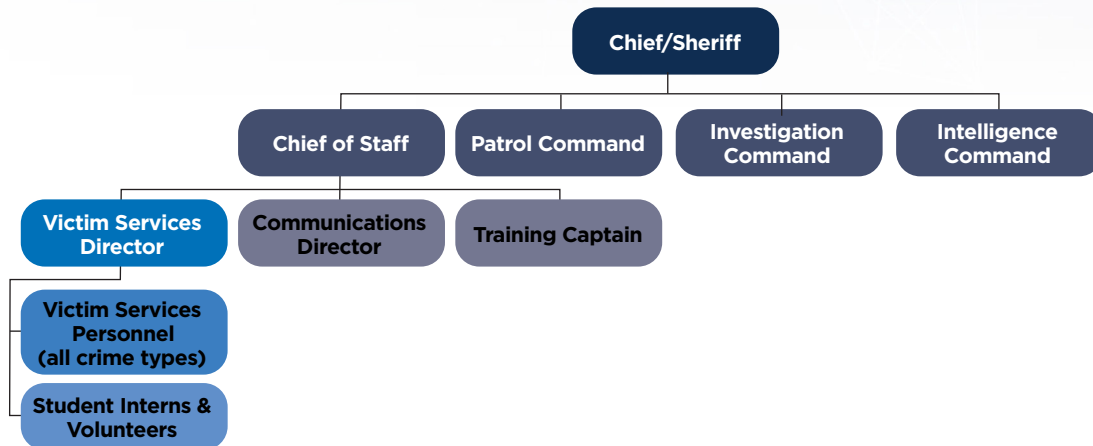
## Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices

Victim services personnel should be placed in the organizational chart in a position that conveys the importance and value of these services to the entire department. For example, if victim services personnel are placed within an investigative unit (decentralized model), many will assume that services are accessible only for cases assigned to that unit. If victim services personnel are housed within a larger command or division (centralized model), then an assumption may be made that services can be used for all investigations. Even still, when victim services personnel are based within an investigative command, victim services may not be provided in all instances (e.g., cases that never get assigned to an investigator, cases involving charges that are filed on scene and forwarded to the prosecuting attorney's office). When determining where victim services personnel are placed within an agency, it is important to consider the message being sent to the agency, victims, and community and the implications for victim access.

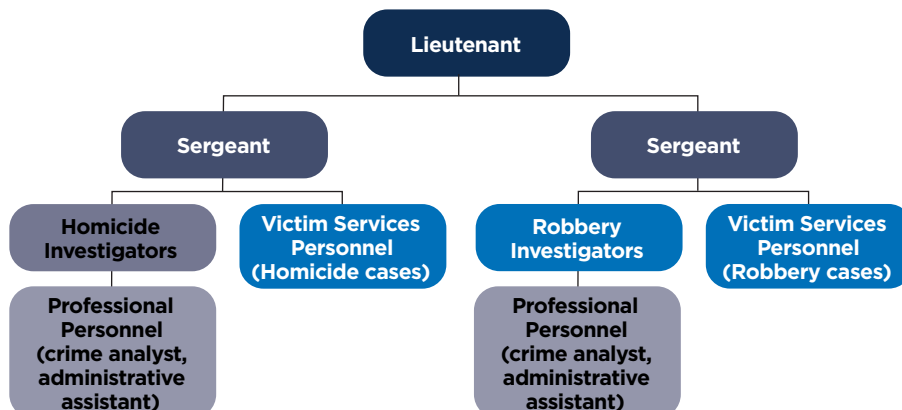
### *Who will be the direct supervisor of victim services personnel?*

The decision of who will carry the responsibility for direct supervision of victim services personnel is critical to successful implementation, development, and growth of the program. Whether a centralized or decentralized model is used, agencies should select a supervisor or supervisors with the time, skills, and commitment necessary to support this endeavor. Many agencies select a sworn staff member as the direct supervisor, while other agencies select a professional staff member for this responsibility. Though both options have the potential for positive and negative implications, agencies are encouraged to weigh this decision carefully. The direct supervisor of the victim services personnel will impact work performance, professional development, and their overall satisfaction with professional roles and responsibilities.

#### Centralized Victim Services



#### Decentralized Victim Services



***Does that person have authority to make victim services program decisions (e.g., to establish new victim services policies, to seek funding to hire additional victim services personnel)?***

One factor to consider is ensuring the direct supervisor has the authority and ability to make timely and effective decisions related to victim services personnel and service delivery. Choosing a supervisor whose title and position classification support this level of responsibility is important. For example, if the victim services supervisor must go through multiple layers of approval to make even small programmatic changes, program development and services to victims will likely be delayed or may be lost in translation. Timely decision-making is important for program success, sustainability, and growth. Ensuring the victim services supervisor has a high level of authority within the agency is recommended.

***Does that person have training, experience, or understanding of the role of victim services?***

Agencies should ensure the selected supervisor has a thorough understanding of the role of victim services as they will be expected to make foundational decisions, guide personnel conduct, and ensure equitable and ethical service provision to victims. The direct supervisor should support the goal of victim services personnel being incorporated as peer professionals within the agency. If a decentralized model is used, agencies should ensure ongoing communication and collaboration among the multiple victim services supervisors and personnel. This contributes to standardization of practice across units and equitable victim service provision.

***Does that person have training on victim-centered, trauma-informed practices?***

Victim services supervisors should have a foundational understanding of victim-centered, trauma-informed practices throughout the criminal justice system, not only those within the scope of victim services. They should be prepared to assist direct reports in identifying where practices can be improved in support of victims (e.g., incorporating victim services personnel during investigative interviews, ensuring trauma-informed language is used in reports). Recognizing the importance of continuity and consistency for victims throughout

their participation in the criminal justice system, victim services supervisors may also have a central role in incorporating these practices in the larger agency (e.g., participating in policy review, arranging cross-training among units) and with partners (e.g., leading multidisciplinary teams).<sup>25</sup> If candidates do not have training on these topics, agencies are encouraged to establish clear expectations and plans for how selected candidates will acquire appropriate training.

***Does that person have training or experience regarding the cultural norms and practices of the community?***

For agencies operating in diverse or culturally specific communities (including tribal communities), another consideration in selecting a victim services supervisor is whether the candidate has training or experience regarding the cultural norms and practices of the community. Agencies should explore methods for recruiting victim services personnel from within the populations represented in their communities. Questions should be posed to potential victim services supervisor candidates regarding their specific experience, background, and training in providing or supervising culturally responsive services to victims from various cultural populations. If candidates do not have such a background, agencies are encouraged to establish clear expectations and plans for how selected candidates will acquire appropriate training.

***Does that person also supervise other units or personnel?***

Realistically assessing workload is important if the victim services supervisor is also expected to supervise other units and personnel. Agencies should consider the number of direct reports the supervisor has, programmatic oversight responsibilities, and other administrative or leadership tasks. The assessment should also include evaluating the supervisor's ability to effectively supervise personnel from a different discipline when applicable. Consider the following examples:

- Lieutenant of the Major Crimes Division is selected as the direct supervisor for victim services personnel and is also responsible for oversight of the Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, Robbery, and Sex Crimes Units.

25 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships](#) and [Introduction to the ELERV Strategy](#), Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 2020).

- In addition to sworn and professional personnel assigned to the Major Crimes Division, the lieutenant should provide equitable access to victim services personnel for guidance and professional support.
  - The lieutenant should continually regard and present victim services personnel as peer professionals who work in collaboration with, not for, other personnel in the Major Crimes Division.
  - The lieutenant must have the necessary skills to navigate discipline-specific approaches and ethical dilemmas among victim services personnel and other personnel in the Major Crimes Division.
- Director of Strategic Initiatives is selected as the direct supervisor for victim services personnel and is responsible for oversight of Chaplain and Peer Support programs.
- In addition to sworn and professional personnel assigned to Chaplain and Peer Support programs, the director should provide equitable access to victim services personnel for guidance and professional support.
  - The director should continually regard and present victim services personnel as peer professionals who work collaboratively with and separately from other personnel in the Chaplain and Peer Support programs according to their distinct roles.
  - The director must have the necessary skills to navigate discipline-specific approaches and ethical dilemmas among chaplains, sworn and professional peer support personnel, and victim services personnel.

***Are there policies in place when victim services personnel report to supervisors with previously established relationships (e.g., relatives, friends)?***

Another important consideration for agencies operating in rural or tribal communities is whether the agency has policies related to victim services personnel reporting to a supervisor with previously established relationships (e.g., relatives, friends). Family members working in the same organization is a frequent occurrence in small communities. These dual relationships (e.g., aunt and supervisor) can be beneficial in building strong organizational cohesion but may also introduce

conflicts resulting from situations that arise outside the workplace. Agencies are encouraged to establish policies and practices that exclude close relatives from directly supervising family members. Each agency will need to define “close relatives” based on the needs and realities of its community. When this situation is unavoidable, agencies are encouraged to identify another staff person within the organization to act as an intermediary supervisor to reduce workplace conflicts of interest.

***What are the management and supervision expectations for victim services personnel?***

***Are victim services personnel expected to manage a program and provide direct services to victims?***

Victim services personnel are often expected to fill multiple levels of responsibility simultaneously. For example, many are expected to manage grant funding and act in a lead role for other personnel (both paid and unpaid) while also providing direct services to victims. These responsibilities often involve different skill sets and may require different time commitments. For example, many agencies have one victim services staff member who is required to lead program development, manage the grant that funds the program, and be on-call 24 hours per day to provide services to victims. This staff member will likely not have sufficient time to devote to program development or other administrative duties. Additionally, many victim services personnel do not have grant management experience and would benefit from training and oversight. Agencies should determine realistic expectations and ensure personnel are provided with training to match their job responsibilities.

***Are victim services personnel expected to grow or expand the program (e.g., expand to serve additional crime types, build a student intern or volunteer program)?***

Many law enforcement agencies identify a need for additional victim services personnel within the first few years after starting a program. This may be due to the program's demonstrated success, additional needs being identified, or the agency's desire to expand services to victims of all crimes (e.g., expanding from serving only victims of violent crime to serving victims of all crime). Victim services personnel are often tasked with overseeing program expansion by default. This can involve researching grant funding opportunities, establishing partnerships, data tracking and analysis,

and grant writing. It may also involve starting new initiatives within the victim services program such as establishing a student intern or volunteer program.<sup>26</sup> All of these endeavors take specific skills and significant staff time. Agencies are encouraged to identify realistic growth goals and training needs and ensure sufficient staffing to achieve these goals.

*Are victim services personnel expected to supervise multiple personnel (other staff, student interns, volunteers)?*

Many victim services units have a multilayered structure that includes supervisory roles. For example, a program may have a victim services coordinator who supervises multiple victim services specialists, student interns, and volunteers. As victim services personnel are given more supervisory and administrative responsibilities (e.g., grant management, policy development), agencies are encouraged to reduce their direct service responsibilities to ensure adequate time is available for these tasks. This may result in a need for additional victim services positions.

*Are these expectations consistent with expectations of other agency staff?*

Agencies are encouraged to analyze and plan to ensure that assigned responsibilities align with personnel's positions and skill sets. Agencies' expectations of victim services personnel and their direct supervisors should be consistent with expectations for other supervisory and frontline personnel. Just as sergeants or lieutenants are expected to have different skill sets and levels of responsibility from patrol officers, supervisors of victim services personnel should be expected to have different skill sets and levels of responsibility from victim services personnel providing direct services to victims. Agencies should support appropriate training in victim services leadership and grant development and management for personnel assigned as direct supervisors of victim services personnel.

*How are supervision practices for victim services personnel structured?*

*Are there regular opportunities for discussions about job responsibilities, program growth, professional development, and performance standards? Are there opportunities for supervision beyond incidents and crisis circumstances?*

Many victim services personnel are accustomed to collaborative supervision. This involves regular, open critiques on applying knowledge, competence, and ethical service provision. Regular supervision meetings between the direct supervisor and each victim services staff member are recommended. This will provide consistent opportunities for conversations about assigned responsibilities, professional development, and performance standards. It will also ensure that supervision occurs beyond incident-based discussions and corrective action. Victim services personnel should also receive feedback about positive contributions to agency objectives and areas for improvement.

In addition to individual meetings, agencies are encouraged to implement regular unit or team meetings that include all victim services personnel. These meetings will provide opportunities for dialogue around building supportive relationships (internally and externally); learning from the experiences of colleagues; program expectations; growth plans; and ideas for continued support of the agency mission, vision, and values through quality services to victims.

*Does the victim services supervisor have the required credentials and experience to supervise student interns (e.g., master's degree in social work)?*

Agencies who pursue grant funding to support victim services personnel should be aware that some funding sources require the use of volunteers. Student interns, volunteers, or a combination of both can often meet this requirement.

When pursuing the option of a student internship program, agencies should become familiar with internship requirements through local colleges and universities. Student intern supervisors are often required to have a graduate-level degree and, for some programs, licensure in a behavioral health discipline. Direct supervisors of victim services interns should have a working knowledge of behavioral health professional requirements (e.g., licensure, continuing education) and codes of ethics. Agencies may be eligible to receive interns from these programs by selecting sworn or professional supervisors for victim services personnel who have the required degrees or licensure.

Another common requirement of many internship programs is mutual benefit for both the agency and the student intern through a learning contract.

26 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package III – Student Interns & Volunteers](#).

Agencies need to plan for realistic time commitments for overseeing learning objectives, assigned tasks, and required evaluations for student interns.

## Ethical Approaches

A long-standing law enforcement practice has been to develop and maintain a shared set of ethical standards.<sup>27</sup> This helps guide decisions regardless of personal beliefs or relationships. These ethical standards acknowledge that the badge officers wear symbolizes public trust. Similarly, law enforcement-based victim services personnel maintain professional standards of conduct. This includes collaboration with other professionals and institutions to advocate for the rights and needs of victims regardless of the outcomes of investigative processes. The separate but complementary codes of ethics can positively contribute to agencywide victim-centered practices.

### *Do all agency personnel understand that the primary role and responsibility of victim services personnel is to serve in the interest of the victim?*

Advocacy, as defined throughout this publication series, includes actions aimed at supporting a cause, idea, policy, or position to assist victims. This includes direct services to victims and actions to improve overall criminal justice system responses. Victim services personnel are expected to support victim self-determination, a victim's ability to make their own choices and know what is best for them, to the fullest extent possible.<sup>28</sup> Victim services personnel should also accurately convey information to victims, including all available options, choices that are within their control, and decisions that will be made by others. Victim services personnel may practice advocacy by explaining concepts, language, options, and possible outcomes. They help victims understand their rights, options for exercising those rights, and possible resolution options when rights are overlooked. Victim services personnel can help with communication between victims and key partners (e.g., investigators, prosecuting attorneys) to support victims' expressed needs, choices, and desired outcomes during their involvement with the criminal justice system. It is also critical for other agency personnel to accurately explain the role of victim services to victims.

When engaging in advocacy within law enforcement settings, it is critical for victim services personnel to understand that advocacy must occur in partnership—not in opposition. Advocacy and partnership do not mean agreement on all issues. Just as agencies regard victim services personnel as peer professionals who collaborate with others, victim services personnel must conduct themselves as peer professionals in the same manner. Law enforcement-based victim services personnel are encouraged to focus on addressing fears, concerns, and barriers (individual and systemic) so victims who want to engage with the criminal justice system can do so effectively. Recognizing that professionals from other disciplines are essential partners in this endeavor will enhance outcomes for victims and reinforce the value of victim services as a profession.

### *Do victim services personnel understand the difference between advocacy and activism?*

While activism and advocacy are connected concepts and often used interchangeably, agencies and law enforcement-based victim services personnel must understand them as distinct. Activism is defined as a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action or involvement, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.<sup>29</sup> Activism is focused on social change. Forms of activism may include engaging the media, petitioning elected officials, preferential patronage of businesses, and demonstrations or protests.

Agencies who pursue grant funding to support victim services should also be aware of the possible connections between activism and lobbying activities. Lobbying activities that directly or indirectly support or oppose the enactment, repeal, modification, or adoption of any law, regulation, or policy at any level of government are expressly prohibited under most federal grants.<sup>30</sup>

Agencies should establish policies regarding employee engagement in activism and lobbying activities. Policies may include restrictions regarding agency affiliation during these activities (e.g., identifying as an agency employee on a social media post expressing a personal political opinion,<sup>31</sup> submitting a letter to the editor on agency letterhead without agency authorization).

27 For more information, see [Law Enforcement Code of Ethics](#).

28 See [Standard 3.1](#) and [Standard 3.2](#) in *Achieving Excellence: Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime*.

29 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, s.v. "[activism](#)."

30 See [Lobbying Restrictions](#) in "'General Conditions' for OJP Awards in FY 2020," U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Justice Programs (2020).

31 IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Concepts & Issues Paper: Social Media](#) (Alexandria, VA: 2019).

*Do victim services personnel understand the requirements and limitations of confidentiality related to their communication with victims?*

Agencies must clearly understand the confidentiality parameters for communication between victims and victim services personnel. The foundation of confidentiality parameters should be rooted in victims' rights and legal rulings. Specifically, victims' rights related to privacy, confidentiality, and privilege, as well as the right to protection, should inform practice. The following definitions can be found in each state [Victims' Rights Jurisdiction Profile](#) Privacy, Privilege, and Confidentiality publication—

- **Privacy**—a fundamental right, essential to victim agency, autonomy, and dignity that—among other things—permits boundaries that limit who has access to communication and information
- **Confidentiality**—a legal and ethical duty not to disclose victim's information learned in confidence
- **Privilege**—a legal right of victims not to disclose—or prevent the disclosure of—certain information in connection with court and other proceedings

Understanding how the agency's chosen model of service provision intersects with communication parameters is essential. The roles of **law enforcement-based victim services**, **hybrid community-based victim services**, and **community-based victim services** are impacted differently by legislation and rulings. Specifically, U.S. Supreme Court ruling *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83, 87-88 (1963), (commonly referred to as *Brady* or *Brady* disclosure) identifies what information and records must be shared between the prosecution and defense during discovery and disclosure processes. Since law enforcement-based victim services personnel are employed by the law enforcement agency, they generally do not have confidential or privileged communication with victims.<sup>32</sup>

Victim services personnel must clearly explain communication parameters and associated impacts to victims at the earliest point of contact and repeat the information in follow-up communications. Providing written material on this subject is also recommended.

*Do victim services personnel understand their mandated reporting obligations per state law or tribal code (related to concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of minors and older or vulnerable adults)?*

Victim services personnel should be aware of applicable mandated reporting laws and policies and communicate these obligations with victims. Agencies need to be clear on whether victim services personnel are defined by statute as mandated reporters, whether any personnel's professional certification or licensure mandates reporting (e.g., social workers), and whether these reporting statuses apply to suspected activity related to children and/or adults. Beyond statute, agencies should review internal practices to reduce duplicate mandated reports when both sworn personnel and victim services personnel are involved. Agency policies on collaborative cross-reporting and investigation practices between law enforcement agencies and state or tribal child/adult welfare agencies may also need to be reviewed.<sup>33</sup>

*Do victim services personnel understand when and how to support the use of accommodations to meet victim needs (e.g., interpreters for victims with language access needs, assistive technology and services for victims with intellectual and developmental disabilities, adaptation of spaces for victims with physical disabilities)?*

Agencies should establish consistent expectations for contact with victims who have identified access needs. Civil rights and language access laws must be considered, and policies established to ensure equitable access for all regardless of ability level.<sup>34</sup> Victim services personnel must understand their individual and agency responsibilities for providing or facilitating accommodations that may include language access (e.g., interpretation services for both spoken and sign languages<sup>35</sup>), physical access (e.g., ensuring meeting rooms can accommodate wheelchairs and other assistive equipment, ensuring written materials are available in large print), and supportive services during investigative processes (e.g., presence of an aide or specialized forensic interviewer when law enforcement

32 Refer to federal and state statutes, agency policies, and grant funding requirements related to victim services personnel confidentiality or privilege. For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Documentation Standards](#) and [Law Enforcement-Associated Victim Service Providers and the Brady Rule: Legal Background and Considerations](#).

33 For more information, see the Mandated Reporting Protocol in [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started](#).

34 For more information, see [The Americans with Disabilities Act](#) and [Title VI of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 42 U.S.C. § 2000d Et Seq.](#)

35 For more information, see the Language Access Protocol in [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started](#).

personnel take statements from victims with intellectual and developmental disabilities<sup>36</sup>). Victim services personnel can play a key role in ensuring victims with access needs can participate in criminal justice processes.

***Have cultural responsiveness standards been established? Do these standards include requirements for initial and ongoing training?***

Agencies should establish clear standards for cultural responsiveness so that personnel understand agency expectations for practices, behaviors, and skills. Cultural responsiveness standards may, at a minimum, include standards for how the agency will establish and maintain updated knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the cultural groups in the community served; standards for the inclusion of cultural considerations in policies and procedures; standards for ongoing training at all levels of the agency in cultural responsiveness standards and practices; and standards for how the agency and personnel will be assessed for continuous improvement in culturally responsive interactions.<sup>37</sup>

***Have clear expectations been set for access to and sharing of restricted criminal justice records, including for other government agencies (e.g., law enforcement, prosecution, probation and parole, Child and Adult Protective Services); community organizations; victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims; members of the public)?***

Agencies should be mindful of how the chosen [model of victim services provision](#) intersects with access to restricted records. Additionally, victim services personnel need to understand information-sharing practices with other governmental agencies—including policing agencies, prosecution offices, parole/probation offices, and state child/adult welfare agencies. Agencies should provide training on these topics to personnel responsible for records management.

Agencies should also understand information-sharing practices with community organizations. Victim services personnel should develop collaborative relationships with multiple community organizations to be aware

of available services and processes (e.g., releases of information) that may benefit victims. Appropriate information sharing is a foundational element of these relationships, and victim services personnel often serve a vital role in facilitating collaboration between community organizations and policing agencies.

Information-sharing practices pertaining to victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims need to be clearly understood by victim services personnel related to open and closed cases. Agencies should also understand how and when victims' rights mandate no-cost access to reports. Even where laws do not exist, agencies are encouraged to reduce or eliminate financial costs to victims. In addition to individuals who have an identified role in a case, victim services personnel should understand information-sharing practices with members of the public. Agency personnel responsible for records management will likely be able to provide helpful information and should be included in policy and practice development.

Access to and compliance with information-sharing practices are critically important for victim services personnel. Unauthorized disclosure may present serious consequences for agencies; professional relationships; and, ultimately, the ability to provide equitable and ethical services to victims.

***Have policies for victim services personnel been developed?***

To further reinforce making common practices standard, agencies should develop formal policies that will guide victim services personnel and ensure victims receive ethical, culturally responsive, and equitable services, whether a centralized or decentralized victim services model is used. In addition to a code of ethics, established policies and practices can help with onboarding, ongoing training reinforcement, and during performance conversations with victim services personnel. Having established policies and practices will also help victim services personnel manage requests that fall outside documented procedures.<sup>38</sup>

36 For more information, see [Just Ask: A Toolkit to Help Law Enforcement Personnel Meet the Needs of Crime Victims with Disabilities](#), [IACP Model Policy: Interactions with Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities](#), [Culture, Language, and Access: Key Considerations for Serving Deaf Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence](#), and [Engaging Police in Immigrant Communities: Promising Practices from the Field](#).

37 For more information, see Office for Victims of Crime's (OVC) [Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime: Competency Standard 5.2](#).

38 For sample victim services policies and protocols, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started](#) and [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package II – Next Steps](#).

### ***Do policies incorporate cultural considerations?***

Established cultural responsiveness standards should be incorporated into agencywide policies while also being explicitly addressed in victim services policies. Establishing policies around these practices creates a foundation for accountability. Victim services supervisors are encouraged to review these policies with victim services personnel on a regular basis. They should also identify ways cultural considerations may come up in daily interactions with victims and throughout victims' participation in the criminal justice system (e.g., burial practices during death investigations, communication norms between different genders).

### ***Have policies been established for referrals to other service providers?***

Victim services personnel should develop practices for referrals to other service providers that are easy for victims and promote seamless transition of services. Referrals may be necessary to ensure that victims can explore options and services with providers who provide other services or offer varying degrees of confidentiality and privilege. Routine conversations should occur between partners to maintain current information about service parameters and to facilitate supportive handoff practices.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Have policies been established for data collection (e.g., identifying what data victim services personnel will track, where this data will be stored)?***

Data collection policies should be established for victim services. Routine data reporting is required by many funders (e.g., federal and state grantors), but data should be collected regardless of the program's funding source. Most agencies collect data using a customized spreadsheet or purchased software. Capturing key metrics (e.g., number of victims served, types of services provided, victim demographics, number of partnerships developed) is essential to building an effective victim services program, and the information can be used in many ways. It can be incorporated into annual reports for agency leadership, funders, and other stakeholders to show the scope of services provided. It can also be compared to other data collected by the agency (e.g., crime statistics, victim satisfaction surveys) to identify

gaps and opportunities to enhance services. Data can also support program sustainability, showing the need for additional victim services positions (to maintain existing services or to expand services), training, or equipment.<sup>40</sup> As with all documentation containing victim information, policies should include provisions to ensure the highest level of privacy for victims that the law allows.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Has a code of ethics for victim services personnel been developed?***

*Agencies are encouraged to develop a code of ethics for victim services personnel. This will assist in standardizing common practices, demonstrating competent and responsible practice, and upholding the value of victim services as a profession.*

An established code of ethics is a useful tool to delineate the role of victim services personnel and provide guidance when questions arise regarding the scope of that role. It can be used as a training document for newly hired victim services personnel, student interns, and volunteers to help with onboarding and ongoing training. An established code of ethics can also be useful for supervision and performance conversations with victim services personnel.<sup>42</sup> It can also provide a framework for training sworn personnel and community organizations around the role of victim services personnel.

Identifying potential biases or conflicts of interest is critical to ensuring ethical service provision. While not always present, when the primary interests of the agency (e.g., service to victims) intersect with secondary interests of victim services personnel (e.g., prior employment, personal victimization, prior contact with the agency), biases or conflicts of interest can occur. Transparency and candid conversations with victim services applicants and staff can help manage these concerns. Consider the following examples:

- During a meeting with his supervisor, a new victim services specialist shared that his sister recently had a negative experience with agency officers responding to a domestic violence incident in which her husband assaulted her. He says he would prefer not to have contact with the responding officers. As

39 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships](#).

40 For more information and sample data collection tools, see [Collecting Data - Center for Victim Research](#).

41 For more information about victim services documentation, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Documentation Standards](#).

42 For a sample victim services code of ethics, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I - Getting Started](#).

part of his assigned responsibilities, he is expected to provide victim services training during roll calls for all agency officers.

- A victim services specialist told her supervisor that she was robbed at gunpoint three years ago. She stated she sought therapy and has since dedicated her life to helping other victims of crime. She expressed concern about working with victims of robbery due to her personal experience. As part of her assigned responsibilities, she is expected to work with victims of all crime types.
- A newly hired victim services volunteer and student intern coordinator shared with her colleagues that she is excited to be working alongside her spouse who is a sergeant in the Internal Affairs Unit. She expressed that being able to talk about her work with someone who understands law enforcement practices will help her respond to victims more effectively. As part of her assigned responsibilities, she is expected to maintain privacy standards related to victim information.
- A victim services specialist serving a tribal police department is called to respond to a crime scene. Upon arrival, she identifies that she is closely related to both the victim and offender. She is the only victim services specialist employed by her agency.

“Through an established code of ethics, victim services personnel now have structured guidance to rely on for key decisions and complex victim interactions. It provides a solid foundation for ensuring consistent services, providing a professional way to say ‘no’ to requests that fall outside our role, and a way to reinforce healthy collaborative relationships with our community partners.”

**Kandi Hause**  
Victim Services Program Coordinator  
Little Rock Police Department  
Little Rock, AR

Agencies should proactively plan for effective management of biases or conflicts of interest. Decisions should be based on victim-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive practices, ensuring that the rights and needs of victims are placed at the forefront of all activity.

## Professional Wellness

Establishing professional wellness opportunities for victim services personnel is important for program health and sustainability. Providing trauma-informed victim services means recognizing how working with those experiencing trauma impacts personnel and how they serve. Agencies are strongly encouraged to identify and make available resources to meet the specific professional wellness needs of victim services personnel. Peer equivalents for victim services personnel within their employing agencies are often limited, especially for victim services personnel with supervisory responsibilities (e.g., other professional staff supervisors).

**Do victim services personnel understand the components and importance of professional wellness?**

While working in victim services can be a rewarding experience for many, it does not come without challenges. Due to exposure to trauma and violence, victim services personnel, like other first responders, are at risk for experiencing vicarious trauma.

### Vicarious Trauma



The **emotional and psychological impact** on people working and volunteering in law enforcement, victim services, emergency medical services, fire services, and other allied professions, **due to exposure to trauma and violence**; related terms include *compassion fatigue* and *secondary traumatic stress*.<sup>43</sup>

43 Office for Victims of Crime, “[Glossary of Terms](#)” in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*.

Work-related trauma exposure can occur from such experiences as listening to individual victims recount their victimization; viewing videos of exploited children; reviewing case files; hearing about or responding to the aftermath of violence and other traumatic events day after day; and responding to mass violence incidents that have resulted in numerous injuries and deaths. Vicarious trauma can occur after individual critical incidents (e.g., responding to a mass violence event). Vicarious trauma can also be cumulative (e.g., working with victims of child abuse for several years). Unaddressed vicarious trauma can lead to burnout, feeling disconnected from others, difficulty sleeping, issues in personal relationships, and physical and mental health challenges.<sup>44</sup> One way to address the negative impact of vicarious trauma is to prioritize professional wellness.



Professional wellness should be treated as a job responsibility, and should be incorporated into onboarding, training, and supervision. Victim services personnel cannot effectively attend to the needs of victims if they are not addressing their own professional wellness needs.<sup>45</sup> Both victim services personnel and the agencies they work for share responsibility in professional wellness.<sup>46</sup>

#### ***Are victim services personnel encouraged to practice professional wellness through—***

***Agency-supported sources (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs, peer support, annual leave)?***

Agencies play an important role in supporting their employees' professional wellness. All agency-supported

wellness programs, activities, and resources (e.g., peer support, critical incident debriefings, chaplains, employee assistance programs) should be available to all professional staff, including victim services personnel. Agencies are encouraged to recognize that victim services personnel's wellness and support needs may be different than those of their sworn or professional colleagues. Agencies should adopt wellness activities to ensure victim services personnel receive the support they need.

Another way agencies can support professional wellness for victim services personnel is to establish appropriate staffing and structure for the victim services program. For example, a program with one victim services staff member responsible for program development, grant management, volunteer and student intern oversight, and direct services to all victims of crime is unsustainable. Agencies should start small and build the program as staffing levels increase. For example, a victim services program may initially serve only co-victims of homicide and expand to also serve victims of nonfatal gun crimes after a new victim services position is created. Agencies should also ensure workload is equitable within the victim services program and as it relates to other sworn and professional staff. For example, a victim services staff member with secondary language capabilities may seem like a natural fit for interpretation needs across the agency. However, role and potential ethical conflicts should be considered. Clear parameters should be set for when bilingual victim services personnel can interpret outside their role in victim services. Without policies, unequal expectations and workload are likely for these employees.

Similarly, agencies should ensure that victim services personnel receive discipline-specific supervision. The victim services supervisor, whether sworn or professional staff, should clearly understand the role and ethics of victim services. If the assigned supervisor does not have these skills, agencies are encouraged to arrange training and professional development opportunities in this area.<sup>47</sup>

44 Office for Victims of Crime, "[Glossary of Terms](#)" in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*. See for more information IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center documents on [Employee Mental Health](#).

45 IACP, [Resilience Strategies for Victim Services Personnel](#) (2022).

46 Emily R. Dworkin, Nicole R. Sorell, and Nicole E. Allen, "Individual-and Setting-Level Correlates of Secondary Traumatic Stress in Rape Crisis Center Staff," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31, no. 4 (2016): 743–752.

47 For more information, see the [Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices](#) section of this publication.

Agency-provided benefits (e.g., leave policies, insurance plans, employee assistance programs) should also support professional wellness. For example, like other staff members, victim services personnel should be able to take leave from their jobs without an expectation that they be answering emails and responding to requests while they are away. Programs with only one victim services staff member should determine how services can continue when this person is away from the office.

Training and professional development are also critical components of professional wellness. Research shows that personnel who feel adequately trained, supported, and knowledgeable about their roles report lower stress.<sup>48</sup> Training for victim services personnel should be equitable to training their sworn colleagues receive and should be focused on the skills needed for their specific role.<sup>49</sup> Some agencies, especially those starting new victim services programs, may lack the staff with the appropriate level of expertise and may need to look outside the agency for discipline-specific training opportunities. Community partners and state and national victim services resources can be helpful.<sup>50</sup> Some victim services personnel come to the agency with prior experience and training in advocacy. However, they may need additional training to help build new skills around program development, grant writing and management, and leadership. Discipline- and role-specific training will allow victim services personnel to gain skills and confidence in their role and supports professional wellness and retention.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to role-specific training, agency personnel should receive training on vicarious trauma and its possible impact. This can include identifying warning signs and risk factors as well as prevention and resiliency

strategies. Additionally, supervisors should discuss vicarious trauma and professional wellness routinely with direct reports. One-on-one supervision meetings can be a place to discuss wellness services and benefits available through the agency (e.g., peer support, employee assistance program, paid time off) and identify action steps to support long-term professional wellness.

### ***Self-initiated activities (e.g., time with friends and family, exercise, hobbies, adequate sleep)?***

Victim services personnel should attend to professional wellness like any other job responsibility. They should engage in professional wellness within the context of their jobs (e.g., maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, acting within the scope of their role, asking for assistance when challenges arise, engaging in agency-supported wellness activities) as well as within their personal lives to maintain work-life balance (e.g., spending time with family and friends outside of work, participating in a faith or spiritual community, exercising, practicing hobbies).

Victim services personnel can also build camaraderie with their colleagues or may find support in those who have similar work experiences. Colleagues can also be a source to share work-related information and stressors that cannot be shared with those outside the workplace (e.g., family, friends). However, victim services personnel must maintain appropriate boundaries and ensure privacy is upheld. While collegial relationships can be an important part of self-initiated professional wellness, victim services personnel should not serve as the main support for colleagues.

48 T K Logan and Robert Walker, “[Advocate Safety Planning Training, Feedback, and Personal Challenges](#),” *Journal of Family Violence* 33 (2018): 213–225; Cris M Sullivan and Lisa A Goodman, “[Advocacy With Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence: What It Is, What It Isn’t, and Why It’s Critically Important](#),” *Violence against Women* 25, no. 16 (2019): 2007–2023.

49 IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Concepts and Issues Paper: Civilian Personnel](#) (Alexandria, VA: 1995).

50 For more information, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package V – Training, Victim Assistance Training \(VAT\) Online, State Victim Assistance Academies, and the National Victim Assistance Academy](#).

51 IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Concepts & Issues Paper: Career Development](#) (Alexandria, VA: 1994).

## Putting It into Practice

There are three concepts central to victim services work—professional role, professional ethics, and professional wellness. They are interconnected, so impacting one area will ultimately affect the other two. Without clear role definition, ethical missteps are more likely, and professional wellness is more difficult.

### Foundation of Victim Services Practice



When developing, expanding, and sustaining law enforcement-based victim services programs, agencies are encouraged to consider these three concepts each time a programmatic decision is made. These concepts can also help ground conversations during on-boarding, in-service training, and staff supervision. Consider the following examples:

- An agency in a large, urban jurisdiction determines that two victim services personnel will serve all victims of violent crime and participate in a 24-hour on-call rotation, the agency should consider:
  - **Professional Role**—Is the role of victim services clearly defined in policy (e.g., services they can provide, how and when victim services should be called out to scenes, how they will document service provision)?
  - **Professional Ethics**—Is ethical service provision possible under this model (e.g., will victim services personnel be asked to practice outside

their competency area, will they be provided with agency equipment such as cell phones to maintain appropriate boundaries with victims they are working with)?

- **Professional Wellness**—Will professional wellness be supported in this model (e.g., is the workload reasonable, is 24-hour on-call response feasible for two people, will these personnel be able to take leave without disrupting services to victims)?
- After an administration change at a small sheriff's office, the victim services specialist is tasked with developing an in-service training for all patrol officers and investigators on trauma response. As the sole victim services staff member at the agency, this new responsibility is in addition to providing direct victim services, overseeing volunteers, and managing the program and grant funding. The agency should consider—
  - **Professional Role**—Is the role of victim services clearly defined in policy (e.g., is providing in-service training consistent with the victim services job description, how will victim services provision be handled during in-service training development and delivery)?
  - **Professional Ethics**—Is ethical service provision impacted by this programmatic change (e.g., will this negatively impact quality services to victims, is this training topic within the victim services staff member's area of competency)?
  - **Professional Wellness**—Will professional wellness be impacted by this programmatic change (e.g., is the workload reasonable, is the timeline reasonable)?

Developing programs that ensure victim services personnel can maintain their professional role, ethically approach their jobs, and adequately practice professional wellness will contribute to positive workplace culture and effective services to victims.

## Closing

Victims of crime are tasked with navigating complex systems in which they did not ask to participate. Their ability to meaningfully participate in the justice process is often further challenged by the short- and long-term impact of trauma. Victims are afforded legal rights and deserve high-quality services (coordinated, collaborative, culturally responsive, multidisciplinary, and trauma-informed) to assist them in exercising

their rights. Agencies establishing or enhancing law enforcement-based victim services can support this effort by integrating victim services personnel as peer professionals who collaborate with other agency personnel. A shared understanding of the separate but complementary role of victim services personnel will serve as a foundation for agencywide victim-centered practices.

## Accompanying Publications & Webinars

The Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV) Program guides agencies to provide high-quality services (coordinated, collaborative, culturally responsive, multidisciplinary, and trauma-informed) that address the broader needs and rights of all crime victims. The following publications can assist in these efforts.

- [Key Considerations](#) and the accompanying Checklist provide an overview of foundational topics for law enforcement-based victim services.
- [Victims' Rights Jurisdiction Profiles](#) provide state-specific information on the intersections of victims' rights and communication with victim services personnel.
- [Advocacy Parameters](#) discusses the structure of law enforcement-based victim services, personnel supervision, and service delivery.
- [Documentation Standards](#) discusses victim services documentation location, content, access, and legal intersections.
- [Using Technology to Communicate with Victims](#) discusses considerations when using virtual technology to communicate with victims.
- [Agency Incorporation](#) discusses integrating victim services within the agency including models of services provision, strategic planning, budget considerations, crisis response, and workplace culture change.

To assist agencies in establishing or enhancing law enforcement-based victim services, the Template Package series provides sample victim services policies and forms that agencies can adapt to state, federal, or tribal jurisdictions and agency requirements. The

template packages should be used in conjunction with the topic-specific resources listed above. The Template Package series includes—

- [Template Package I – Getting Started](#) provides job descriptions, interview questions, code of ethics, and foundational policies and protocols.
- [Template Package II – Next Steps](#) provides case response protocol templates, scenarios, and documentation samples.
- [Template Package III – Student Interns & Volunteers](#) provides templates for recruiting, screening and selection, training, supervision, and other agency considerations for student interns and volunteers.
- [Template Package IV – Pamphlets](#) includes sample crime-specific and topic-specific informational pamphlets agencies can customize and disseminate to victims of crime.
- [Template Package V – Training](#) includes customizable presentations and activity workbooks agencies can use for victim services personnel training.
- [Template Package VI – Program Evaluation](#) includes a high-level overview of how to integrate program evaluation into victim services programs, sample surveys, and survey development tips.

IACP developed a [virtual training series](#) to supplement the publications. Each topic covered has content intended for program personnel, including sworn and professional staff. This model promotes a thorough understanding of the intricacies of victim services at all levels of a law enforcement agency.

## Glossary

Throughout this series, the following definitions will apply. They were selected through a review of documents in the field including those from existing law enforcement-based victim services programs:

- **Advocacy**—actions to support a cause, idea, policy, or position.
  - **Individual advocacy**—actions aimed at direct services for victims.
  - **Systemic advocacy**—actions to improve overall system responses and outcomes for all victims.
  - **Community-based advocacy**—actions by those who work for private, autonomous, often nonprofit organizations within the community.
  - **System-based advocacy**—actions by those employed by public agencies such as law enforcement, prosecutor's office, or some other entity within the city, county, state, tribal, or federal government.
- **Agency**—refers to the police department, sheriff's office, tribal police or public safety department, campus police department, district attorney's office, state attorney's office, or other governmental criminal justice entity that is employing victim services personnel.
- **Centralized Victim Services Model**—a model in which all victim services personnel report to the same supervisor, regardless of crime type, jurisdiction area, or other assignment (e.g., victim services personnel serving co-victims of homicide and victims of sexual assault all report to the same supervisor).
- **Community-Based Organization**—a nongovernmental or nonprofit entity that may provide services to victims.
- **Crime Victim Compensation**—a state or federal-based<sup>52</sup> reimbursement program for victims of crime, found in every U.S. state and territory, but with eligibility criteria and specific benefits that are unique to each state or territory.
- **Culturally Responsive**<sup>53</sup>—refers to the ability of an individual or organization to understand, learn from, and interact effectively with people of different cultures, including drawing on culturally based values, traditions, spiritual beliefs, customs, languages, and behaviors to plan, implement, and evaluate programs and services. Related terms are “cultural accountability,” “cultural competency,” or “cultural humility.”
- **Death Investigation Agency**—this refers to the local government office that is specifically trained to investigate the pathology of death.
- **Decentralized Victim Services Model**—a model in which victim services personnel report to separate supervisors depending on crime type, jurisdiction area, or other assignment (e.g., victim services personnel serving co-victims of homicide report to a different supervisor than those serving victims of sexual assault).
- **Domestic Violence**—This is intended to be used as an umbrella term to capture all types of abuse or neglect between family members, former or current intimate partners, or individuals cohabiting. Across the United States criminal codes have utilized different terms, including domestic battery, domestic abuse, domestic assault, family violence, etc.
- **Mandated Reporting**—obligations per state, federal, or tribal law about concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of minors and older or vulnerable adults.
- **Procedural Justice**—an approach to resolving disputes and allocating resources that involves fair and consistent application of rules, inclusion of those impacted by decisions, and transparency of processes by which impartial and unbiased decisions are made.<sup>54</sup>

52 There are currently two states, [Arizona](#) and [Colorado](#), that administer victim compensation funds using a decentralized system.

53 Center for Court Innovation, Casa de Esperanza, and the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, “[Cultural Responsiveness & the Courts](#),” in *Building a Culture of Justice: How Courts Are Improving Access and Understanding in Domestic Violence Cases*, Viewers’ Guide (New York: Center for Court Innovation, 2016); Marie-Elena Reyes and Ann Curry-Stevens, [Protocol for Culturally Responsive Organizations: Literature Review and Standards for Performance](#) (Portland, OR: Center to Advance Racial Equity, Portland State University 2014); Office for Victims of Crime(OVC) Training and Technical Assistance Center, “[American Indian and Alaska Native Populations](#),” web module, 45 min., in Specific Considerations for Providing Victim Services online training.

54 Laura Kunard and Charlene Moe, [Procedural Justice for Law Enforcement: An Overview](#) (Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, 2015).

- **Professional Personnel**—non-sworn or civilian law enforcement agency personnel (e.g., victim services, front desk, crime scene, records, communications/dispatch).
- **Protection Orders**—This term refers to a civil order that provides protection from abuse or harm to a victim/plaintiff/petitioner by a respondent. Typically, there are qualifying conditions for obtaining an order, including the relationship between the victim and the respondent being family (blood or marriage), a former or current intimate partner, share a child together, or a co-habitant. Other terms used for protection order include restraining order, protection from abuse order, protective order, etc.
- **Sexual Assault**—This is intended to be used as an umbrella term to capture all types of sexual violence crimes or crimes of a sexual nature. Across the United States criminal codes have utilized different terms to classify sexual violence, including sexual assault, rape, sexual battery, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, indecent assault, institutional sexual assault, statutory sexual assault, etc.
- **Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ)**—an immigration classification for certain foreign children present in the United States who have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by a parent. SIJ classification allows these individuals to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status (also known as getting a green card).<sup>55</sup>
- **Spontaneous Disclosure**—situations in which a victim, witness, survivor, or co-victim, unprompted, discloses details about criminal events to victim services personnel that were not previously shared with law enforcement personnel.
- **Student Intern**—someone who serves in a law enforcement agency or community-based organization for a designated period with or without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered and is affiliated with an institution of higher education.<sup>56</sup>
- **Suspect**—this refers to an individual who is thought to be guilty of a crime(s).
- **T nonimmigrant status (T Visa)**—Temporary immigration benefit for victims of severe forms of human trafficking who are aiding law enforcement in the criminal investigation or prosecution. In addition, continued presence (CP) is a type of immigration status that can be granted to victims of human trafficking aiding law enforcement in the criminal investigation or prosecution.
- **Trauma-Informed**—approaches delivered with an understanding of the vulnerabilities and experiences of trauma survivors, including the prevalence and physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma. A trauma-informed approach recognizes signs of trauma in staff, victims, and others and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings. Trauma-informed approaches place priority on restoring the survivor's feelings of safety, choice, and control. Programs, services, agencies, and communities can be trauma-informed.<sup>57</sup>
- **Tribe**—any American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Tribe, Band, Nation, or other organized group or community (including any Alaska Native Village or regional corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act ([85 Stat. 688], 43 USC § 1601 et seq.) who are recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to AI/AN individuals.
- **U nonimmigrant status (U Visa)**—Visa for victims of qualifying crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are aiding law enforcement or government officials in the criminal investigation or prosecution.
- **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.<sup>58</sup>

55 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, [Immigration Relief for Abused Children](#), M-1114B (2016).

56 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Concepts & Issues Paper: Volunteers](#) (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 2019).

57 OVC, "[Glossary](#)" in *Achieving Excellence: Model Standards for Serving Victims & Survivors of Crime (Model Standards)*.

58 Office for Victims of Crime, "[Glossary of Terms](#)" in *The Vicarious Trauma Toolkit*.

- **Victim-Centered**—placing the crime victim’s priorities, needs, and interests at the center of the work with the victim; providing nonjudgmental assistance, with an emphasis on victim self-determination, where appropriate, and assisting victims in making informed choices; ensuring that restoring victims’ feelings of safety and security are a priority and safeguarding against policies and practices that may inadvertently re-traumatize victims; ensuring that victims’ rights, voices, and perspectives are incorporated when developing and implementing system- and community-based efforts that impact crime victims.<sup>59</sup>
- **Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE)**—An online platform that provides victims and other individuals reliable information regarding offender’s custody status. This service can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week without charge. The VINE service provides information by phone, email, TTY, and text message.
- **Victims’ Rights**—language included in constitutions, statutes, rules, and policies that vary by federal, state, or tribal jurisdiction and define legal responsibilities related to victims of crime, affording them independent, participatory status in the criminal justice system.<sup>60</sup>
- **Victim Services Personnel**—personnel (paid or unpaid) designated to provide law enforcement-based program oversight, crisis intervention, criminal justice support, community referrals, and advocacy on behalf of crime victims, witnesses, survivors, and co-victims.
- **Victim Services Unit (VSU)**—the unit within the law enforcement agency that houses the victim services personnel.
- **Victim, Witness, Survivor, Co-victim**—any person (minor or adult) who directly experiences or is impacted by a crime or criminal activity.
  - **Victim** is an individual who is an independent participant in the criminal case under federal or state victims’ rights laws or tribal victims’ rights codes, 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** is an individual who has personal knowledge of information or actions that are relative to the incident being investigated.
  - **Survivor** is often used interchangeably with “victim” when conveying context related to resilience and healing.
  - **Co-victim** is an individual who has lost a loved one to homicide, including family members, other relatives, and friends of the decedent.
- **Volunteer**—someone who performs a service for a law enforcement agency or community-based organization without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation for services rendered.<sup>61</sup>

59 OVC, “[Glossary](#)” in *Achieving Excellence: Model Standards for Serving Victims & Survivors of Crime (Model Standards)*.

60 Office of Justice Programs, “[About Victims’ Rights](#),” Victim Law, U.S. Department of Justice; National Crime Victim Law Institute, “[Victims’ Rights Jurisdiction Profiles](#)” (2020); Paul G. Cassell and Margaret Garvin, “[Protecting Crime Victims in State Constitutions: The Example of the New Marsy’s Law for Florida](#),” *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 110, no. 2 (2020): 99–139.

61 IACP Law Enforcement Policy Center, [Concepts & Issues Paper: Volunteers](#).

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