Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: 
Agency Incorporation of Victim Services
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Updated May 2023
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. 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.

Prior Publications & Accompanying Webinars

The 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.

- **Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Key Considerations** and the accompanying **Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Key Considerations 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.

- **Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Advocacy Parameters** discusses the structure of law enforcement-based victim services, personnel supervision, and service delivery.

- **Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Documentation Standards** discusses victim services documentation location, content, access, and legal intersections.

- **Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Using Technology to Communicate with Victims** discusses considerations when using virtual technology to communicate with victims.

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——

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2 For more information, see the Models of Service Provision section of this publication.
• Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package I – Getting Started provides job descriptions, interview questions, code of ethics, and foundational policies and protocols.

• Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package II – Next Steps provides case response protocol templates, scenarios, and documentation samples.

• Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package III – Student Interns & Volunteers provides templates for recruiting, screening and selection, training, supervision, and other agency considerations for student interns and volunteers.

• Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package IV – Pamphlets includes sample crime-specific and topic-specific informational pamphlets agencies can customize and disseminate to victims of crime.

• Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package V – Training includes customizable presentations and activity workbooks agencies can use for victim services personnel training.

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.

Definitions

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.
  o Individual advocacy—actions aimed at direct services for victims.
  o Systemic advocacy—actions to improve overall system responses and outcomes for all victims.
  o Community-based advocacy—actions by those who work for private, autonomous, often nonprofit organizations within the community.
  o 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
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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.

- **Culturally Responsive**\(^3\)—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.”

- **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).

- **Professional Personnel**—non-sworn or civilian law enforcement agency personnel (e.g., victim services, front desk, crime scene, records, communications/dispatch).

- **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.\(^4\)

- **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.\(^5\)

- **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.

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• **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.6

• **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.7

• **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.
  
  o **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.
  
  o **Witness** is an individual who has personal knowledge of information or actions that are relative to the incident being investigated.
  
  o **Survivor** is often used interchangeably with “victim” when conveying context related to resilience and healing.
  
  o **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.8

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Agency Incorporation of Victim Services

Incorporating victim services personnel into law enforcement agencies creates benefits for victims and the agencies serving them – enhancing community trust. Victims who have the assistance of an advocate are more likely to receive supportive services post-crime, remain engaged in the criminal justice process, and report lower levels of distress following interactions with the legal system. Victims who receive support and feel empowered during their participation in the criminal justice process are also more likely to use these resources again if needed in the future. Incorporating victim services into a law enforcement agency promotes legitimacy in the agency’s response to victims. The following infographic outlines additional benefits to victims, agencies, and communities.

### Benefits to Victims
- Better responsiveness to individual needs
- More timely notification and explanation of victims’ rights
- Access to information for support, options, and resources
- Increased education related to the criminal justice system

### Benefits to Agency
- Improved effectiveness and efficiency of an agency’s overall response
- Increased trust from the community
- Additional information from victims that aids in case resolution
- Exposure to and collaboration with personnel who have specialized experience in different disciplines

### Benefits to Community
- A sense of fairness through procedural justice by allocating resources objectively and being transparent about how decisions are made
- Enhanced public safety within the community
- Confidence in and engagement between communities and law enforcement

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Law enforcement agencies should be intentional and strategic when planning to incorporate victim services within the agency. Implementation of victim services within an agency will vary depending on the needs of the agency and the community, agency size, and the resources available. However, the end goal for any agency should be to integrate victim services into all aspects of the agency (e.g., policy development, communications protocols, training) in a thoughtful and sustainable manner. Factors such as program structure, agency budget processes, response plans, and agency culture should be considered to ensure victim services personnel and their assigned responsibilities are effectively incorporated.

Models of Service Provision

Multiple models of victim services provision exist, and agencies must first determine which will be used. This decision will affect how victim services are incorporated into the agency (e.g., reporting structure) and how victim services will function (e.g., information sharing, documentation). Becoming familiar with these different models can increase the overall understanding of victim advocacy. They 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 to rigorous background check processes and training, receive access to 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.

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12 For more information about models of service provision, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Advocacy Parameters and Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Documentation Standards.
Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a systemic process of envisioning a desired future, translating this vision into broadly defined goals, and developing action steps to achieve those goals. It can be easy to get caught up in the day-to-day work once victim services are established. Therefore, strategic planning requires victim services personnel and decision-makers to engage in ongoing discussions to broaden their perspectives and consider the future of victim services. Expansion and sustainability depend on this higher-level planning.

Developing a strategic plan can help victim services personnel set and maintain boundaries and stay focused on established goals. When victim services are new, victim services personnel are often asked to participate in agency-wide initiatives (e.g., task forces, committees, community outreach events) or asked to train other agency personnel or community partners. While it is important for victim services personnel to be at the table for different initiatives, tasks and obligations directly related to serving victims should be prioritized. Victim services personnel sometimes need to set priorities and should identify when to say “no” to maintain the integrity of victim services. For example, due to limited staffing, victim services personnel may not be able to participate in all community events. When communicating this, personnel should clearly articulate to their leadership why and the potential impact it would have on existing services. Reviewing the strategic plan can assist in determining which tasks align with the mission of victim services. Strategic planning can also help agency leaders identify ways to support victim services personnel (e.g., reinforcing the boundaries of the victim services role to other agency personnel).

A strategic plan can also support professional wellness. Developing and sharing a well-thought-out strategic plan helps reinforce that the agency is planning for the stability and longevity of victim services.

13 For more information on setting and maintaining professional boundaries, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Advocacy Parameters.
This is especially important for victim services personnel supported through grant funding, where questions and concerns about long-term employment are likely to come up. Implementing a strategic plan also gives victim services personnel the opportunity to be part of operational development and, for many, to learn new skills (e.g., budget management, grant writing).

Agencies should dedicate time to developing a strategic plan for victim services that aligns with the agency’s overall strategic plan. It should serve as a guide for all future decisions. Agencies are encouraged to think beyond existing resources to envision what victim services will ultimately look like (e.g., crime types served, services provided, staffing levels).

**Developing a Strategic Plan**

When deciding on the direction of the victim services strategic plan, it is important to keep in mind that no two agencies are the same. Strategic planning typically focuses on establishing, sustaining, refining, or expanding existing services. Agencies with a solid foundation of services and secure funding may be ready to expand services to further address the needs of victims (e.g., serving victims of additional crime types, developing an on-call rotation), add staff positions, or establish a student intern or volunteer program. Not all agencies will have the need or capacity to expand beyond their current services or staffing levels, but strategic plans are essential for guiding and refining practices. Strategic plans should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the agency and the victims it serves.

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14 For more information about establishing a new victim services program, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Key Considerations.
Has a strategic plan been developed specifically for victim services?

Strategic planning should occur with longer term goals in mind (covering about three to five years) and be broken down into manageable steps:

- **Envision:** What is the desired future or end result?
- **Assess:** What is the current environment?
- **Set Goals:** What actions need to be taken?
- **Implement:** Who is responsible for each action? What is the timeline?
- **Evaluate:** Is the plan working? How do you know? What barriers need to be addressed?

**Envision**

Agencies are encouraged to examine the motivation for establishing or enhancing victim services and clearly articulate the associated desired outcomes. Developing or revising mission, vision, and values statements for victim services can help ground the remaining steps of strategic planning and guide goal development. When envisioning the future of victim services, it is important to consider who should participate in strategic planning discussions. Discussions should involve both agency leadership and victim services personnel at multiple levels (e.g., line-level staff, supervisors). This layered approach supports personnel engagement and ensures planning occurs through a multidisciplinary lens. It may also be helpful to engage external partners that support victims of crime during this phase of strategic planning.

**Assess**

Understanding the current environment within the agency and community can help determine what resources, policies, and partnerships exist or need to be developed. Most agencies already collect data that can inform decisions and determine the direction of victim services. For example, crime statistics can shed light on the prevalence of crime types and where they occurred. Victim services supported by grant funding will likely have performance measures data that show where and how services are currently being provided and may also help identify options to expand services.

Conducting a formative evaluation, such as a community needs assessment or gap analysis, can also help identify resources or gaps in services that exist in the community. During this phase of strategic planning, agencies are encouraged to consider partnering with a researcher. A research partner can assist in

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15 For more information on establishing external partnerships, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships.

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evaluating existing agency culture, data, and policies. Additionally, they can analyze gathered data to inform current practices and services and provide objective information to share with key stakeholders.

**Set Goals**

The information gathered from assessments can be used to set goals and establish action steps. Agencies can use goal-setting strategies like the SMART goal model to define and track strategic goals. SMART goals are structured to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Following such a model will help ensure that goals are realistic and broken down into manageable steps. Action steps should be assigned so that someone or several people are accountable for each task. As goals are accomplished, agencies are encouraged to revisit the strategic plan to identify new goals.

**Implement**

Once goals and timelines are established, the strategic plan should be communicated to those who will carry out the action steps, those who will be directly affected, and, ultimately, the wider agency. Agency leaders can support implementation by setting clear expectations and communicating to all personnel the purpose and goals of victim services. This encourages teamwork between victim services personnel and throughout the agency.

As victim services are established or changes are implemented, goals and action steps may change. Agencies should continue to gather data throughout implementation to inform the setting of new goals and objectives.

**Evaluate**

Evaluating and monitoring progress is critical, and agencies must determine how success will be measured. Are goals being met? If not, what barriers need to be addressed? Evaluation can be completed in a variety of ways. For example, information such as numbers of victims served and amount of overtime worked by victim services personnel may identify potential areas for growth. Some agencies may use surveys to gather feedback on performance factors (e.g., victim satisfaction surveys, internal surveys). Annual performance reviews, in addition to regular supervision, can be used to determine if staff are adequately trained and feel supported in their roles. Gathering this information and demonstrating the impact of victim services within the agency is a key component of program evaluation. It can guide victim services implementation and assist in sustainability efforts.

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16 For additional information, see Performance Monitoring, Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) Strategy, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: IACP, 2020).
17 For more information and tools on program assessments, see the Center for Victim Research – Tools and Training and Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package VI – Research and Program Evaluation.
18 IACP and OVC, Leadership, ELERV Strategy, 2nd ed.
19 To assist in developing SMART goals, see the ELERV SMART Goal Worksheet.
20 To assist in developing action steps, see the ELERV Action Plan Worksheet.
21 For more information on conducting surveys, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package VI – Research and Program Evaluation.
Is there a process in place to regularly review, track progress, and update the victim services strategic plan?

Strategic planning is inherently cyclical, and a strategic plan should be a living document that is reviewed and updated regularly. Agencies are encouraged to conduct ongoing program evaluations to determine whether or not victim services are working as planned. Data collected through these efforts can be used to adjust goals to align with shifting needs and priorities. This process should be included in agency policies and procedures. Reviews should take place annually, and timelines should be specified within policy. Policies should also identify evaluation timelines, who will oversee this process, and the personnel responsible for action steps.

Victim Services Units/Personnel Models

Strategic placement of victim services units in the organizational chart can help convey the importance and value of these services to the entire department. As victim services and communities change, agencies should be prepared to modify victim services units/personnel models to meet ever-evolving needs. For example, if victim services is established through a domestic violence-specific grant, it may make sense for victim services to be decentralized and placed within the domestic violence investigations chain of command. However, if victim services expands to serve all crime types, a centralized model may make more sense. Victim services may be moved out of a specialized unit and into a place on the organizational chart that supports access by all agency personnel.

There is no single correct victim services unit/personnel model for all agencies, and what worked when a victim services unit was first developed may not work in the future. Agencies should regularly evaluate personnel structures and make necessary changes to reach established goals.

While this does not describe all potential models, the strengths and considerations for the following common personnel models are outlined below:

- Multilevel Victim Services Personnel
- Line-Level Victim Services Personnel
- Hybrid Community-Based Victim Services Personnel

“You send a message about the importance of victim services, the importance of it to your organization, the importance of it to your community, when you place them on the organizational chart. You’re going to get better service delivery. You’re going to get people that are more committed and willing to do that work that has to happen.”

Chief of Police
Matthew Domenico
Brighton Police Department
Brighton, Colorado
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Multilevel Victim Services Personnel, Command-Level Sworn Supervisor

Key Components

- Victim Services Unit (VSU) is centrally located.
- Mid-level professional staff supervisor (e.g., victim services director) is responsible for unit and reports directly to chief executive (e.g., chief of staff).
- First-line professional staff supervisor (e.g., victim services coordinator) is responsible for overseeing student interns and volunteers.
- Line staff report directly to mid-level supervisor.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conveys the value of victim services to the agency</td>
<td>Sworn supervisor may prioritize needs of sworn staff over victim services personnel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicates personnel to advocate for and implement victim services</td>
<td>Possible acceptance/credibility challenges to seeing the victim services director as equivalent to other directors may occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicates personnel to handle administrative oversight and strategic planning</td>
<td>VSU supervisors may experience challenges related to lack of peer equivalents in the agency (e.g., other professional staff supervisors reporting to a chief of staff or equivalent).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports future expansion of the VSU</td>
<td>Separated from investigations and patrol command, VSU will need to be intentional about building relationships internally, so the agency knows what services are provided and how to refer victims.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports employee retention and professional wellness due to adequate discipline-specific supervision and opportunities for professional growth/promotions</td>
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Multilevel Victim Services Personnel, Upper-level Sworn Supervisor

Key Components

- Victim Services Unit (VSU) is centrally located.
- First-line professional staff supervisor (e.g., victim services manager) is responsible for VSU and reports directly to upper-level sworn supervisor (e.g., captain).
- Line staff report directly to first-line professional supervisor.

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<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicates personnel to advocate for and implement the VSU</td>
<td>Sworn supervisor may prioritize needs of sworn staff over victim services personnel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dedicates personnel to apply for and manage funding</td>
<td>Possible acceptance/credibility challenges to seeing the victim services manager as equivalent to lieutenants may occur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supports future expansion/growth of the VSU</td>
<td>Victim services manager may experience challenges related to lack of peer equivalents in the agency (e.g., professional staff supervisor reporting to a captain or equivalent).</td>
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<tr>
<td>If housed under investigations command, allows for ease of access to investigators</td>
<td>If housed under investigations command, patrol officers may not realize victim services are accessible for victims whose case is not assigned to an investigator.</td>
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**Line-Level Victim Services Personnel, Mid-Level Sworn Supervisor**

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<th>Chain of Command</th>
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<tr>
<td>Lieutenant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sergeant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigators</td>
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### Key Components

- **Victim Services Unit (VSU)** is centrally located.
- Line staff (victim services specialists and sergeants) report directly to mid-level sworn supervisor.

### Strengths

- Clear parameters for services when the VSU is attached to specific units (e.g., victim services personnel serve co-victims of homicide if they are housed within the Homicide Unit).
- Possible opportunity exists to develop a sense of “team” among sworn/professional staff in designated units.

### Considerations

- Turnover tends to be high at the first-line level, which may negatively impact VSU development and sustainability.
- Sworn supervisor may prioritize needs of sworn staff over victim services personnel.
- Sworn supervisor may have limited experience with victim services and may require training to effectively supervise.
- If victim services are not intended to be limited to only this unit, colleagues outside of the unit may not be aware of the VSU.
- Possible acceptance/credibility challenges to seeing the victim services personnel as equivalent to first-line supervisors may occur.
- Limited victim services staffing exists to cover when one or both are on leave.
- Limited opportunity is given for professional growth/promotions.
- There is limited capacity for VSU expansion.
- The victim services specialist with more seniority may become the de facto VSU supervisor without recognition/compensation.
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**Line-level Victim Services Personnel, First-line Separate Sworn Supervisor**

- **Chain of Command**
  - Lieutenant
  - Sergeant
  - Victim Services Specialist
    - Investigators
    - Professional Staff
  - Sergeant
    - Victim Services Specialist
    - Investigators
    - Professional Staff

**Key Components**
- Victim Services Unit (VSU) is centrally located.
- Line staff report directly to separate first-line sworn supervisors.

**Strengths**
- Clear parameters for services exist when a victim services specialist is attached to specific units (e.g., it is clear that victim services personnel serve co-victims of homicide if they are housed within the Homicide Unit).
- Possible opportunities exist to develop a sense of “team” among sworn/professional staff in designated units.

**Considerations**
- Turnover tends to be high at the first-line level, which may negatively impact VSU development and sustainability.
- Sworn supervisor may prioritize needs of sworn staff over victim services personnel.
- Sworn supervisor may have limited experience with victim services and may require training to effectively supervise.
- As a result of different supervisors, the possibility for inconsistent service delivery and standards exists among VSU.
- There is a diminished opportunity to develop sense of ‘team’ with other victim services personnel.
- Limited victim services personnel offer staffing challenges for adequate coverage when one or both are on leave.
- Limited opportunity exists for professional growth/promotions.
- Capacity for VSU expansion is limited.
Line-level Victim Services Personnel, First-line Sworn Supervisor

**Key Components**
- Victim Services Unit (VSU) is centrally located.
- Line staff report directly to first-line sworn supervisor.

**Strengths**
- Works well when scope of the VSU is small
- Can ensure consistent VSU implementation
- Supports collaboration with sworn personnel

**Considerations**
- Turnover tends to be high at the sergeant/lieutenant level and may negatively impact VSU development and sustainability.
- Sworn supervisor may have limited experience with victim services and may require training to effectively supervise.
- Sworn supervisor may prioritize needs of sworn staff over victim services personnel.
- Limited victim services personnel offer staffing challenges to adequately cover when one or both are on leave.
- Limited opportunities exist for professional growth/promotions.
- Capacity for VSU expansion is limited.
- The victim services specialist with more seniority may become the de facto victim services supervisor without recognition or compensation.
Hybrid Community-Based Victim Services Personnel

**Key Components**

- Contract is between law enforcement agency and a local community-based organization to provide services (i.e., a hybrid community-based victim services model).
- Agencies may also contract with an individual to provide services.
- Contract may be established through agency funding or as a sub-contract under a grant the law enforcement agency administers.\(^\text{23}\)
- Strong policies and regular cross-training are essential.
- Both parties should be fully aware of information sharing parameters (e.g., confidentiality and documentation).

**Strengths**

- Law enforcement agency can be selective in the services and activities it chooses to fund.
- Clear parameters are defined by contract between law enforcement agency and community-based organization.
- Contract may simplify financial responsibilities for law enforcement agency (flat fee vs. salaries, benefits, retirement).

**Considerations**

- Law enforcement agency will not retain full control of personnel functions.
- Law enforcement agency will need to commit personnel time to oversight and supervision even though contracted personnel are employed at community-based organization.
- High level of collaboration is required to make this model successful.
- Victim services is not truly integrated within agency as it is a contractual relationship.
- Due to the nature of different employers, different policies, and legislation, roles vary.\(^\text{24}\)

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\(^{23}\) Agencies should review agency policies related to contract procurement processes before establishing a contract. Agencies with grant funding should consult with funders about allowable expenses before establishing subcontracts. Some grants do not allow subcontracts.

\(^{24}\) For more information on how 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, see [Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Advocacy Parameters](#).
Budget Process
Incorporating victim services into a law enforcement agency requires financial resources, intentional thought, and planning. Depending on the funding model used, budget processes and costs associated with victim services may vary.

Funding Models
Determining how an agency’s victim services will be funded is an integral part of strategic planning. Funding models may look different between agencies and may change within the same agency over time. There is not a single correct strategy for all agencies. The funding models for law enforcement-based victim services include:

- Agency budget
- Cost-sharing (i.e., multiple law enforcement agencies)
- Grants
- Local funding/other (e.g., fines and fees, donations, etc.)
- Blended funding

Agency Budget
Victim services that are fully funded through the agency’s budget typically offer the highest level of long-term stability. The agency retains full control of personnel functions, and the funding is guaranteed for the budget period. Additionally, incorporating victim services in the agency budget demonstrates the agency’s commitment to supporting victims. However, most agencies do not begin with this funding model. Most agencies begin with grant funding and must demonstrate success before considering funding through the agency budget. For agencies implementing or enhancing victim services, part of the strategic plan should include how to “make the case” to decision makers (e.g., agency leaders, city council, tribal council, state legislature). Agencies should use data gathered while developing their strategic plan to demonstrate the need for victim services. A realistic timeline should be established, taking into consideration the agency’s budget request and approval processes. For many agencies, budget requests must be made a year or more in advance, and multiple levels of review and approval are required.

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Cost Sharing

A cost-sharing model splits costs associated with operating victim services across multiple law enforcement agencies so that minimal costs are incurred by each agency involved. This can be a beneficial model for agencies with limited resources or funding. For example, if four small agencies in the same geographical area are unable to sustain victim services individually, they can develop a cost-sharing agreement to build regional victim services and split the costs. In addition to numerous agency benefits, this model supports consistent service delivery to victims across multiple jurisdictions.

Agencies engaging in a cost-sharing model should formalize the partnership between the agencies through a formal agreement such as an intergovernmental agreement (IGA) or memorandum of understanding (MOU) and determine who will be the administrative agency. The administrative agency may be responsible for duties such as hiring and supervision of staff, managing the victim services budget and grants, maintaining equipment, and determining how costs will be assigned.

Some agencies develop a formula to determine how much each agency will contribute. Multiple factors may be considered including jurisdiction size and number of incidents eligible for victim services response at each agency. A sample formula including these criteria follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Cost-Sharing Formula</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency X’s % Contribution =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| \[
| \frac{\text{Agency X Jurisdiction Population}}{\text{Agency X + Y Jurisdiction Populations}} \times 100 + \frac{\text{Agency X Victim Services Cases}}{\text{Agency X + Y Victim Services Cases}} \times 100 \]
| Number of agencies included in cost—sharing agreement |

“Central Bucks Regional Police Department understands the importance of a service/cost-sharing model for new initiatives. Sharing services allows the VSU to support four times the number of victims and educate more officers on trauma-informed approaches. This collaboration has set the foundation for systemic change and consistent service provision throughout the region. The cost-sharing model will provide sustainability to the VSU, ensuring long-term costs are not burdensome on any one department.”

Chief Karl Knott
Central Bucks Regional Police Department
Doylestown, Pennsylvania
For example, Norton Police Department and Bexar County Sheriff’s Office have recently entered into a formal cost-sharing agreement. Norton Police Department has a jurisdiction population of 65,000 and victim services personnel responded to 1,300 cases over the past year. Bexar County Sheriff’s Office has a jurisdiction population of 40,000 and victim services personnel responded to 650 cases over the past year. Using the sample formula above, each agency’s contribution is calculated as follows:

\[
\text{Norton PD’s Contribution: } \frac{65,000}{105,000} \times 100 + \frac{1,300}{1,950} \times 100 = 64.3\%
\]

\[
\text{Bexar County SO’s Contribution: } \frac{40,000}{105,000} \times 100 + \frac{650}{1,950} \times 100 = 35.7\%
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jurisdiction Population</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
<th>Victim Services Cases</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Victim Services Cases</th>
<th>Total Contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norton Police Department</td>
<td>65,000</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bexar County Sheriff’s Office</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105,000</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1,950</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sometimes-complex logistics of this funding model require strong leadership and communication among the partners. No matter how costs will be split, agencies’ expectations and goals should be clearly stated and aligned. Agencies must consider how not only initial personnel costs will be determined and funded, but also maintenance costs such as equipment, training, and software purchases. Additionally, information-sharing practices must be developed and memorialized in a formal agreement to ensure victim services personnel have access to incident reports and other information relevant to their jobs from each participating agency.

**Grants**

Law enforcement-based victim services frequently begin with grant funding. Grants are often specific to providing direct victim services and provide several years of funding, allowing agencies to get victim services off the ground. Alternatively, agencies with established victim services can use grant funding to enhance efforts (e.g., expand services, hire more staff). In either case, it is important to remember that funding is not guaranteed beyond the award period and should not be counted on as a long-term funding.
source. Grant funding should be viewed as temporary, with the ultimate goal of securing a permanent funding source.

The application processes for grants can be competitive and time-consuming. Agencies must plan ahead, sometimes several years in advance. There may be restrictions on what services can be provided and how the grant funds may be used. 26 Agencies pursuing grant funding should ensure qualified personnel are identified to carry out grant administration duties (e.g., programmatic and financial reporting, drawing down funds). Long applications and timelines can result in funding gaps (e.g., an existing grant ends at the end of a calendar year but the agency will not be notified if they received a new award until March). Agencies are strongly encouraged to take steps to transition off grant funding to a more permanent source as part of strategic planning.

Local Funding/Other

Local and other funding sources can offer creative ways to fill gaps and needs that cannot typically be funded through other sources. This can include victim-related expenses (e.g., temporary hotel stays, food, clothing, bus passes) or other programmatic costs (e.g., decorating a soft victim room, purchasing a projector for presentations). Agencies should investigate possible local funding opportunities such as those available through philanthropy groups, faith-based programs, foundations, charitable entities, or even local or national businesses. This may also include donations. These funding sources may have fewer restrictions than state or federal grants and can sometimes be used for one-time purchases for specific purposes (e.g., food for a volunteer training, VSU tablecloth for outreach events).

Agencies can identify gaps in services or common victim needs and tailor their research to entities that may be able to assist. Whether through nontraditional funding sources or donations, agency personnel must ensure that they follow all applicable policies and laws. Additionally, agencies should understand the expectations, requirements, and restrictions of the funding or donation as well as relevant agency policies before accepting.

Blended Funding

Many law enforcement-based victim services programs will most likely use a blended funding model. This model can include a combination of agency funds, grants, and other sources described above. Diversification helps minimize risk for victim services if one source becomes unavailable (e.g., grant funding ends). Administering multiple funding streams can be time-consuming and require specialized knowledge and skills, so agencies are encouraged to work closely with their finance departments and outside funders.

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26 For example, agencies receiving federal or state VOCA funding should ensure associated costs align with both federal VOCA Victim Assistance Program Rule (28 C.F.R. 94) and state VOCA requirements (agencies are encouraged to refer to OVC’s Help for Victims, which provides VOCA state contacts and additional resources).
Associated Costs

*Have costs associated with victim services personnel (e.g., salary, benefits, equipment, training) been incorporated into the agency budget process?*

No matter the funding model used, costs associated with victim services personnel must be incorporated into the agency budget process. Common budgetary considerations include salary, benefits, training, equipment, and supplies.

**Salary and Benefits**

Victim services personnel’s salary and benefits should align with other agency personnel in similar positions. Agencies should determine the type of employment (e.g., full- or part-time, contracted) based on the funding model. Additionally, for victim services personnel that are expected to be on-call or work beyond typical business hours, agencies should determine their eligibility for overtime or on-call pay. These parameters should align with those in place for other personnel. For example, if crime scene investigators are compensated for being on-call, victim services personnel with comparable on-call responsibilities should be compensated similarly.

The budget planning process should be centered around victim services sustainability and the strategic plan. Agencies should account for future salary increases, promotions, and reclassifications that could impact the budget. Agency needs may change, and victim services may evolve to require changes in the funding model. For example, victim services that are started using grant funding and contracted positions may transition to full agency funding over time. Agencies should also identify opportunities for advancement for victim services personnel (e.g., as personnel are added to the program, restructuring to include a victim services supervisor position). ²⁷

**Training and Professional Development**

Training and professional development for victim services personnel is an essential and ongoing component of successful victim services. Like their sworn colleagues, victim services personnel should receive initial and ongoing training to assist them in their work and further contribute to the professionalization of the field. ²⁸ While some no-cost training exists, budget considerations should include national or regional conferences, state victim assistance academies, ²⁹ memberships to professional organizations, and other developmental opportunities. Victim services is a fast-changing field with new research and best practices coming out regularly. Staying current is essential for victim services personnel to hone their skills and effectively serve victims.
Workspace and Equipment

Just as sworn personnel require tools and equipment to carry out their duties, victim services personnel require the proper workspace and equipment to effectively serve victims. Careful consideration should be given to where victim services will be physically located within the agency. Will staff have private offices, or will they work in a shared space with access to a private location to meet with victims? Determining what equipment is needed should be based on victim services personnel’s scope of work. For example, computers and phones are essential and should include the appropriate software and security features. However, it may be determined that laptops, tablets, or cellphones are more functional for in-field response. Agencies participating in a cost-sharing agreement may also need to consider unique logistical concerns, such as identification badges for building access across agencies. Agencies must also plan for replacement costs when technology and equipment break or need to be replaced. Similarly, agencies must determine where victim services personnel will store their documentation and whether there will be initial or ongoing costs (e.g., annual software subscriptions, locking filing cabinets for paper records).

Depending on the scope of victim services, transportation expenses may also need to be considered. This may include transportation to and from meetings, on-call or planned field response to meet with victims, transporting victims to and from interviews, and other case-related events. If possible, victim services personnel should have access to agency vehicles to carry out these essential functions. If personal vehicles are to be used, agencies should consider providing mileage reimbursement and personal vehicle insurance. Victim services personnel that transport victims may incur additional unexpected vehicle expenses, such as car seats or personal protection equipment.

Supplies and Uniforms

Supplies and uniforms must also be considered when planning the victim services budget. Office supplies, printing, and associated costs should be included in budget planning. However, supplies go beyond pens and paper. For example, victim services personnel may provide victims with temporary assistance meeting basic needs (e.g., gas cards, bus/metro passes, gift cards). Without proper planning and resources, victim services personnel may be tempted to use personal funds to cover these expenses. Agencies should consider establishing a “victim fund” for incidental expenses. Policies should be developed to establish when and how this money is used and how expenses will be documented. Agencies must coordinate with stakeholders to ensure donations are received, managed, and disseminated according to established policies.

Agencies should also determine if and when victim services personnel should wear uniforms. This may vary from agency to agency depending on the role of victim services personnel and resources available. For example, agencies with victim services personnel responding on scene may require them to wear uniforms so they can be easily identified. Uniforms should be unique to victim services so victims and community members can easily distinguish them from sworn personnel. This can be accomplished by

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30 For more information on law enforcement-based victim services documentation, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Documentation Standards.
Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: *Agency Incorporation of Victim Services*

using a different color than sworn officer uniforms or including an agency or victim services logo. These details show agency affiliation but avoid the impression that victim services personnel are sworn officers. Agencies should include uniform replacement costs in budget planning.

**Crisis Response Plans**

Law enforcement agencies respond to crisis events regularly. However, managing unexpected or large-scale crises can be especially challenging without proper planning. These events require a substantial response and are often taxing on an agency’s resources. Agencies should plan ahead to ensure that roles are well defined, personnel and those involved remain safe, confusion is limited, and plans can be carried out quickly.

*Are victim services personnel incorporated into larger agency crisis response plans (e.g., mass casualty response plans)?*

During crisis response, agency personnel routinely activate necessary resources, including investigators, supervisors, crime scene personnel, and other specialized units like Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) and hostage negotiators. Similarly, agencies should identify the role victim services personnel will play in large-scale crisis response and incorporate them into planning, policies, and training. This may include response plans for large-scale or mass casualty events or incidents (e.g., natural disaster response) that require deployment of many agency personnel and other resources (e.g., emergency funds).\(^{31}\) Victim services personnel can lend their expertise to ensure plans are trauma-informed and victim-centered. Agencies should ensure victim services personnel are integrated into existing agency practices by including their role in policies, protocols, and training exercises. This inclusion will help victim services personnel prepare before a crisis occurs. Different types of crisis events require a unique response (e.g., a mass casualty event vs. civil unrest vs. flooding), and the level of victim services personnel response should be determined for each.

*Are victim services personnel knowledgeable of cultural considerations relevant to crisis response?*

Victim services personnel must be aware of the cultural composition and demographics of the community and consider how that might impact crisis response. For example, different cultural or religious communities might have specific beliefs, practices, or rituals related to afterlife preparation. During a mass casualty event, knowledge of these practices is critical for staff to provide culturally responsive services.

Practices that address cultural considerations should be incorporated into the agency’s crisis response plans and policies. Additionally, training should be provided to ensure that victims of a crisis event receive

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\(^{31}\) For more information on incorporating victim services into crisis response plans, see OVC’s [Helping Victims of Mass Violence & Terrorism: Planning, Response, Recovery, and Resources](https://www.ojp.gov/ovc/hvmt) and [The Improving Community Preparedness to Assist Victims of Mass Violence and Domestic Terrorism: Training and Technical Assistance (ICP TTA) Program](https://icp-ttp.ojp.gov/).
culturally responsive and trauma-informed services. Agencies are encouraged to identify culturally specific organizations in the community to serve as partners in crisis response planning and training.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Are victim services personnel involved in agency cross-training for crisis response plans?}

The middle of a crisis event should not be when personnel from across the agency first work together. To ensure crisis response plans are carried out effectively, victim services personnel should regularly cross-train with sworn colleagues, other professional staff, and others involved in the agency’s crisis response plan (e.g., community partners). Cross-training should be written into the agency’s ongoing training plans. Regular training allows roles to be clearly defined and understood across all agency personnel. Developing and establishing strong relationships prior to a crisis event is critical to an agency’s ability to respond effectively. Training activities, such as table-top exercises or mass casualty response simulations, offer opportunities to build and strengthen these partnerships.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Are victim services personnel familiar with incident command policies and practices?}

Agency response to crisis events can look drastically different than day-to-day or on-call response. Depending on the type of event, agency communication may be different, and resources may be limited. For example, on-call victim services personnel may often receive direction from one of many personnel on a scene during a routine response. During a crisis or large-scale event, they may need to communicate directly with the incident commander for instructions. It is imperative that all victim services personnel receive training on incident command policies and practices since this structure and related expectations may be different from their typical response processes. While some responsibilities may be similar, processes may differ during a crisis. For example, during a mass casualty event, agencies may need to prepare to conduct multiple death notifications simultaneously, and they should ensure adequate victim services staffing levels are outlined in the crisis response plan. Depending on the nature of the event, victim services personnel may also be tasked with carrying out essential functions. For example, in the event of a natural disaster or mass casualty event, victim services personnel may be tasked with establishing and operating a family support center for victims and their families. Knowledge of and training on these responsibilities will help ensure all personnel are prepared, and victims’ needs are addressed efficiently during a crisis.

\textbf{Workplace Culture Change}

\textit{Have steps been taken to foster a victim-centered, trauma-informed workplace culture within the agency?}

A culture focused on victim-centered, trauma-informed practices is essential to best serve victims. For some agencies, skepticism and resistance to incorporating victim services may necessitate changes to the existing workplace culture. Implementing these changes is the responsibility of all sworn and professional

\textsuperscript{32} For more information on incorporating culturally responsive practices, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Advocacy Parameters.

\textsuperscript{33} For more information on crisis response training exercises and drills, see the ICP TTA Program’s Victim Services Exercise Guide & Scenario Templates.
staff, not just victim services personnel. Agency leaders should seek to generate internal and external buy-in early and establish strategies to sustain this approach.\textsuperscript{34}

**Internal Buy-In**

Many law enforcement agencies eagerly welcome victim services and see the benefits such programs can offer to the communities they serve. However, some agency personnel may be reluctant to accept victim services due to concerns over the division of duties, additional responsibilities, and organizational restructuring. This can be especially true in agencies where victim services have not existed before. This hesitancy toward change is normal and internal buy-in can take time to develop. However, agency leaders should be proactive and plan to address voiced concerns. To be successful, messaging from agency leaders should be intentional and consistent. For example, the placement of victim services personnel on the organizational chart may impact perceptions held by other agency personnel. If a victim services supervisor will be placed at a level equivalent to a lieutenant or higher, agency leaders should discuss what this equivalency will entail for those currently at this level (e.g., participation in command staff meetings, decision-making authority under certain circumstances).

Even the physical location of desks or offices will convey the importance of victim services to the agency. Decisions on such matters should be made thoughtfully, and their impact should be carefully considered.

One important component of gaining buy-in is for leaders to listen and respond to concerns from all law enforcement personnel, both sworn and professional. Ensuring everyone has a voice—and their concerns are heard—is key. Surveys can be an effective tool to gather feedback from agency staff.\textsuperscript{35} Open and transparent communication is essential. The role of victim services and the benefits for victims, the agency, and community trust should be regularly reinforced. This messaging can come in a variety of ways. Internal memos explaining the role and purpose of victim services may be a quick way to inform the entire agency at once. Keeping personnel informed about the positive impacts of victim services, through newsletters or bulletins, will also aid in developing buy-in.

Further, recognizing victim services personnel and those who work collaboratively with them through

\textsuperscript{34} For more information on building a victim-centered agency, see IACP and OVC, *Leadership, ELERV Strategy*, 2nd ed.

\textsuperscript{35} For more information on collecting feedback from agency personnel and sample survey templates, see *Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Template Package VI – Research & Program Evaluation*. 

*Kim Donovan*

*Victim Specialist*

*Overland Park Police Department*

*Overland Park, Kansas*
commendations and awards will emphasize and reinforce the importance of this work and victim-centered, trauma-informed practices to all agency personnel.

Securing buy-in from informal leaders (e.g., those who are not currently in supervisory roles but who are leaders among their peers) can also be critical to changing the agency culture. These leaders may not be directly responsible for implementing victim services within the agency, but their buy-in can positively influence other agency staff to understand and recognize the importance of victim services.\(^{36}\)

Regular supervision that encourages all agency staff to access and work with victim services personnel is another method leaders can use to foster buy-in. Victim services personnel and their colleagues, both sworn and professional, should participate in regular cross-training, such as attending in-service training or conferences together.\(^ {37}\) This cross-training helps everyone understand each other’s roles better, while establishing relationships and camaraderie among all staff. Further, including victim services in academy training will establish victim-centered, trauma-informed practices as the norm for recruits. As these sworn personnel rise through the ranks, the agency’s culture will shift to one that is more victim-centered.

**External Buy-In**

It is also important to obtain buy-in from external partners. This collaboration is essential for victims to receive a high level of services.\(^ {38}\)

Bringing in community partners to assist in early victim services development can help secure initial external buy-in and strengthen partnerships. Inviting them to share ideas and concerns will ensure that partners feel they have a voice. Addressing challenges and concerns early during program development efforts will send a clear message to the community that the agency intends to supplement, not replace, existing services.

Regular interaction and clear communication are key to building trust and maintaining support from external partners. Referrals and incident-related contact should not be the only times for communication between the agency and external partners. Agencies are encouraged to establish regular meetings with external partners to collaborate and share information. Doing so will help avoid the duplication of roles and increase efficiency across partnering agencies and organizations. All personnel working with victims should be encouraged to become familiar with external partner organization locations, services, and points of contact. Explaining the role and responsibilities of law enforcement-based victim services personnel and where opportunities for collaboration exist can help gain external buy-in.

Engaging in cross-training with external partners is another effective strategy to build relationships. Just as internal agency staff should attend training together, community partners can participate in cross-training activities as well. Inviting partners to agency-hosted training and encouraging law enforcement

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\(^{36}\) For more information on informal leaders, see IACP and OVC, *Leadership, ELERV Strategy*, 2nd ed.

\(^{37}\) For more information on cross-training, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships.

\(^{38}\) For more information on establishing external partnerships, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships.
personnel to participate in job shadowing with partners can help ensure all parties understand roles and the best ways to support each other’s work.  

**Closing**

Law enforcement-based victim services personnel are critical in ensuring that victims receive timely services and support. To effectively meet victims’ needs, incorporating victim services personnel into a law enforcement agency requires intentional and strategic planning. Agencies should take time to develop a plan that aligns with the mission and vision of the agency and supports victim services sustainability. Integrating law enforcement-based victim services can help promote victim-centered, trauma-informed practices throughout the agency and the community it serves, ultimately leading to enhanced public safety and community trust.

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39 For more information on cross-training, see Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services: Effective Partnerships.