

**Establishing or Enhancing Law
Enforcement-Based Victim Services –
*What are the key considerations?***

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Introduction](#) 3

[Definitions](#)..... 4

[Victims’ Rights](#)..... 5

[Advocacy Parameters](#) 6

[Personnel Hiring and Selection](#)..... 7

[Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices](#) 8

[Span of Responsibility](#)..... 9

[Ethical Approaches](#) 10

[Documentation Practices](#)..... 11

[Location](#)..... 11

[Content](#) 12

[Access](#)..... 13

[Legal Intersections](#) 13

[Subpoena Concerns](#) 14

[Complex Documentation](#) 15

[Partnerships](#) 15

[Internal](#)..... 16

[External](#) 16

[Formal Agreements](#) 17

[Agency Incorporation of Victim Services](#) 18

[Budget Process](#)..... 19

[Victim Intersection Points](#)..... 19

[Crisis Response Plans](#)..... 19

[Culture Change](#) 20

Introduction

Research shows that victims of crime may experience a variety of short- and long-term challenges in the aftermath of the crime. They encounter multiple complex systems and they may feel confused and overwhelmed. Victims who choose to participate with the criminal justice system are at risk for secondary victimization, which is an indirect result of the crime that occurs through the responses of individuals and institutions. Types of secondary victimization include victim blaming, inappropriate behavior or language, and indifference or disregard of victims' needs and wishes by criminal justice personnel or other organizations with access to victims post-crime. Victims who experience secondary victimization by law enforcement are less likely to continue participating with the reporting and prosecution process (Rich & Seffrin, 2012; Hardy, Young, & Holmes, 2009).

Historically, there have been concerted efforts to provide guidance towards improving the quality and consistency of response to crime victims by practitioners. [Achieving Excellence: Model Standards for Serving Victims & Survivors of Crime](#) provides information aimed at strengthening organizational capacity through articulation of: *Program Standards*, *Competency Standards*, and *Ethical Standards* (Office for Victims of Crime, n.d.). This information is intended to enhance the capacity for provision of high-quality, consistent responses to crime victims.

There have also been efforts to assess law enforcement response to crime victims. [Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims: A 21st Century Strategy](#) encompasses an organizational strategy that introduces law enforcement leaders to the benefits, challenges, methods, and responsibilities for enhancing their response to victims of crime. A key concept in this strategy is the identification of the Seven Critical Needs of Victims: *Safety, Support, Information, Access, Continuity, Voice, and Justice* (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2007).

As a result of a strategic effort in 2018 to support the development of law enforcement-based direct victim services in the United States and to strengthen the capacity of these victim services and support partnerships with community-based programs, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) launched the *Law Enforcement-Based Direct Victim Services & Technical Assistance Program (LEV Program)*. As the provider of training and technical assistance for the *LEV Program*, the goal of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) is to enhance the capacity of law enforcement-based victim services by providing guidance on promising practices, protocols, and policies that aim to provide victims with the rights, services, and responses they need.

The IACP is known for its commitment to shaping the future of the police profession. Through timely research, programming, and unparalleled training opportunities, the IACP is preparing current and emerging police leaders—and the agencies and communities they serve—to succeed in addressing the most pressing issues, threats, and challenges of the day.

As agencies embark to establish or enhance direct services to victims within law enforcement-based systems, this document is intended to provide those agencies with topics identified as key considerations

in this worthwhile pursuit. Currently, multiple models of service provision exist (system-based advocates hired through both permanent and temporary positions, community-based advocates serving agencies through informal agreements, community-based advocates hired through contracts, volunteer personnel performing duties for agencies through informal agreements). Additionally, variances in agency and community cultures, values, goals, service needs, and mandated responsibilities per state law (related to concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of minors and elder or vulnerable adults) exist. Through the recognition of these differences, there is also a recognized need to provide guiding information towards the standardization of common practices.

As a companion to this document, *Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations Checklist* has been developed to provide provisional guidance to agencies establishing or enhancing direct services to victims. Future documents in this publication series will provide comprehensive exploration of the following key considerations:

- Victim Services Advocacy Parameters and Documentation
- Victim Services Partnerships and Collaborations
- Value of Victim Services

The aim of the *Law Enforcement-Based Direct Victim Services & Technical Assistance Program* is to provide guidance for agencies towards the provision of high-quality services (coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary, and trauma-informed) that address the broader needs and rights of all crime victims.

Definitions

Essential to the provision of high-quality services to crime victims is the need to adopt a shared understanding of frequently used terms. These terms were developed through a review of documents in the field, including those from existing law enforcement-based victim services programs.

Throughout this document series, the following definitions will apply:

- **Advocacy** – actions aimed at actively supporting a cause, idea, policy, or position
 - Individual advocacy – actions aimed at direct services to victims
 - Systemic advocacy – actions aimed at improving overall system responses and outcomes for all victims
 - Community-based advocacy – actions by those who work for private, autonomous, often non-profit agencies within the community
 - System-based advocacy – actions by those employed by public agencies such as law enforcement, office of the prosecuting attorney, or some other entity within the city, county, state, or federal government

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

- **Agency** – this refers to the police department, sheriff’s office, campus police department, district attorney’s office, state attorney’s office or other governmental criminal justice entity that is employing victim services personnel.
- **Trauma-informed** – an approach involving educating victims, service providers, and the general community about the impact of trauma on the health and well-being of the victim; attending to the victim’s emotional and physical safety; and using resources, services, and support to increase the victim’s capacity to recover (National Institute of Justice, 2016). Full development of a trauma-informed response will include all disciplines involved in response efforts (dispatch, patrol, detectives, supervisors, nurses, advocates, prosecutors, victim services personnel, and service providers).
- **Victim-centered** – an approach involving the victim being at the center of all decisions regarding victim recovery and involvement with the criminal justice system. The victim’s choice, safety, and well-being are the focus and the needs of the victim are everyone’s concern (National Institute of Justice, 2016).
- **Victim, witness, survivor** – this refers to any person (child, adolescent, or adult) who directly experiences or witnesses a crime or criminal activity. This also includes those who are in close relationship to a person killed by homicide.
 - Survivor is often used interchangeably with ‘victim’ when conveying context related to resilience and healing
 - Victim is an individual who is an independent participant in the criminal case under federal or state victims’ rights laws; denotes a person’s legal status (unavailable to the general public) and defines the level and extent of participation that the individual is entitled to in the criminal matter.
- **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 those impacted by criminal events.

Victims’ Rights

Unlike the rights of defendants, which are well-known and often recited, very few people know what rights are afforded to victims of crime. As professionals (law enforcement officers, prosecutors, victim services personnel, etc.) working within the criminal justice system, it is essential to incorporate personal knowledge of victims’ rights along with thoughtful plans for educating and assisting victims in exercising those rights. When establishing or enhancing law enforcement-based victim services, some questions to consider related to victims’ rights include:

- Does your state have a constitutional amendment related to victims’ rights? If yes, are you knowledgeable about this amendment?

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

- Are there general state constitutional provisions that apply uniquely to all victims (e.g., a general right to privacy)?
- Are you knowledgeable about the statutory victims' rights in your state?
 - Do those rights automatically protect victims or do victims have to request them?
 - Do you have practices in place to guide victims related to requesting specific rights?
 - Are those rights enforceable?
- Have you established a consistent practice for informing victims of their rights?
 - Is law enforcement required by statute to distribute victims' rights information?
 - Does this practice include conversation beyond handing out pre-printed information?
 - Are there personnel assigned to have a full discussion of rights with victims to include guidance towards exercising those rights?

([Office for Victims of Crime](#), n.d.)

“Not only law enforcement, but the public is familiar with defendant’s rights – in fact, most people can readily recite Miranda rights. Victims also have rights yet very few people know them. We need to get to the place with victims’ rights that they too are common knowledge and afforded in routine practice. Law enforcement is the start of this practice.”

Meg Garvin
Executive Director & Clinical
Professor of Law
National Crime Victim Law
Institute
Portland, OR

Advocacy Parameters

To ease successful integration of law enforcement-based victim services personnel within agencies, common myths and concerns about the respective disciplines and core functions should be openly discussed. Historically, law enforcement agencies have cited concerns about the involvement of advocates due to perceptions that advocates will interfere in the investigative process, will be critical of law enforcement practices, and will convince victims not to participate in the criminal justice process. Historically, advocates have cited concerns about involvement in the criminal justice process due to perceptions that they will not be allowed to be present for victims at critical points during the investigative process, will not be provided with information necessary to appropriately assist victims, and will be viewed and utilized as assistants to law enforcement personnel.

Successful integration of law enforcement-based victim services personnel within agencies will additionally be eased through a fundamental understanding of core contrasts related to communication and decision-making models, parameters of primary responsibilities, and measures of success.

Many law enforcement agencies adhere to structured hierarchy concepts that rely upon linear decision-making and communication – placing value on situation-based outcomes, comfort with rank structure,

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

and little emphasis placed on agreement by all parties with decisions. Conversely, victim services personnel often focus on individual well-being within a social context which often relies upon consensus decision-making and communication – placing value on common goals, comfort with egalitarian structure, and a desire to seek agreements to support decisions.

Law enforcement primarily focuses on maintaining the role of objective factfinders while conducting bias-free investigations of reported criminal activity. Conversely, victim services personnel primarily focus on advocating for the rights and needs of victims regardless of the outcome of investigative processes.

These contrasts are also embodied through variances in measures of success as seen by law enforcement and victim services personnel. Often, the measure of success for law enforcement is the arrest of an offender for the highest level of crime followed by a conviction with the maximum allowable sentence. **Because many victims do not experience resolution of reported crimes by these standards, it is important to ensure meaningful access to advocacy and services for victims at every stage of the criminal justice process. Access to procedural justice – which involves promoting a sense of fairness by establishing and maintaining unbiased resource allocation and transparency of the processes by which decisions are made – may be the only form of justice that victims receive through their interactions with system processes and professionals.**

“Our goal is to create a safer community and in order to do that we have to focus on more than ‘locking up the bad guy.’ We need to understand the impact of trauma and how to respond effectively to those who have experienced trauma.”

Curtis L. Graves, Director
Commander of Strategic
Initiatives
Mobile Police Department
Mobile, AL

Agencies can aid in the realization of procedural justice for victims through intentional efforts to incorporate victim services personnel into agency operations – from initial report through transition to court and all the processes in between. After factoring in these contrasts, agencies should engage in thoughtful consideration towards hiring and selection, reporting structure and supervision practices, span of responsibility, and ethical approaches associated with victim services personnel.

Personnel Hiring and Selection

One area in which contrasts between law enforcement and victim services can be seen is through the hiring and selection processes of personnel for each of these disciplines. In law enforcement, having demonstrated longevity with prior organizations is seen as positive. Victim services personnel often choose to change organizations more frequently to broaden their professional experience due to many organizations limiting their scope to specific populations or services. It is also common for victim services personnel to include volunteers and student interns as personnel who carry primary responsibilities.

Additionally, there may be contrasts in the skills necessary to complete core job duties. Law enforcement often focuses on mental, intellectual, emotional, and physical attributes that allow for success in immediate high-risk circumstances. Victim services personnel often focus on trauma response, identifying

barriers and solutions to system response, and management of emotional crisis situations post high-risk circumstances. It is also worth noting that while activity performed by victim services personnel does not require behavioral health licensure, many personnel applying for these positions may have professional degrees that are accompanied by specific code of ethics that travel with them regardless of employing agency. Some questions to consider regarding the hiring and selection of victim services personnel include:

- Have interview questions been modified to identify skills and abilities of ideal victim services personnel applicants?
- Has consideration been extended to include professionals familiar with the role of victim services personnel on the interview panel?
- Has consideration been extended for interpretation of work history and relevance to core job duties?
- Have job duties been structured to align with education and training principles required for this role?
- Has consideration been extended towards the background check necessary to facilitate access to law enforcement/court records by victim services personnel (i.e. NCIC/CJIS access and training compliance for those systems)?
- Have selection processes been established for volunteers and student interns?

Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices

When incorporating victim services into the agency, it is recommended to place victim services personnel in the organizational chart in a position that conveys importance and value of these services to the entire department. Many victim services personnel are accustomed to supervision practices that are collaboratively based and involve regular and open critique around application of standard knowledge, competence, demeanor, and ethical service provision with the ultimate focus on those being served. Law enforcement supervision is designed to employ incident-based corrective action. Some questions to consider related to reporting structure and supervision practices of victim services personnel include:

- Who will be the direct supervisor of victim services personnel?
 - Does that person hold enough authority to make department-wide decisions?
 - Does that person have training/experience/understanding of the role of victim services?
 - Does that person also supervise other units/personnel?
- What are the management/supervision expectations of victim services personnel?
 - Is there an expectation for victim services personnel to manage a program in addition to providing direct services?

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

- Is there an expectation for victim services personnel to grow/expand services and personnel within the agency?
- Is there an expectation for victim services personnel to supervise multiple personnel (other staff, student interns, volunteers)?
- Do these expectations equate to expectations of other agency staff?
- How are supervision practices of victim services personnel structured?
 - Are there regular opportunities for conversation and dialogue around responsibilities, program growth, professional development, and performance standards?
 - Are there opportunities for supervision contact beyond incidents and crisis circumstances?
 - Does the victim services supervisor have requisite knowledge about professional requirements and code of ethics for specific behavioral health degrees?
 - Does the victim services supervisor have adequate credentials and experience to supervise volunteers? student interns?
 - Does the victim services supervisor have experience with management of behavior and performance of volunteers? student interns?

[\(Office for Victims of Crime, n.d.\)](#)

Span of Responsibility

Victim services personnel are often expected to fill multiple levels of responsibility simultaneously. For instance, many victim services personnel are expected to manage grant funding and supervise other personnel (both paid and unpaid, sometimes for multiple programs) while also providing direct services to victims. This approach is not recommended as the skills sets for these respective responsibilities are different – just as it is not recommended for Sergeants or Lieutenants to routinely perform functions of patrol officers. It is also common for victim services personnel to be paid through grant funding, so attention must be paid to the parameters of that funding. Some questions to consider related to span of responsibility for victim services personnel include:

- What mode of service delivery is expected for victim services personnel?
 - On-call response? By phone or in the field?
 - Phone contact?
 - Office appointments?
 - Letter, email or text communication?
- Is there a specific time frame for services provided to victims?
- Are victim services personnel expected to provide services to more than one law enforcement agency or jurisdiction? If so, have formal agreements been executed?

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

- Are victim services personnel expected to provide services to:
 - Victims of all crime types?
 - Those impacted by crisis circumstances (i.e. suicide, traffic fatalities, family disputes that are not deemed criminal)?
- Has clear delineation been established between victim services and:
 - Peer Support programs and services to employees?
 - Chaplain programs?

Ethical Approaches

As the field of victim services continues to develop, there is an emphasis placed on the ability of victim services personnel to demonstrate competent and responsible practice. Through a shared understanding of the role of victim services personnel, there is an increased ability to protect the public from exploitation. Some questions to consider related to ethical approaches of victim services personnel include:

- Are victim services personnel prepared to engage in advocacy for victims without alienation of others?
- Are victim services personnel clear on the distinction between advocacy and activism?
- Have clear expectations been set related to confidentiality of communication between victim services personnel and those they serve?
- Are the mandated reporting obligations per state law (related to concerns of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of minors and elder or vulnerable adults) for victim services personnel clear?
- Have clear expectations been set related to language access and use of interpreters?
 - Is there clear guidance related to the use of professional interpreters versus family members or third parties, to include minimum ages of interpreters?
 - Is there clear guidance related to levels of interpreters based on varying legal needs (i.e. setting an appointment, participating in an interview, testifying in court)?
 - Is there clear guidance on the use of interpreters who have confidentiality or privilege through their employment?
- Have clear expectations been set related to access to and disclosure of restricted records generated by criminal justice professionals for:
 - Other government (law enforcement, prosecution, probation and parole, Child and Adult Protective Services) agencies?
 - Community agencies?
 - Victims, witnesses, and survivors?
 - Members of the public?

- Are all agency personnel clear that the role of victim services personnel is to recognize the interest of the person served as a primary responsibility?
- Has a separate but complimentary Code of Ethics for victim services personnel been developed that aligns with the agency standards of conduct?
- Have separate but complimentary policies and practices for victim services personnel been developed that align with agency policies and practices?
- Have policies and practices been established for referrals to other service providers within the community?

Documentation Practices

Victim services personnel should be prepared to fully and accurately document activities performed in the course of their assigned responsibilities. Documentation serves to support effective service to victims, witnesses, and survivors. Documentation creates a record of contact and provides useful information for others who work with the same victim, including but not limited to law enforcement personnel, prosecutors, and victim compensation workers. It also provides a way to verify the actions or services provided in the event a question or concern is raised. Thorough and factual documentation may assist victims, witnesses and survivors with the qualification process for services and resources they need to include protection orders, public housing, public assistance, health and life insurance, crime victim compensation, immigration relief, and resolution of landlord-tenant disputes among others. Accurate, succinct, and trauma-informed documentation can also aid in the reduction of inadvertent harm to victims, witnesses, and survivors. Law enforcement agencies and victim services personnel are encouraged to be thoughtful about how interactions with victims are documented, where and how documentation is stored, and who has access to the information.

Location

Law enforcement agencies must determine whether documentation will be kept only electronically or if paper records will also be maintained. The availability of both electronic and physical storage space will impact this decision. Agencies are encouraged to research various options and understand the pros and cons of each, with the understanding that documentation of services and actions by victim services personnel is not optional. Some questions to consider when determining where documentation of victim services personnel will be kept include:

- Can documentation of victim services personnel be contained in the same RMS system as documentation by law enforcement personnel?
- Should a separate system be created and maintained for documentation of victim services personnel?

Content

While the role of victim services personnel will differ from that of a law enforcement officer, the extent to which they accurately and thoroughly document the services they provide and actions they take should not. **It is critical that documentation of victim services personnel include only information regarding actions taken by victim services personnel and not a detailed restatement of the facts of the case or actions taken by others.** Documentation of the incident itself will and should be documented in detail by law enforcement personnel who receive the information first-hand. Any discrepancies may cause confusion during subsequent actions steps and potential prosecution of the case. Some questions to consider when determining the content of documentation include:

- If a victim spontaneously discloses details about criminal events to victim services personnel that were not previously disclosed to law enforcement, how will this disclosure be handled and documented?
 - Has the prosecuting attorney’s office in the agency’s jurisdiction been consulted for protocol development?
 - Have differences between community- and system-based advocates been included in protocol development?
- Is appropriate language being utilized in documentation (by both law enforcement and victim services personnel)?
 - Victim-Blaming Language — It is often stated in law enforcement incident reports that the status of cases or lack of investigation are a result of “victim cooperation,” or lack thereof. This use of language in the investigative process places blame on the victim without asking the reasons they decline to participate in investigations or exploring other investigative techniques.
 - Linguistic Avoidance — This common language pitfall occurs when language is used to deflect responsibility away from the perpetrator and/or diffuse responsibility by documenting in a way where there is no perpetrator (i.e. “Mary was punched and strangled” vs. “Dan punched and strangled Mary”).
 - Language of Consent — Statements that imply consent without the context of physical or emotional force (i.e. “He had sex with her” vs. “He forcefully penetrated her vagina with his penis”) often portray an incomplete and inaccurate picture of what occurred. (Legal Momentum, 2013)

“When we consistently document based on services rendered we encourage trust in the overall system. If we, as Victim Services, are fearful or unable to document the support and services we provide – what does that say about the credibility of our role? What does that do to the credibility of the system?”

Caroline Huffaker
Victim Services & Chaplains
Coordinator
Chattanooga Police
Department
Chattanooga, TN

Access

It is important for agencies to understand if, when, and to whom documentation of victim services personnel will be accessible. As government entities, case-related documentation by law enforcement agency personnel (both sworn and professional) will likely be widely accessible to multiple parties, including other law enforcement personnel, victims, prosecutors, defense attorneys, suspects, media, and the public. Some questions to consider when determining documentation content include:

- If victim services personnel are community-based advocates:
 - Have they followed their employing agency's guidelines regarding access to documentation?
 - Have they advised victims of their agency's guidelines?
 - Is there an understanding that documentation may not be accessible to personnel outside of the employing agency of the victim services personnel, including to law enforcement?
- If victim services personnel are system-based advocates:
 - Have victims been advised of the potentially wide access to documentation?
 - When victim safety or other concerns are present, have protocols been established to ensure victims receive services and ensure documentation abides by policy and victims' rights, including redaction prior to disclosure?

Legal Intersections

Other common documentation considerations include intersections with legal requirements such as Brady, Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and Open Records/Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. Agencies who receive VOCA and VAWA funding need to be aware of legal requirements related to documentation that are attached to those funding streams. Documentation should be completed with these intersections in mind, including long-term implications of documentation content. It is incumbent upon law enforcement agencies to work cooperatively with Public Information Officers and prosecutors to understand local, state, and federal rules that impact access to documentation of victim services personnel. Some questions to consider regarding legal intersections of documentation include:

- Have protocols been developed for documentation that impacts Brady disclosures?
- Have protocols been developed for documenting self-reported victim diagnosis information that may be sensitive and/or protected by HIPAA, such as medical conditions, HIV status, mental/behavioral health conditions, and substance use/abuse?
- Have victim services personnel received training on FERPA and the intersection with law enforcement records?

- Have victim services personnel received training on the process for Open Records/FOIA requests?
- Have protocols been put in place for notification of the victim regarding requests for information?

Subpoena Concerns

Agencies that have victim services personnel often cite subpoena concerns when discussing documentation of service provision. It is important to note that any citizen who may have relevant information related to a criminal or civil case is subject to subpoena if they are within the jurisdiction of the court. Policies and procedures for documentation should be drafted with an understanding of subpoena law in the jurisdiction. System-based advocates are no different than law enforcement personnel in their obligation to provide testimony. Community-based advocates must follow the subpoena response protocols of their employing agencies and should be prepared to testify within these parameters. For all victim services personnel, providing testimony should be considered a routine job responsibility. Training of victim services personnel around these issues is critical to ensure competent execution of these job duties.

Another important distinction is the difference between fact and expert witnesses:

- A **fact witness** is an individual who has personal knowledge of events pertaining to the case and can testify as to the things they have personally observed or witnessed. Fact witnesses may not offer opinions.
- An **expert witness** offers opinions that may assist the court in understanding technical knowledge to aid in a decision or judgement. Expert witnesses do not necessarily have personal knowledge of the facts of the case but can make statements about aspects of the case in which he or she has specialized training (Psychological Center for Expert Evaluations, 2014).

In most cases, victim services personnel will be providing services in connection to reports of criminal incidents. In these cases, they are considered fact witnesses and testimony will be limited to their personal interactions with victims, the services they provided, and actions they took. Victim services personnel may also be subpoenaed to provide testimony in civil cases that result from contact with the criminal justice system. It is important to understand that victim services personnel are inherently aligned with the desires and needs of the persons they serve and often do not have access to the full set of facts and historical information related to the presenting civil issue. Therefore, victim services personnel are not able to provide objective opinions and recommendations about common civil issues, including suitability of parents and decisions related to custody and visitation.

With requisite experience and appropriate training, victim services personnel can become certified as expert witnesses – often in the area of trauma response. However, expert witness testimony should

not be provided by victim services personnel in any case where they personally rendered services to the identified victim.

Complex Documentation

It is the responsibility of victim services personnel to accurately capture victims' experiences and needs resulting from system interactions ([Office for Victims of Crime](#), n.d.). At times, this may include guiding victims on how to address outcomes that do not meet their expectations. It is important that this information is captured as victim experiences rather than factual determination of events. For example, if a victim expresses displeasure to victim services personnel following an interaction with a detective, victim services personnel should document "Victim reported (victim's description of events)" rather than "The detective disregarded the victim and treated him rudely." Some questions to consider regarding complex documentation include:

- Are processes related to agency complaints or concerns publicly posted?
- Have processes related to complaints or concerns about victim services personnel been established?
- Are victim services personnel familiar with appropriate and established supervisory contact, complaint, or grievance processes for:
 - Officers? Detectives? Other law enforcement personnel?
 - Victim services personnel (within the agency and with other agencies)?
 - Prosecutors? Defense attorneys? Court staff?
 - Forensic nurses? Other involved professionals?
- Is there a statewide rights compliance system that can be referenced?

Partnerships

It is unrealistic for law enforcement agencies to meet all victim needs. Moreover, victims benefit from connection to services and support that are separate from the criminal justice system and that are designed to promote long-term healing (Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Sefl, & Barnes, 2001). Victims are best served when there is strong collaboration both within law enforcement agencies and with external service providers. These partnerships are vital in upholding victims' rights and ensuring their ongoing needs are properly addressed.

Both internal and external evaluations can assist agencies in identifying key stakeholders and opportunities for partnerships. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to complete comprehensive evaluations of organizational structure and practices as well as analyses of community composition and availability of existing external resources and services. Data collection can also be used to evaluate whether the agency is effectively carrying out planned activities, whether the goals of established

partnerships are being met, and the extent to which the agency is achieving its stated objectives related to victim response.

Internal

Response to the needs of crime victims should be a priority for all personnel within the agency. To further promote this shared goal, victim services personnel are encouraged to establish internal partnerships at multiple levels (patrol, detectives, supervisors, and command staff) and across disciplines (records, crime scene, SWAT, and dispatch personnel). This multi-disciplinary model encourages collaboration and includes the voice of multiple internal stakeholders in the decision-making process. Some questions to consider when determining internal partnerships with victim services personnel include:

- Do crime scene personnel understand the role of and utilize victim services during processes that impact victims?
- Are records personnel and other professional staff and victim services personnel familiar with respective roles?
- Has cross-training occurred with dispatch personnel and victim services personnel to ensure appropriate utilization and effective communication?
- Has cross-training occurred with patrol officers, detectives, sworn supervisors, and victim services personnel with respect to on-scene procedures and/or protocols to ensure there is a coordinated, seamless response?
- Are patrol officers, detectives, sworn supervisors, and victim services personnel prepared to effectively communicate and partner with each other?
- Have victim services personnel sought input and participation from staff members of other disciplines and divisions when developing policies and protocols?

“Internal partnerships are critical to the success of Victim Services. Law enforcement must understand that in the aftermath of an incident, we still have a responsibility to make sure victims are treated with empathy and understanding – Victim Services helps us meet that responsibility. Through this partnership, we’re able to build trust with our citizens, produce better case results, and provide a service beyond writing a report. In the end, this results in the community feeling both served and protected.”

Ryan Phipps, Chief of Police
Manor Police Department
Manor, TX

External

Law enforcement is not always the appropriate discipline to meet the varied and expansive needs of all victims. Therefore, learning how to partner and effectively utilize available resources in the community is of the utmost importance. This may require changes to established practices and granting access to the agency in new ways. Partnerships should be mutually beneficial and centered around victims’ needs. Partnerships may include:

- Non-profit victim service providers
- Faith-based organizations
- Community agencies
- Child and Adult Protective Services agencies
- Schools
- Legal service providers
- Research partners
- Other criminal justice agencies:
 - Corrections
 - Jails
 - Probation and Parole
 - Prosecution Offices

Formal Agreements

Strong partnerships are maintained when all parties have input and understand the parameters of the relationship. Key elements of successful partnerships, both internal and external, include:

- Clear understanding of each partner's roles and responsibilities
- Clear parameters for information sharing
- Common language
- Joint training and networking opportunities
- Agreement on indicators of partnering success
- Continuing assessment and fine-tuning of partnerships

([International Association of Chiefs of Police](#), 2007)

Internal partnerships can be reinforced through the development of Standard Operating Procedures and department-wide, cross-discipline policies. External partnerships can be strengthened through Memoranda of Understanding, Cooperative Agreements, and other formal inter-agency agreements. While these agreements can encompass many of the items listed above, they are not intended to be detailed procedural documents for personnel of the agencies signing the agreements. Formalizing partnerships not only clarifies roles in meeting the needs of victims, it further removes autonomy in decision-making and encourages multidisciplinary and coordinated response. Partnership agreements should be reviewed periodically and involve discussions about what is working well and how to address any areas of concern ([International Association of Chiefs of Police](#), 2008).

Agency Incorporation of Victim Services

Research shows that trained advocates who are present and available at each phase of the criminal justice process can have a positive impact on victims and the system as a whole. Victims who have the assistance of an advocate are more likely to receive supportive services post-crime, are more likely to remain engaged in the criminal justice process, and report lower levels of distress following interactions with the legal system (Campbell, 2006; Wasco, Campbell, Barnes, & Ahrens, 1999). Victims who experience support and feel empowered during their participation in the criminal justice process are also more likely to utilize these resources again if needed in the future (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2009). Moreover, victims who receive services are more likely to experience a follow-up criminal justice action, including law enforcement notification, arrest, or follow-up contact further into the criminal justice system (Koeppel & Bouffard, 2012).

Victim services personnel play a significant advocacy role by providing crisis intervention, assistance with navigating the complexities of the criminal justice system, and support for victims in exercising their rights as victims of crime. Victim services personnel can also mitigate secondary victimization by treating victims with fairness, dignity, and respect and providing information for victims to make well-informed decisions (Laxminarayan, 2012).

The inclusion of victim services personnel within law enforcement agencies may result in benefits for both the victims and the agencies serving them. Some benefits may include:

- Victims experience services that are responsive to their specialized needs.
- Victims have access to a reliable source of information for support, options and resources.
- Victims may provide additional information that aids in case resolution.
- Personnel benefit from exposure to/collaboration with personnel who have specialized experience from different disciplines.
- Personnel with specialized experience are available to focus on:
 - Risk reduction with victims for future incidents.
 - Addressing victim needs from a broader perspective.
 - Enhanced participation in the criminal justice process.

“We’ve been looking for a way to secure funding that matched our goal of serving the victims. Our hope is that through demonstrating the value of Victim Services we can incorporate the costs of the program into our budget process. Victim Services holds value for both our department and the community.”

LaMar Brown
Grant Programs Administrator
City of Buckeye Police
Department
Buckeye, AZ

Budget Process

A commitment to meaningful incorporation of victim services personnel into a law enforcement agency requires financial resources. Many organizations begin victim services programs through state and/or federal grant programs. When grant funding is used, a broad understanding of grant funding opportunities and effective grant management is strongly encouraged. A commitment to time-limited reliance on grant funding and a long-term goal of transitioning to agency budget inclusion should be prioritized. Victim services personnel should incorporate practices to capture measurable outcomes associated with effective service provision in order to articulate growing need and effectiveness of personnel allocation and service provision. Common budgetary considerations include:

- Salary/benefits (including determination of eligibility for overtime or on-call pay)
- Initial and ongoing training/professional development needs
- Allocation of workspace and equipment
- Access to agency vehicles by victim services personnel

Victim Intersection Points

Comprehensive victim response extends beyond on-scene contact with officers. Law enforcement agencies are encouraged to expand victim-centered practices to all victim contact points such as dispatch, front desk, property retrieval, obtaining copies of incident reports, and receiving case updates. Victim response should be identified as an agency-wide priority, and written policies and procedures should be developed to guide practice throughout the organization. Some questions to consider when determining victim-centered practices at victim intersection points include:

- Have law enforcement (both sworn personnel and professional staff) and victim services personnel received training related to trauma-informed practices?
- Have victim services personnel been provided an opportunity to review initial questions asked of victims when calling for assistance?
- Has training been provided to public information officers regarding victim-centered language and practices related to media releases?
- Have victim services personnel been trained on the process for obtaining copies of reports for victims?
- Are practices in place to minimize impact of returning property to people under sensitive circumstances?

Crisis Response Plans

During crisis response, agency personnel routinely determine the need for and activate necessary resources to include detective involvement, supervisory involvement, response of crime scene personnel, and response of other specialized units like SWAT and Hostage Negotiators. However, with victim services

personnel it is often routine practice for patrol, investigative and supervisory personnel to ask victims if they want the presence of victim services personnel – frequently with an inadequate explanation of their role and responsibilities. To relieve the burden of determining the need for assistance from those who are directly impacted by the crisis event, incorporation of victim services personnel and victim-centered practices into the development and execution of agency crisis response plans is strongly encouraged. This may include response plans for mass casualty events or incidents that require deployment of many agency personnel. Routine inclusion of victim services personnel in agency response to both day-to-day and major incidents will further legitimize the role of victim services personnel and ensure victims’ interests remain at the forefront. Some questions to consider when developing agency crisis response plans include:

- Are agency personnel prepared to adequately explain the role of victim services personnel?
- Are victim services personnel appropriately incorporated according to their skills and role with victims?
- Has cross-training occurred between victim services personnel and other personnel in the event of dual response during crisis circumstances?
- Are victim services personnel familiar with incident command protocols?
- Do written crisis response plans for the agency include appropriate utilization of victim services personnel?

Culture Change

For agencies, the addition of victim services personnel requires a culture change within the organization. Not all members of the organization will be in favor of the change as it will likely require adjustments in roles and responsibilities, redefining what success looks like, and changes in the balance of power in an organization. Internal buy-in may take time to develop. Agency leadership should expect resistance to the culture change and plan for ways to openly and productively address concerns raised. Agency leaders should also be intentional and consistent when conveying positive messages about victim services to the larger agency, including where victim services personnel will be placed in the organizational structure and even where workspaces of victim services personnel will be physically located. Other practical measures may include incorporating victim services personnel into policy review committees and other leadership meetings where agency decisions are made. Other ways to achieve internal buy-in may include:

- Asking for and giving credit for ideas from law enforcement personnel (sworn and professional staff)
- Listening and responding to concerns from law enforcement personnel (sworn and professional staff)
- Acknowledging challenges
- Continuously reinforcing the benefits of the role of victim services personnel

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Key Considerations

- Keeping personnel informed about the positive impacts of the efforts of victim services personnel

In communities where collaboration is not a common practice, it may also be necessary to gain buy-in from external partners. Providing partners with information about victim response efforts will support mutual understanding and help your agency become more effective. Internal agency personnel at all levels, including sworn and professional staff, are encouraged to become familiar with partner agency locations, services, and key responsibilities. Face-to-face interactions outside of incident-related contact can also help accomplish this goal. Just as ride-a-longs and participation in citizen academies are encouraged as ways to learn more about law enforcement, law enforcement personnel are encouraged to participate in sit-a-longs or agency meetings and trainings with community partners to build relationships and better understand partner roles in the larger system. Other ways to accomplish external buy-in may include:

- Involving partners early in the process
- Inviting partner ideas and responding to concerns
- Collaborating to resolve shared problems and make each other's jobs easier
- Keeping external partners informed about the results of joint efforts and expressing appreciation for their work to support victims ([International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2008](#))

Both formal and informal leaders within the organization should be included in implementation efforts. Personnel who have shown commitment to providing quality victim response should be provided the time and opportunity to invest in the work, thus ensuring that they can encourage, support, and monitor the ongoing progress within and outside the agency. Discussion of accountability measures for compliance with victim-centered practice and expectations should be conducted early and often during implementation ([International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2008](#)).

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 are deserving of responsive, accessible services to assist them in exercising their rights throughout this process. Law enforcement is uniquely positioned to lead coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary, and trauma-informed response to victims and help ensure that their needs are prioritized. The inclusion of dedicated victim services personnel into law enforcement agencies can be a positive step toward achieving this goal.

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