Documenting and Advancing Promising Practices
in Law Enforcement Victim Support

Agency Self-Assessment Tool for Law Enforcement Victim Support

COPS
Community Oriented Policing Services
U.S. Department of Justice

IACP
International Association of
Chiefs of Police

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About the Agency Self-Assessment Tool for Law Enforcement Victim Support

Victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches to crime can support victim recovery and engagement with the criminal justice system. These approaches enhance victim and community safety while helping law enforcement solve and prevent crime. The Agency Self-Assessment Tool for Law Enforcement Victim Support is designed to assist law enforcement agencies in reviewing practices related to victim response—specifically the integration of victim-centered, trauma-informed practices into the overall operating philosophy and culture of the agency.

This self-assessment should be completed by a small team, including sworn and professional staff, and overseen by senior leadership and supported by a coordinator. The self-assessment team should include participants with knowledge of agency practices and personnel responsibilities. This assessment process incorporates the following steps:

1. Agency Information Review

    a. Organizational structure

    b. Policies and practices

    c. Data

    d. Funding support

2. Agency Personnel Interviews—agency personnel of various ranks and disciplines

    a. Executive/command personnel (e.g., chief, commissioner, deputy sheriff, commander)

    b. Sworn supervisors (e.g., corporals, sergeants, lieutenants, captains, inspectors)

    c. Investigative personnel (sworn or civilian)

    d. Patrol personnel (initial responding officers/deputies/troopers)

     e. Professional personnel supervisors (e.g., communications, records, crime scene)

     f. Professional personnel (e.g., crime scene, records, administrative assistants, victim services)

3. Agency Personnel Interviews—agency-based victim services personnel (if applicable)

     a. Victim services supervisors

     b. Victim services staff

     c. Victim services interns and volunteers

4. Review and Action Planning

     a. Agency goals and outcomes

     b. Agency activities, assignments, and timelines

Section 1. Agency Information Review

The self-assessment team should begin by gathering and reviewing basic agency information related to victim response. Having this information will be helpful during personnel interviews (sections 2 and 3) and critical during review and action planning (section 4).

Examine organizational chart

   Position descriptions

   Reporting structure

Review policies and practices

   Victim response policies and victim-centered, trauma-informed policies

   Internal collaborative engagement practices (Standard Operating Procedures, agency initiatives/teams)

   Multidisciplinary team participation

   Personnel roles and responsibilities

   Memorandums of Understanding / Cooperative Working Agreements for victim response efforts

Collect data

   UCR/NIBRS Summary Reports of Crimes (past three years)

   Personnel numbers/demographics (sworn, professional staff, interns, volunteers)

   Jurisdiction population

Identify funding support for victim response efforts

Agency budget

Federal

Bureau of Indian Affairs   Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Bureau of Justice Assistance   Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Office for Victims of Crime   Office on Violence Against Women

State

Victims of Crime Act   Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant

Violence Against Women Act

Local

County/city grants   Private foundation/business grants

Tribal grants

Private:

Other:

Provide a description of activities supported for each funding source received.

Provide position titles of personnel responsible for identifying and applying for funding opportunities. Indicate if these activities are primary or secondary to other responsibilities.

Section 2. Agency Personnel Interviews

The self-assessment team is encouraged to speak to personnel from various ranks and disciplines. The experiences, views, and input of a wide range of agency personnel are necessary to form a complete and accurate picture of agency practices. When conducting these interviews, the team should remind personnel that there are no right or wrong answers and that interviews are only one part of the assessment process. Information gathered during interviews will contribute to effective review and action planning (section 4).

Initial questions in each section are intended to be asked of all personnel interviewed. Questions identified as "Additional Question" are intended to be asked only of specific groups of personnel.

Victimization Categories

- Assault
- Burglary
- Child Abuse
- Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence
- DUI/DWI Injuries/Death
- Elder/Vulnerable Adult Abuse
- Fraud/ID Theft

- Mass Disaster
- Mass Violence
- Missing/Murdered Indigenous Persons
- Gang Violence
- Gun/Weapon Violence
- Hate Crimes
- Homicide

- Human Trafficking
- Robbery
- Sexual Violence
- Stalking
- Strangulation
- Non-Criminal Crisis Events
- Traffic Fatalities

In your experience, what are the victimization categories most often reported to your agency?

Additional Question—Sworn Supervisors and Investigative Personnel:

In your experience, what are the types of reports most often assigned to you and your unit?

Additional Question—Professional Personnel Supervisor and Professional Personnel:

In your experience, what additional victimization categories are commonly reported?

Victim-Centered, Trauma-Informed Practices

A *victim-centered approach* puts the victim at the center of all decisions regarding victim recovery and any 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.[1]

Examples of *victim-centered practices* include victim involvement on strategic planning boards, policies that reflect victim choice and voice, expectations for personnel involvement in multidisciplinary work (e.g., gun violence work group, sexual assault response team), specialized training for multiple ranks and disciplines in effective victim interactions, and the creation of an agency victim services unit.

What is your understanding of the term victim-centered?

Describe victim-centered practices that you use in your assigned responsibilities.

What training have you received around victim-centered practices?

Additional Question—Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, and Professional Personnel Supervisors:

How do you ensure that personnel you supervise respond in a victim-centered manner?

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

Additional Question—Professional Personnel Supervisors and Professional Personnel:
Describe agency practices you believe help support victim-centered responses by sworn personnel.

A *trauma-informed approach* involves 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.[2]

Examples of *trauma-informed practices* include structural changes to minimize trauma (e.g., soft rooms), policies that reflect efforts to minimize or mitigate trauma (e.g., arrest processes, interview practices, case update expectations, property return practices), specialized training for multiple ranks and disciplines in the neurobiology of trauma and trauma-informed interviewing, and oversight and review of victim interactions.

What is your understanding of the term trauma-informed?

Describe trauma-informed practices that you use in your assigned responsibilities.

What training have you received around trauma-informed practices?

Additional Question—Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, and Professional Personnel Supervisors:
How do you ensure that personnel you supervise respond in a trauma-informed manner?

Additional Question—Professional Personnel Supervisors and Professional Personnel:
Describe agency practices you believe help support trauma-informed responses by sworn personnel.

2.   NIJ, *Notifying Sexual Assault Victims* (see note 1).

Agency Partnerships

Describe internal and external partnerships that help in meeting victims' needs.

What about these partnerships is most beneficial for victims? What about these partnerships is most beneficial for agency response?

What is your role and participation in working with partners?

What actions could be taken to improve internal and external partnerships?

Victims' Rights

Victims' rights refers to language included in constitutions, statutes, rules, and policies that define legal responsibilities related to victims of crime. These laws and policies vary by state, but all afford crime victims independent, participatory status in the criminal justice system.[3]

Examples of *victims' rights policies* on an agency level include mandating the provision of written information to victims and notifying victims when suspects are are arrested for specific crimes.

Are you familiar with the current state laws related to victims' rights? If so, describe them.

What are the agency responsibilities related to victims' rights? Describe the processes and who is responsible for them.

Describe actions you take to inform victims of their rights and how you help them exercise those rights.

3.   International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), "Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services – Advocacy Parameters & Documentation" (Alexandria, VA: IACP, April 2021).

Describe agency processes for language access, interpretation, and translation needs of victims.

___

Additional Question—*Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, and Professional Personnel Supervisors:*
How do you ensure that personnel you supervise inform and help victims exercise their rights?

External Funding Support

What challenges does your agency experience around securing external funding to support victim response efforts?

___

Additional Question—*Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, Professional Personnel Supervisors and Professional Personnel:*
How does funding impact victim response efforts, including personnel hiring and retention?

Agency-Based Victim Services Personnel Challenges

Does the agency employ or contract with victim services personnel who act as agency representatives (full-time, part-time, volunteer)?

What challenges does your agency experience in trying to establish or maintain agency-based victim services personnel and services?

Section 3. Agency-Based Victim Services Personnel

Agency Personnel Interviews

Agency-based victim services personnel are personnel employed by or contracted with the agency to provide services to victims of crime and noncriminal crisis events as representatives of the agency.

Complete this section if agency-based victim services personnel are in place. The self-assessment team should seek the experiences, views, and input of personnel from multiple ranks and disciplines. When interviewing, the team should remind personnel that there are no right or wrong answers and that interviews are only one part of the assessment process. These questions are intended to be asked of all personnel interviewed, both victim services personnel and other agency personnel. Additional questions are intended to be asked of specific personnel interviewed. Information gathered during these interviews will contribute to effective review and action planning (section 4).

What is your understanding of the role of agency-based victim services personnel?

What are the benefits of having agency-based victim services personnel?

What practices of agency-based victim services personnel effectively support agency response?

Are sworn personnel expected to document when they request the response of agency-based victim services personnel or refer victims to agency-based victim services personnel? If so, describe the documentation process.

When and how often do you interact with [other] agency-based victim services personnel?

(Phrasing depends on whether person interviewed is victim services personnel.)

Advocacy Parameters

Personnel Hiring and Selection

What are the minimum qualifications for agency-based victim services personnel positions?

Describe the hiring and selection process for agency-based victim services personnel positions—including interns and volunteers (if applicable) and your role in that process (if applicable).

Describe the formal on-boarding or new hire training process for agency-based victim services personnel.

Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices

Who is the direct supervisor of agency-based victim services personnel? Is the direct supervisor also responsible for supervising other personnel or units? If so, describe.

How is the performance of agency-based victim services personnel evaluated?

Describe any formal or ongoing development opportunities to enhance the skills and practices of agency-based victim services personnel.

Span of Responsibility

Are agency-based victim services personnel expected to contact victims within specific time frames? If so, provide details and describe the process to ensure compliance.

Are agency-based victim services personnel responsible for activities and tasks beyond victim contact and services? If so, describe.

Describe role differences between agency-based victim services personnel, peer support, chaplains, co-response, and community outreach.

Ethical Approaches

Does the agency have established practices and training for ethical dilemmas? If so, describe.

Additional Question—Investigative Personnel:

Do you regularly communicate with [other] agency-based victim services personnel regarding case and victim information? If so, describe.

(Phrasing depends on whether person interviewed is victim services personnel.)

Additional Question—Patrol Personnel:

Are agency-based victim services personnel requested to respond to patrol incidents? If so, describe.

Additional Question—Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, and Professional Personnel Supervisors:

Has a Code of Ethics for agency-based victim services personnel been developed? If so, describe.

Additional Question—Investigative Personnel, Patrol Personnel, and Professional Personnel:

Describe how the agency handles situations in which agency-based victim services personnel express concern with actions of sworn personnel around victim-centered, trauma-informed practices.

Documentation Practices

Location and Access

Where is the documentation of agency-based victim services personnel entered and maintained?

What agency personnel have access to documentation created and maintained by agency-based victim services personnel?

Content

What information is typically in the documentation created and maintained by agency-based victim services personnel?

Describe the documentation training process for agency-based victim services personnel.

Legal Intersections

Are agency-based victim services personnel expected to document everything that victims tell them? Describe agency practices.

Can agency-based victim services personnel receive subpoenas related to their documentation? Describe agency practices.

Additional Question—*Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, Professional Personnel Supervisors, and Professional Personnel:*
Who is responsible for reviewing and assessing documentation created and maintained by agency-based victim services personnel?

Additional Question—*Investigative Personnel and Patrol Personnel:*
Under what circumstances might you review documentation of agency-based victim services personnel?

Victim Services Personnel Partnerships

Internal

Do agency-based victim services personnel routinely collaborate with internal partners (e.g., records personnel, patrol, investigators)? If so, describe.

Describe cross-training practices between units and disciplines within the agency.

External

Do agency-based victim services personnel routinely collaborate with external agencies? If so, describe.

Describe cross-training practices with external agencies.

Agency Incorporation of Victim Services Personnel

How often do you access [other] agency-based victim services personnel to support victims? Describe any benefits or challenges of this process.

(Phrasing depends on whether person interviewed is victim services personnel.)

What is the role of agency-based victim services personnel in agency crisis response plans (e.g., mass fatalities)?

Describe how you believe agency-based victim services personnel are perceived and regarded in the agency.

Describe actions the agency could take to improve the integration of agency-based victim services personnel into overall operations and processes.

Additional Question—Administrative/Command Personnel, Sworn Supervisors, Professional Personnel Supervisors, and Professional Personnel:

Are agency-based victim services personnel supported through the agency budget?

Section 4. Review and Action Planning

To ensure a comprehensive and meaningful process, the self-assessment team should complete a thorough review of sections 1–3. The Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV) worksheets linked in the footnotes provide useful framworks for this review process.

1. Agency Information Review. Document agency strengths and gaps in effective victim response.[4]

2. Agency Personnel Interviews. Highlight both positive personnel contributions and practices that exemplify effective victim response and areas requiring enhancement to achieve victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches agency-wide.

3. Agency-Based Victim Services Personnel – agency personnel interviews (if applicable). Review the identified challenges and benefits of using specialized personnel to enhance the overall agency response to victims.

The overall themes you discover in reviewing sections 1–3 will form the basis for clear recommendations and action planning in the last two steps:

4. Agency goals and outcomes. Identify specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals to support progress toward expected agency outcomes around effective victim response.[5]

5. Agency activities, assignments, and timelines. Set goals and outcomes. These will be most effectively achieved by establishing clear action steps, identifying personnel who are responsible, and setting deadlines.[6]

Routine communication between internal agency personnel and external stakeholders around these efforts is encouraged to support sustained organizational change.

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4. ELERV SWOT Analysis worksheet: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theiacp.org%2F-sites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2FELERV%2F10.%2520FINAL-%2520SWOT%2520Analysis%2520worksheet.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.
5. ELERV Smart Goal worksheet: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theiacp.org%2F-sites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2FELERV%2F6.%2520FINAL-%2520ELERV%2520SMART%2520Goal%2520Worksheet.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.
6. ELERV Action Plan worksheet: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theiacp.org%2F-sites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2FELERV%2F7.%2520FINAL-%2520ELERV%2520Action%2520Plan%2520Worksheet.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK.

Recommended Resources

IACP resources

Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV): https://www.theiacp.org/projects/enhancing-law-enforcement-response-to-victims-elerv

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV): https://www.theiacp.org/projects/law-enforcement-based-victim-services-lev

- *Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services—Template Package I: Getting Started:* https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/LEV/Publications/Template%20Package%20I_04.2021.pdf

- *Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services—Template Package II: Next Steps:* https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/LEV/Publications/Template%20Package%20II-May2021.pdf

- *Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services—Advocacy Parameters & Documentation:* https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/LEV/Publications/AdvocacyParametersandDocumentation-May2021.pdf

- *Establishing or Enhancing Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services—Effective Partnerships:* https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/LEV/Publications/EffectivePartnerships-May2021.pdf

Successful Trauma-Informed Victim Interviewing: https://www.theiacp.org/resources/document/successful-trauma-informed-victim-interviewing

Victim's Rights Jurisdiction Profiles: https://www.theiacp.org/victims-rights-jurisdiction-profiles

Other resources

National Crime Victim Law Institute (NCVLI). 2021a. "Law Enforcement-Associated Victim Advocates and Brady Disclosures: Legal Background and Considerations." (Portland, Oregon: NCVLI). https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/32286-law-enforcement-associated-victim-advocates-and

———.2021b. "Victims' Rights During Significant Stages of the Criminal Justice Process." (Portland, Oregon: NCVLI). https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/32285-victims-rights-during-significant-stages-of-the

SAMHSA [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration]Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative. 2014. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.* Rockville, MD: SAHMSA. https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf

Woods, Timothy. 2010. *First Response to Victims of Crime: A Guidebook for Law Enforcement Officers.* NJC 231171. Washington, DC: Office for Victims of Crime. https://ovc.ojp.gov/library/publications/first-response-victims-crime-guidebook-law-enforcement-officers

About the IACP

The **International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)** is the world's largest and most influential professional association for police leaders. With more than 32,000 members in over 170 countries, the IACP is a recognized leader in global policing, committed to advancing safer communities through thoughtful, progressive police leadership. Since 1893, the association has been serving communities by speaking out on behalf of law enforcement and advancing leadership and professionalism in policing worldwide.

The IACP is known for its commitment to enhancing community safety by 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.

The IACP is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. The IACP is the publisher of The Police Chief magazine, the leading periodical for law enforcement executives, and the host of the IACP Annual Conference, the largest police educational and technology exposition in the world. IACP membership is open to law enforcement professionals of all ranks, as well as non-sworn leaders across the criminal justice system.

Learn more about the IACP at www.theIACP.org.

About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has been appropriated more than $20 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.

- More than 800,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office–funded training organizations and the COPS Training Portal.

- Almost 500 agencies have received customized advice and peer-led technical assistance through the COPS Office Collaborative Reform Initiative Technical Assistance Center.

- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.

- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, roundtables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, https://cops.usdoj.gov.

Victim-centered, trauma-informed approaches to crime can support victim recovery and engagement with the criminal justice system. These approaches enhance victim and community safety while helping law enforcement solve and prevent crime. *The Agency Self-Assessment Tool for Law Enforcement Victim Support* is designed to assist law enforcement agencies in reviewing practices related to victim response—specifically the integration of victim-centered, trauma-informed practices into the overall operating philosophy and culture of the agency—through reviews of policy and practices and interviews with sworn and professional staff.