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Best Practices Guidelines: Crime Victim Services

*At the core and center
of everything we do
are the victims we serve.
– OJP grantee*



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Table of Contents

Introduction and Background	1
Overarching Assumptions	2
Development Tools	3
The Development Process	3
Definitions	4
Best Practices	8
I. Direct Services	
Personal Advocacy	8
Crisis Counseling/Intervention.....	9
Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Tribal Justice Systems Advocacy	9
Victim Rights	10
Financial Assistance	11
Support Group	12
Medical, Chemical and Mental Health	12
Appropriateness and Accessibility	13
Confidentiality.....	13
Safety and Security of Service Location	14
II. Community Partnerships	
Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Tribal Justice Systems	16
Victim Service and Social Service Providers	16
Government Administration.....	17
Community Education and Outreach	17
Community Engagement and Partnerships	18
III. Business Practices	
Governance	
Obligations	20
Legal Requirements and Standards	21
Financial Management	21
Finances Support Missions and Values	22
Leadership	
Executive Knowledge and Skills	23
Supervision.....	24
Staff Structures and Development	24
Planning and Evaluation	25
Appendix A: Ethics for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers	26

Introduction and Background

The victim services field has over 30 years of collective experience to draw on as we define best practice guidelines. We have learned and will continue to learn from each other and most importantly from victims what works and what does not. Together we can identify best practices and support one another in building a network of effective, sustainable programs, integrated within our communities, which provide high quality services to victims of crime. Ultimately the desired outcomes for those dedicated to victim services are that: victims have the services and resources they need; the response to victims by the criminal justice system and communities is effective and leads to a reduction in crime; and that programs that serve victims are high quality, viable and sustainable.

Requests for services have grown due to increased and improved education and outreach. Changing populations, varying needs and increasingly complex systems continue to create new challenges for service staff. There has been a call from the field, allies, funders, and communities for best practice guidelines and increased opportunities for training and technical assistance to enhance professionalism.

Providing victim-centered services while developing and maintaining effective community partnerships requires organizational stability. Sound management and systems of accountability provide the strong backbone necessary to support sustainable direct services. Therefore we have included sections addressing business practices, governance, leadership and development in these guidelines.

Crime victims not only deserve the best possible services but in times of an economically challenging environment, programs that can demonstrate positive outcomes are more likely to receive funding from a variety of sources. Demonstrated results are expected by all funders including the Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

In 2008, the OJP Crime Victim Services Grants Unit developed a strategic plan to set direction for the unit for the next several years. This best practices project grew out of that plan and is the logical next step. The core values and principles in the strategic plan state a commitment to:

- victim-centered philosophy and practices that are driven by the needs, strengths and voices of victims;
- promoting positive, respectful, and professional relationships, partnerships and collaborations; and
- supporting trust, shared commitment and collective action, resulting in high quality outcomes for victims.

During 2009, OJP and the Greater Twin Cities United Way (GTCUW) have been collaborating to streamline and simplify funding processes for victim service programs funded by both agencies. The Family Violence Unit of the GTCUW has also joined OJP in this best practices project. The best practices reflected in this document are intended to assist programs to identify and pursue key areas for organization development. The identified process for assessment and support will provide opportunities for cross-learning and inform and support OJP's commitment to making sound decisions and advocating for future funding.

Overarching Assumptions

These overarching assumptions underlie and will guide the best practices project:

- We are committed to helping victims heal. Ending violence and victimization is the motivation that drives and inspires our individual and collective work.
- Many victim service agencies exemplify integrated victim-centered services and have much to contribute to this best practices project.
- Approaches vary from program to program and it is challenging to identify best practices that cross all areas of victim services. These guidelines are intended to be flexible. Common sense will prevail as programs make decisions about whether or not specific best practices do or do not fit their specific organizational structure, target service population, geographic location and/or other factors. This is especially true for government-based victim service programs that must adhere to specific protocols. In addition, the guidelines will change as together we work toward building a common base of understanding between and across victim service programs.
- This is an ongoing process. We recognize that the strategy to build an integrated system of best practices, and building the capacity of ALL programs to provide those practices takes time. Individual programs have varying levels of capacity to take on goals and this will be considered within their development plan.
- Effective partnerships are vital to the success of this project. We need everyone's participation, energy and support to actively promote best practices in the field.
- Best practices that demonstrate positive outcomes for victims not only benefit victims, but also benefit those who are in service to victims. Victim-centered services were and are the heart of the victim movement.
- Victims deserve high quality services, the public demands that we all are wise stewards of public resources, and future funding requires us to demonstrate that we are making progress in addressing crime within communities and providing services to crime victims.

Development Tools

There are several ways to identify each program's best practice strengths and potential areas for development. The most commonly used methods will include using development tools, interviews with program staff and reviewing supporting documents.

Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool

This tool will be available online for individual programs to use for self-assessment in preparation for their best practice development interview with OJP staff.

Best Practices Identification Interview

OJP staff will conduct interviews with programs to identify together areas of program strength and opportunities for development. This interview will include reviewing supporting documents.

The Development Process

There are five steps in the Best Practices Development process:

1. Access the Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool.

This is your opportunity to self-assess where your program is today against the identified best practices. The results of these simple online tools will help you identify the areas where you are in alignment with best practices and the areas you may wish to focus on as you develop your best practice development plan.

2. Be available for the Best Practices Development Interview.

OJP staff will contact you to set up an in-person interview, discuss your program's strengths and areas for development, and look at supporting documents to expand the information you gained through your Best Practices Self-Assessment Tool.

3. Work with OJP staff to develop a Best Practices Development and Resource Plan.

The purpose is to identify priorities for the next 1 to 3 years and identify potential resources to support those priorities. (For example, in year 1 you may identify development goals such as recruiting board members to fill key areas of representation from your community, expanding your policies and procedures manual, or securing board training to address gaps in board knowledge and skills.)

4. Participate in identified training and development opportunities to address the priorities in your Best Practices Development Plan.

OJP will provide opportunities and resources to assist programs in their development of best practices, as identified in their individual Best Practice Development Plans.

5. Report progress in accomplishing your plan.

In the future your development plan will become a requirement of your OJP funding application, thus you will report on your plan through annual reporting documents.

Definitions

The following definitions are provided to facilitate better understanding and a common use of terms.

Best Practices

A best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. Best practices include processes and activities that have been shown in practice to be the most effective. A commitment to using best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success. The term is used frequently in the fields of health care, government administration, law enforcement, social services, mental health, the education system, technology, and elsewhere.

The best practices identified in these guidelines are intended for use with victim service programs funded by OJP, in addition to those programs funded by both OJP and the GTCUW.

Victim Service Programs Funded by OJP

Programs providing services to assist crime victims across Minnesota reflect diversity in their approach to services. Some programs specialize in crime-specific services (e.g. child abuse, domestic violence, general crime, sexual assault) or a combination of these. Some programs are funded to primarily serve specific cultural communities, or populations, such as vulnerable adults or children and their non-offending caregivers. Types of programs vary widely, (e.g. rape crisis centers, parenting time centers, domestic violence shelters, county attorney based victim/witness programs, tribal reservation programs, legal advocacy programs, etc.). Programs also work with victims seeking services related to incidents not defined as crime in the criminal code (e.g. singular acts of stalking or harassment that alone are not considered a crime).

Victim-centered

At the core of every best practice is a victim-centered approach to services that is accessible and appropriate for every crime victim seeking assistance. Being victim-centered must be the overarching philosophy guiding the work, and the key element that informs decision-making by organizations. When services are victim-centered, they are specific, appropriate, culturally and physically accessible, and driven by the needs of individuals impacted by crime and violence. These individuals include primary and secondary victims as well as broader communities affected by crime.

Definitions (cont'd)

Commitment to Cultural Proficiency

The ability of victim service programs to be victim-centered is wholly dependent on their organization-wide commitment to cultural proficiency. Cultural proficiency is based in a commitment to social justice and the elimination of systemic oppression. Cultural proficiency demands a commitment to organization-wide learning and connections to cultural communities. The results are that victims of any culture are welcomed, safe and supported when accessing services and see reflections of their culture in the organization's environment, brochures and materials, staff, programs, and activities. There are numerous terms used to define the commitment of service providers to meet the needs of individuals in the context of their identified culture(s) and communities. The following are some of those terms with definitions.

Cultural proficiency

Cultural proficiency is the ability to work with individuals or communities whose culture is different from one's own or from the dominant culture of the agency. It is the knowledge that culture impacts an individual's perspective – how they view the world and others, how they relate to others, and how they perceive themselves. Cultural proficiency includes: respecting differences; relating to individuals as individuals (with an awareness of the influence of culture); genuine commitment to serve the individual's needs; and commitment to continuously learning about cultural differences, the cultures of others, and how culture influences each of us and our work together.

Culture, cultural awareness and cultural relevance

OJP understands *culture* to mean "A set of learned values, attitudes, rituals and practices held in common by a group of people, usually identified by history, language and traditions." Broadly defined, culture includes groups identified by race/ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical and/or cognitive ability, social class, economic status, education, marital status, geography, family structure, religious affiliation/spirituality, and residency without regard to immigration status. An individual's definition of who they are culturally is complex and multi-layered and cannot be assumed by others. *Cultural awareness* is the understanding that culture impacts an individual's perspective and their experience of victimization. *Cultural relevance* puts cultural knowledge and skill into action, making an individual victim service program relevant to the victims it serves.

Cultural specificity and co-advocacy

Individual victim service programs may provide culturally specific services in their agency or in some aspects of their program. Culturally specific programs are designed to meet the needs of victims from a specific cultural community. The dominant organizational culture of culturally specific programs – including staff, programs, operations, activities and materials reflect the culture and values of a

Definitions (cont'd)

specific community. Co-advocacy is one approach to serving the specific cultural needs of victims who seek services from mainstream victim service agencies. Co-advocacy is a shared agreement between the culturally specific agency and the mainstream agency to provide advocacy to victims needing culturally specific services. In the process of that partnership, the culturally specific agency is assisting the mainstream agency in building its capacity to become culturally proficient. Thus, co-advocacy provides the victim with a service that is relevant to his/her cultural needs for healing and recovery while assisting the mainstream agency in building its cultural proficiency and its knowledge of cultural community resources.

Bias

Bias is defined as partiality (conscious or unconscious); an opinion, feeling or influence that strongly favors a “side” or “view.” Bias can be favorable or unfavorable. Bias is embedded in all cultures and everyone has personal biases. A commitment to cultural proficiency includes a commitment to raising awareness of personal biases that are barriers to effective service and acting to minimize or eliminate those biases in working with victims.

Equity and equality

Equality means that all parties receive the same share or treatment. Equity is the quality or action of being just – that all parties and voices are equally valued and supported. Equity is a key factor in promoting culturally proficiency organizations.

Professional Boundaries and Ethics

Victim service providers are, and are perceived by the victims they serve, as professionals that are there to help. For providers to be effective, they need to establish a safe and trusting relationship between themselves and those they serve. A power differential exists because the provider is in a position to help and the person seeking services is someone whose experiences have made him/her vulnerable. Professional boundaries define appropriate interaction and are the established limits that allow for safe and respectful connections. Boundaries exist to protect both the provider and the person being served. In residential programs especially, where privacy is less available, boundary issues are increased and require greater definition. Professional boundaries are included in an organization’s code of ethics.

When a profession establishes a code of ethics, the code serves several purposes. It safeguards the reputation of the profession, protects the public from exploitation, and furthers competent and responsible practice. The foundation for the victim assistance code of ethics consists of underlying values such as client autonomy, privacy, and self-determination; objectivity and freedom from further abuse; honesty and equity of service; compassion and respect for individuals; social responsibility; confidentiality; and working within one’s range of competence.

Definitions (cont'd)

- See Appendix A for *Ethics for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers*, developed by the National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium.
- See Office for Victims of Crime on-line training: Ethics in Victim Services www.ovcttac.gov/ethics
- See National Victim Assistance Academy Ethics Section ce4less.com/Tests/Materials/E051Materials.pdf
- National Association of Social Workers, Code of Ethics www.socialworkers.org/pubs/Code/code.asp

Governance

Governance refers to the obligations of a board of directors of a nonprofit corporation. Governance of an organization means establishment of policies, and continuous monitoring of their proper implementation, by the members of the governing body of an organization (the board of directors or other governance structure that is in place). It means adhering to its statutory obligations and includes the mechanisms required to balance the powers of the members (with the associated accountability), and their primary duty of enhancing the prosperity and viability of the organization. Note: Other governing bodies (councils, boards, etc.) have different governance obligations. Based on what we learn through implementation of these guidelines, best practices will be added for those types of governing bodies.

Leadership

Leadership includes the ability to lead, guide, direct, inspire, influence and empower people. It also includes thinking through the organization's mission, defining it, then clearly and visibly using organizational resources to accomplish it. The organizational leader clearly sets goals and priorities and defines and maintains standards. In victim programs, leaders will model and integrate the values and ethics of victim-centered programming.

Financial Viability

Viable organizations are those that are able to meet their financial obligations when due without incurring debt that will be difficult to repay.

Organizational Sustainability

Organizational sustainability occurs when an organization is profitable enough to plan for and develop financial reserves that will help it weather changes in the economic environment and the program without risk to the organization. If an organization is sustainable, it has invested sufficient resources so that it can sustain itself over the years.

Best Practices

Category: Direct Services

Topics: Personal Advocacy, Crisis Counseling/Intervention, Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Tribal Justice Systems Advocacy, Victim Rights, Financial Assistance, Support Group, Medical, Chemical and Mental Health, Appropriateness and Accessibility, Confidentiality, Safety and Security of Service Location

Personal Advocacy

Definition: Individual support and/or assistance with issues resulting from victimization in accordance with victims' self-identified needs and goals, and with access to culturally relevant and language appropriate services.

Best Practices:

1. *Engage with victims through a respectful approach that honors who they are as individuals and commits to meeting their needs.*
2. *Build trust and rapport to support victims in strengthening their self-empowerment and decision-making.*
3. *Understand and inform victims of the possible civil and/or criminal justice options or responses.*
4. *Discuss with victims the dynamics of their victimization and the legal parameters.*
5. *Recognize and honor the role of culture in victimization and victims' responses to victimization.*
6. *Advocate for victims' choices and rights.*
7. *Speak on behalf of victims if requested or needed.*
8. *Assist in accessing available resources and personal support networks.*
9. *Work with victims to identify a culturally relevant plan to support their goals.*
10. *Know your own expertise and limitations to most effectively serve victims.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Clearly inform victims as early as possible in the case process about the role of the government-based advocate and the confidentiality of information provided to the advocate.*
2. *Discuss with victims the available on-going support services from other non-profit victim service agencies, and supply contact information.*

Resources and Strategies:

Direct Services Chapter from the National Victim Assistance Academy

www.ovcttac.org/svaa/documents/nvaa_documents/Chapter_7_Direct_Services.pdf

Crisis Counseling/Intervention

Definition: A personal response to individuals in crisis who are impacted by crime, provided in a variety of settings.

Best Practices:

1. *Assess immediate needs for safety and security.*
2. *Listen, validate and honor individual victims' experiences of victimization.*
3. *Help victims identify next steps.*
4. *Develop a safety plan with victims.*
5. *Inform about resources and provide referrals according to victims' plans.*
6. *Provide access to crisis support by telephone, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Inform victims of an after-hours crisis line and the type of support they may reasonably expect to receive when calling.*

Resources and Strategies:

Direct Services Chapter from the National Victim Assistance Academy

www.ovcttac.org/svaa/documents/nvaa_documents/Chapter_7_Direct_Services.pdf

Civil, Criminal, Juvenile and Tribal Justice Systems Advocacy

Definition: Personal support and assistance to ensure victims' interests are represented and their rights upheld within all justice systems.

Best Practices:

1. *Understand the history of justice system biases and their possible impact on victims and cases, and work with victims and systems to minimize their effects.*
2. *Understand and explain how the justice system works and the continuum of justice options, including restorative justice.*
3. *Provide assistance in making informed choices.*
4. *Provide support throughout all processes including those involving other systems (e.g., child/adult protection, medical, etc.).*
5. *Ensure victims' statutory rights are upheld.*
6. *Develop and implement a protocol addressing cross-jurisdictional issues.*
7. *Assist in pursuing criminal and civil orders.*
8. *Assist victims in accessing justice system partners as resources.*
9. *Assist in accessing legal resources as appropriate.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Inform victims of the implications when law enforcement and prosecution work toward making a chargeable case whether or not the victim agrees.*

2. Inform victims of the discretion afforded law enforcement agencies and prosecutors, and the role victims have in the criminal justice process.
3. Ensure that victims' input and objections are communicated to the prosecutors.
4. Assist in developing policies and procedures to ensure that victims' rights are upheld.

Resources and Strategies:

Navigating the Justice Systems Chapter from the National Victim Assistance Academy
www.ovcttac.gov/svaa/documents/nvaa_documents/Chapter_4_Justice_Systems.pdf

Victim Rights

Definition: The statutory rights all victims have under the law, as well as the right to accessible, safe, knowledgeable, supportive and respectful services from victim service providers.

Best Practices:

1. Provide to victims a copy of their statutory rights in a format and language that is easily understood.
2. Make available to victims a document that describes the organization's commitment to victim-centered services (e.g. code of ethics, advocacy rights, accessibility, etc.).
3. **For Non-profits:** Provide a written copy of the organization's complaint process and encourage victims to use the process if needed, without bias or retaliation.
4. Inform victims of the role of the Crime Victim Justice Unit within the Minnesota Office of Justice Programs and provide contact information.

Government-based Program Specific:

1. Ensure that information regarding the agency's complaint process is readily available to victims and provide information on how to access the complaint policy and process.
2. Develop, and periodically review, procedures and practices related to crime victim rights, and make any necessary changes to ensure continued compliance with the statutory obligations to victims.
3. Work with local law enforcement, probation, prosecutors, and the judiciary to ensure they understand their statutory obligations to crime victims.
4. Establish an end-of-case process that ensures complete information is provided to victims about post-conviction issues, rights, resources and information.

Resources and Strategies:

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs – Crime Victim Rights
http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/publications/Brochures/crime_victim_rights.pdf

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs – Crime Victim Justice Unit

http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/cvs/cvju/publications/CVJU_brochure.pdf

Minnesota Crime Victim Rights Guide: Reference Guide for Criminal Justice Agencies and Professionals:

http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/cvs/cvju/publications/Victim_Rights_Reference_Guide.pdf

Financial Assistance

Definition: Information and assistance in obtaining financial resources to alleviate the financial impact of a crime.

Best Practices:

1. *Understand and explain the differences between state crime victim reparations, restitution and emergency funds.*
2. *Inform and assist in applying for state crime victim reparations and emergency funds.*
3. *Connect victims with community financial resources and assistance.*
4. *Assist in pursuing civil financial remedies if appropriate.*
5. *Ensure victims are aware of the steps necessary to pursue restitution in a criminal case.*
6. *Create documentation for all staff outlining the restitution process for each county served by the agency.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Assist in developing agency policies and procedures to ensure the efficient and timely collection of information for the processing of restitution requests.*
2. *Provide assistance to victims in the restitution process, including assistance with gathering and completing forms.*
3. *Discuss strategies with victim for collecting restitution if an offender is not complying with scheduled payments or otherwise not complying with the restitution order.*
4. *Work with local court administration to ensure that restitution orders are consistently entered as civil judgment and, in case of a prison commit, the restitution order is forwarded to the Dept. of Corrections.*

Resources and Strategies:

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs - Reparations

<http://www.dps.state.mn.us/ojp/cvs/reparations/index.htm>

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs - Restitution

<http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/cvs/cvju/publications/Restitution.pdf>

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs – Collecting Court-Ordered Restitution
<http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/cvs/cvju/publications/CollectingRestitution.pdf>

Minnesota Department of Corrections - Restitution
www.corr.state.mn.us/crimevictim/restitution.htm

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs – Emergency Fund
<http://www.ojp.state.mn.us/cvs/emergfund.htm>

Support Group

Definition: Meetings of victims of crime and/or others impacted by crime to provide emotional support and education to assist in healing and recovery.

Best Practices:

1. *Inform and assist victims in accessing culturally appropriate group support.*
2. *Provide trained facilitators.*
3. *Create a welcoming, safe and confidential environment.*
4. *Use a support group structure and/or guidelines that promote healthy interactions and ongoing healing.*
5. *Design group logistics (space, time, activity, location, duration) that work best for targeted victim populations and their needs.*
6. *Utilize participant surveys to improve the curriculum or group process.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Provide victims with referral information regarding available support groups.*

Resources and Strategies:

National Organization for Victims of Crime Support Group Guide
www.trynova.org/victiminfo/readings/

Medical, Chemical and Mental Health

Definition: Treatment and care provided by health professionals for victims and/or others impacted by crime.

Best Practices:

1. *Identify with the victims their possible health needs.*
2. *Provide information and referral for appropriate treatment options.*
3. *Assist victims in accessing health resources and providers, including culturally relevant options.*

Resources and Strategies:

Direct Services Chapter from the National Victim Assistance Academy

www.ovcttac.org/svaa/documents/nvaa_documents/Chapter_7_Direct_Services.pdf

Appropriateness and Accessibility

Definition: Services which are welcoming, culturally inclusive, physically accessible, and appropriate to all victims seeking assistance. Those working with victims are aware of the cultural, individual and role differences including those related to race/ethnicity, language, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, physical and/or cognitive ability, social class, economic status, education, marital status, religious affiliation, and residency, without regard to immigration status.

Best Practices:

1. *Identify personal biases and work to limit their effect.*
2. *Use flexibility, innovation and persistence to promote fair access and the benefits of service.*
3. *Value and promote justice and equity in delivery of services.*
4. *Use initiative and ongoing commitment to ensure that the program and services are welcoming, available and extended to populations in need.*
5. *Ensure accessibility at all service delivery sites.*

Resources and Strategies:

“21 Cultural Competencies for the 21st Century” by Jose J. Soto, J.D.

www.inmotionmagazine.com/soto6.html

Michigan Education Association: “What is Cultural Competency?”

www.mea.org/diversity/what_is_cultural_competency.html

Confidentiality

Definition: All personal information relating to victims is held private by victim service providers according to their organizational policy and in accordance with Minnesota state law, unless victims give prior consent permitting the disclosure of information through informed consent.

Best Practices:

1. *Clearly inform victims about data privacy, confidentiality policies and mandated reporting requirements as early as possible in the intake process.*

2. Clearly define and follow confidentiality policies throughout the agency, among all staff and volunteers.
3. Ensure all staff and volunteers understand their professional responsibility, ethical obligations and legal requirements regarding confidentiality of client information and receipt of services.
4. Have in place a policy and protocol that is in compliance with legal requirements for data and record retention.
5. Develop a system for coding victims' files that maintains anonymity.

Government-based Program Specific:

1. Clearly explain the confidentiality rules for government-based victim service programs at the onset of a criminal case.

Resources and Strategies:

Minnesota Statutes 2010, Section 13.822 Sexual Assault Data

www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=13.822

Minnesota Statutes 2010, Section 13.80 Domestic Abuse Data

www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=13.80

Minnesota Statutes 2010, Section 611A.32, Subdivision 5 Classification of data collected by grantees

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=611A.32>

Minnesota Statutes 2010, Section 611A.32, Subdivision 5 Classification of Data

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=611A.46>

Minnesota Statutes 2010, Section 13.823 Domestic Abuse or Sexual Attack Programs

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=13.823>

Safety and Security of Service Location

Definition: Appropriate steps are taken by organizations to ensure the security of their physical program location and structure, and for the individual safety of clients, staff, volunteers, board members, etc.

Best Practices

1. Develop and follow safety protocols for access to the program service locations by the general public.
2. Train staff in appropriate safety and security policies and practices.
3. Clearly inform clients of safety and security protocols.

- 4. Ensure building security equipment and tools are updated regularly and function properly.*

Government-based Program Specific:

- 1. Work with the court to ensure that a safe waiting area for victims is available at the courthouse.*

Category: Community Partnerships

Topics: Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Tribal Justice Systems, Victim Service and Social Service Providers, Government Administration, Community Education and Outreach, Community Engagement and Partnerships

Civil, Criminal, Juvenile, and Tribal Justice Systems

Definition: Efforts in partnership to improve the justice system's responsiveness to, and understanding of, crime victims.

Best Practices:

1. *Build and maintain cooperative working relationships with and/or between criminal justice partners.*
2. *Participate in multi-disciplinary training.*
3. *Utilize effective policies and protocols to connect the work between system partners and victim service programs on behalf of victims, ensuring clear definition of roles and responsibilities for all partners.*
4. *Ensure all partners are knowledgeable of victims' statutory rights.*
5. *Participate in a multidisciplinary team to address systems change opportunities for a more effective response to crime victimization.*

Resources and Strategies:

Criminal Justice Institute
www.cj institute.org/node/5

Victim Service and Social Service Providers

Definition: Developing formal and informal collaboration with other crime victim and social service providers to coordinate efforts in meeting crime victim needs.

Best Practices:

1. *Maintain a current list of community resources that provide victim-centered services.*
2. *Develop ongoing relationships with culturally specific programs and resources to ensure access for victims.*
3. *Strategize together to leverage existing/available resources.*
4. *Establish and maintain a referral procedure in cooperation with other community agencies.*
5. *Collaborate to develop new ways of integrating and delivering victim-centered services.*
6. *Participate in multi-disciplinary training.*

7. *Participate in task forces, committees, and work groups to increase effectiveness in a victim-centered response.*

Resources and Strategies:

Criminal Justice Institute

www.cj institute.org/node/5

Government Administration

Definition: Developing formal and informal relationships with federal, tribal, state, and local government leaders to gain support and funding.

Best Practices:

1. *Create awareness within state and local government of crime victimization issues and programs.*
2. *Develop understanding of political process, including policy and funding.*
3. *Define value of services to the health of the community for greater government and community understanding and partnership.*

Community Education and Outreach

Definition: Educating the community on crime victimization issues and promoting awareness of available services and prevention efforts.

Best Practices:

1. *Utilize training tools based on best practices and most recent research.*
2. *Educate the community to change the social norms that promote and/or contribute to crime and violence.*
3. *Conduct primary prevention activities in the community.*
4. *Provide information and education regarding personal and community safety planning.*
5. *Regularly survey key community stakeholders for feedback on the program to use in program development and marketing strategies.*
6. *Develop and implement a marketing/outreach plan that is regularly updated and improves accessibility and awareness.*
7. *Regularly update marketing materials, such as brochures, logo, business cards, signs and a website, to ensure accurate and current information and cultural relevance.*

Government-based Program Specific:

1. *Participate in government-sponsored activities that allow for promotion of: agency services; community and public safety; and community awareness of crime victimization issues.*

Resources and Strategies:

The Ultimate Educator: Achieving Maximum Results through Adult Learning
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/educator/welcome.html

Sustaining Grassroots Community-Based Programs:

A Toolkit for Community- and Faith-Based Service Providers
download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/prevline/pdfs/SMA08-4340.pdf

Community Engagement and Partnerships

Definition: The active roles played by community organizations, businesses and individual members in the development and delivery of services in their community.

Best Practices:

1. *Engage a wide variety of community businesses and organizations, including culturally specific resources, about the work of the agency and create ongoing partnerships.*
2. *Build networks to ensure funding, recruit volunteers, and sustain other types of community support.*
3. *Enhance public safety and efficiency of services through input and commitment from community partners to ensure a continuum of supports for victims.*
4. *Discuss with community partners the varying ethics that apply in different organizations and the potential impact on collaborative work on behalf of victims.*
5. *Ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities in joint efforts on behalf of victims.*
6. *Develop partnerships that establish the program as a valued and essential victim service resource that positively affects the quality of life for the community.*
7. *Present evaluation data to the community to promote services and gain support.*
8. *Be transparent about the scope of program services when communicating with the public.*

Resources and Strategies (Best Practice Examples): Making Collaboration Work: The Experiences of Denver Victim Services 2000

www.ovc.gov/publications/bulletins/mcwedvs2000/welcome.html

Sexual Violence Justice Institute

www.mncasa.org/svji.html

Category: Business Practices: Governance

Topics: Governance Obligations, Legal Requirements and Standards, Financial Management, Finances Support Mission and Values

The following links apply to the entire Business Practices - Governance section.

Note: Grant recipients of OJP are required to know, understand and adhere to the OJP Grant Manual, as required in their grant contract. None of the best practice guidelines in this document hold more weight or supersede the grant requirements as outlined in the Grant Manual.

OJP Grant Manual:

www.ojp.state.mn.us/Grants/Grant_Manual.PDF

Resources, Policies and Strategies:

Minnesota Council on Nonprofits Principles

www.mncn.org/info_principles.htm

www.mncn.org/info_govern.htm

Minnesota Statutes 2009, Chapter 317A. Nonprofit Corporations

www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/revisor/pages/statute/statute_chapter_toc.php?chapter=317A

Fiduciary Duties of Directors of Charitable Organizations

www.ag.state.mn.us/charities/FiduciaryDuties.asp

Guide to Charities Law (includes fiduciary responsibilities)

www.ag.state.mn.us/Brochures/pubGuidetoCharitiesLaws.pdf

Independent Sector

www.independentsector.org/

Charities Review Council: Accountability Standards for Governance

www.smartgivers.org/Governance_Resources.html

MAP for Nonprofits for Governance Articles and Training

www.mapfornonprofits.org/

Governance Obligations

Definition: Governance is defined as the statutory, legal, fiduciary, moral and ethical obligations that guide the policies and actions of the **board of directors of a nonprofit organization**. Note: Other types of councils or boards (tribal, city, county, educational institution, hospital, etc.) have different governance obligations not defined here.

Best Practices:

1. *Operate in compliance with organizational by-laws, guidelines and resolutions.*
2. *Have a board structure with policies and practices that are designed to meet fiscal and governance responsibilities.*
3. *Know and commit to the organization's mission, to meeting the needs of crime victims it serves and to eliminating barriers to access and services.*
4. *Recruit, orient and develop individual board members that reflect the diversity of the service community and possess needed skills, expertise and connections.*
5. *Follow policies and practices to ensure against conflict of interest.*
6. *Meet as a full board at least four times a year, with one meeting constituting an annual meeting, and more as needed to ensure overall organizational accountability and performance.*
7. *Review financial reports at regularly scheduled board meetings to be fully aware of the current financial condition/status of the agency.*
8. *Ensure written personnel policies and procedures are in place and systematically followed.*
9. *Ensure an organizational structure is in place to provide effective victim-centered services.*
10. *Have a positive, productive and supportive role with the director.*
11. *Ensure checks and balances within the governing structure (e.g. the director is not a voting member).*
12. *Hire and, when necessary, terminate the director (or equivalent position/title).*
13. *Regularly and systematically evaluate the performance of the director in a non-punitive way, based on clearly identified, stated and written expectations.*
14. *Ensure a safe, productive and satisfying organizational work environment.*
15. *Ensure that there is an internal grievance process in place that can be accessed without bias by staff or volunteers.*
16. *Periodically evaluate its performance as the governing body.*

Legal Requirements and Standards

Definition: Victim service organizations operate in compliance with legal requirements, good business standards, and standards that guide services to victims.

Best Practices:

1. *Know and comply with state, federal, and tribal legal and fiscal obligations and/or guidelines as an organization and an employer, including but not limited to: Minnesota Human Rights Act, protection of privacy, Tennessee Warning, release of information, mandatory reporting, employment law, lobbying and fundraising restrictions, etc.*
2. *Know and comply with reporting and filing required to meet all legal and fiscal obligations.*
3. *Follow civil rights compliance requirements and nondiscrimination in hiring as an Equal Opportunity Employer (EOE).*
4. *Know and comply with the legal requirements of recruiting, hiring, employing and terminating employees.*
5. *Know and follow rules on the appropriate use of employees versus independent contractors.*

Financial Management

Definition: Financial oversight by the governing board of directors/governing body and organizational policies and procedures that demonstrate effective management of all financial aspects of the organization.

Best Practices for the governing body:

1. *Demonstrate knowledge in budgeting, budget forecasting and financial reporting.*
2. *Be aware of potential financial risk to the organization, its staff, facility and people served, and have policies, tools and resources in place to minimize and manage risk.*
3. *Carry adequate insurance to protect assets and minimize liability and risk.*
4. *Actively engage in fundraising (if allowed) to support its annual budget and sustain the program.*
5. *Engage an independent auditor and participate in an auditing process as needed and required.*

Best Practices for the director:

1. *Operate with a system of financial controls in place to ensure adequate financial planning, appropriate checks and balances and fiscal integrity.*

2. *Know how to budget, project and manage cash flow, and use financial tools (e.g. budgeting, forecasting, cash flow analysis, balance sheets, etc.) to plan for organizational viability and sustainability.*
3. *Regularly monitor revenue and expenses and produce financial reports for governing body oversight to ensure awareness of immediate and long-term financial condition, and to assist future planning.*
4. *Ensure effective procurement and purchasing policies and procedures that promote transparent, conflict-free, cost effective and well-documented transactions.*
5. *Properly allocate costs to the function, revenue source or project benefitting from the expenditure.*
6. *Have financial systems in place to prevent commingling of funds where prohibited.*
7. *Understand what constitutes supplanting of funds and plan effectively to make sure it does not occur.*
8. *If accounting or any other administrative service is outsourced, maintain appropriate financial controls for oversight.*
9. *Demonstrate knowledge of financial systems, financial controls and accountabilities.*

Finances Support Mission and Values

Definition: Resources are garnered and allocated to align with the organizational values and support activities designed to accomplish the mission.

Best Practices:

1. *Regularly assess the current and future needs of the organization and allocate resources to address those needs in support of the organization's mission.*
2. *Demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement of service quality and cultural proficiency and align resources accordingly.*
3. *Maintain an accessible, safe and welcoming environment for victims and an efficient and productive work environment for staff through ensuring adequate resources for facility and equipment upgrades and maintenance.*
4. *Ensure adequate resources in the annual budget for staff development.*
5. *Cultivate positive communications with a variety of funders to ensure continued financial support.*
6. *Engage and mobilize the community in support of the organization to raise awareness and generate financial support.*

Category: Business Practices: Leadership

Topics: Executive Knowledge and Skills, Supervision, Staff Structures and Development, Planning and Evaluation

Resources and Strategies:

Office for Victims of Crime National Leadership Curriculum

www.ovc.gov/assist/leadership/welcome.html

Executive Knowledge and Skills

Definition: The high level leadership, management and administrative skills needed to lead a victim service agency and be a knowledgeable and credible voice for the organization and for victims.

Best Practices:

- 1. Have the education and/or equivalent experience, skill sets and ability to lead and promote a victim-centered service organization.*
- 2. Exhibit extensive knowledge of victimization, victim services, and a commitment to victim-centered services.*
- 3. Demonstrate understanding of the organization, services, community and relevant issues and trends.*
- 4. Understand her/his role and responsibility to the governing body of the organization.*
- 5. Exhibit knowledge and professionalism in executive responsibilities.*
- 6. Demonstrate a commitment to cultural proficiency at all levels of the organization.*
- 7. Possess effective fundraising, grant-writing, financial analysis and management skills.*
- 8. Have awareness of local, statewide and federal resources for victim assistance.*
- 9. Understand the organization's service community, the issues and trends within the community, and implement strategies to effectively access opportunities that benefit the program and the victims it serves.*
- 10. Clearly articulate and model commitment to the mission, vision and values of the organization both within the organization and in the community.*
- 11. Have a succession plan in place to ensure the passing on of executive knowledge in cases of emergency or planned executive transition.*
- 12. Use existing coalitions and other victim service programs and resources for information and organization and program development.*
- 13. Use technology to effectively communicate, report, raise funds and monitor activities.*

Supervision

Definition: The obligations of the director and other supervisors to create a positive and productive workplace environment that benefits both paid and unpaid staff and promotes high quality services to victims.

Best Practices:

1. *Support and promote a victim-centered workplace climate that encourages and develops staff leadership.*
2. *Apply management and supervisory principles, theories and best practices to motivate staff, achieve organizational excellence and accomplish quality outcomes for victims.*
3. *Know and use open posting and hiring practices, and cultural networks/media to ensure a diverse pool of candidates for open staff positions.*
4. *Guard against actions that create the appearance of a conflict of interest (e.g. hiring relatives and friends).*
5. *Identify and monitor individual staff burn-out and have policies and/or systems in place to support staff self-care and personal boundary setting.*
6. *Develop and implement policies, tools and procedures that ensure clear expectations for staff, quick and effective responses to performance issues, respectful and positive resolution of conflict, ongoing feedback, and recognition and rewards for quality performance.*
7. *Treat staff fairly and equitably in the areas of accountability, expectations, quality of supervision and rewarding of performance.*
8. *Use transparency and professionalism in communications.*
9. *Use staff feedback and exit interviews as tools for continuous quality improvement.*

Staff Structures and Development

Definition: Policies and procedures that ensure a positive and productive work environment that supports paid and unpaid staff satisfaction, development, retention and commitment.

Best Practices:

1. *Implement a plan for recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse, stable and quality group of employees.*
2. *Develop and use policies and procedures for recruiting, training, orienting, evaluating, supervising, disciplining and terminating employees.*
3. *Have current written position descriptions that accurately define roles and responsibilities and reflect job duties for staff at all levels of the organization.*
4. *Have a current organizational chart with positions and lines of authority.*

5. *Have policies in place that address bias and promote and support cultural proficiency.*
6. *Have and use an organizational code of conduct that includes clear professional boundaries between and among supervisors, staff and people served.*
7. *Provide opportunities for staff development, including training to increase cultural proficiency.*
8. *Use a consistent and effective performance review process and regularly conduct performance evaluations of all staff, based on current job description, work plan and/or other stated expectations.*
9. *Provide positive and constructive performance feedback to staff on an ongoing basis.*
10. *Ensure that each employee has a development plan that is based on identified needs and related to overall performance.*
11. *If appropriate, each staff will have a workplan that is aligned with the organization's strategic plan and individual staff progress is monitored on a regular basis.*
12. *Provide to staff a grievance policy that can be used without bias or fear of retaliation.*

Planning and Evaluation

Definition: Planning and evaluation that ensures programs are relevant and viable and are contributing to the accomplishment of the mission.

Best Practices:

1. *Update regularly its strategic plan and/or business plan to reflect internal and external changes and challenges and to ensure relevance.*
2. *Develop and implement an organization-wide cultural proficiency plan.*
3. *Routinely ask for victims' opinions and ideas for improving service and have a system in place to use that information.*
4. *Have a process in place and conduct ongoing evaluation of its service impact, outcomes and satisfaction, including input from victims, staff, community members, and community partners, and integrate that feedback into program planning and improvement.*
5. *Understand issues and trends, and opportunities and challenges that may affect the quality of services to victims and the effectiveness and sustainability of the organization.*

Ethics for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers

Developed by the National Victim Assistance Standards Consortium (NVASC)

Section I: SCOPE OF SERVICES

Ethical Standard 1.1: The victim assistance provider understands his or her legal responsibilities, limitations, and the implications of his/her actions within the service delivery setting, and performs duties in accord with laws, regulations, policies, and legislated rights of persons served.

Ethical Standard 1.2: The victim assistance provider accurately represents his or her professional title, qualifications, and/or credentials in relationships with persons served and in public advertising.

Ethical Standard 1.3: The victim assistance provider maintains a high standard of professional conduct.

Ethical Standard 1.4: The victim assistance provider achieves and maintains a high level of professional competence.

Ethical Standard 1.5: The victim assistance provider who provides a service for a fee informs a person served about the fee at the initial session or meeting.

Section II: COORDINATING WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

Ethical Standard 2.1: The victim assistance provider conducts relationships with colleagues and other professionals in such a way as to promote mutual respect, confidence, and improvement of services.

Ethical Standard 2.2: The victim assistance provider shares knowledge and encourages proficiency in victim assistance among colleagues and other professionals.

Ethical Standard 2.3: The victim assistance provider serves the public interest by contributing to the improvement of systems that impact victims of crime.

Section III: DIRECT SERVICES

Ethical Standard 3.1: The victim assistance provider respects and attempts to protect the victim's civil rights.

Ethical Standard 3.2: The victim assistance provider recognizes the interests of the person served as a primary responsibility.

Ethical Standard 3.3: The victim assistance provider refrains from behaviors that communicate victim blame, suspicion regarding victim accounts of the crime, condemnation for past behavior, or other judgmental, anti-victim sentiments.

Ethical Standard 3.4: The victim assistance provider respects the victim's right to self-determination.

Ethical Standard 3.5: The victim assistance provider preserves the confidentiality of information provided by the person served or acquired from other sources before, during, and after the course of the professional relationship.

Ethics for Victim Assistance Programs and Providers (cont'd)

Ethical Standard 3.6: The victim assistance provider avoids conflicts of interest and discloses any possible conflict to the program or person served as well as to prospective programs or persons served.

Ethical Standard 3.7: The victim assistance provider terminates a professional relationship with a victim when the victim is not likely to benefit from continued services.

Ethical Standard 3.8: The victim assistance provider does not engage in personal relationships with persons served which exploit professional trust or could impair the victim assistance provider's objectivity and professional judgment.

Ethical Standard 3.9: The victim assistance provider does not discriminate against a victim or another staff member on the basis of race/ethnicity, language, sex/gender, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, social class, economic status, education, marital status, religious affiliation, residency, or HIV status.

Ethical Standard 3.10: The victim assistance provider furnishes opportunities for colleague victim assistance providers to seek appropriate services when traumatized by a criminal event or client interaction.

Section IV: ADMINISTRATION AND EVALUATION

Ethical Standard 4.1: The victim assistance provider reports to appropriate authorities the conduct of any colleague or other professional (including self) that constitutes mistreatment of a person served or brings the profession into dishonor.