



Victim Services Assessment (VSA) Overview and Assessment Topics

Description

Working with the Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) Team, PSN site teams will examine appropriate victim services and programming in their district for assessment and potentially identify a specific focus area within victim services to focus the assessment (e.g., domestic violence). This document provides an overview of expected activities throughout the VSA process.

In collaboration with your PSN Team, the assessment team will identify service providers and partnerships to collaborate with throughout this process. Below are example steps of an assessment to be incorporated into a VSA focusing on DV and include:

- Determining your current capacity to respond to DV victims, including the effectiveness, accessibility, and resources/funding of existing programs and services;
- Identifying the breadth of state, local, and national organizations and agencies that exist and provide DV-related services and programming;
- Identifying opportunities to enhance and/or create new DV-related programs and services; and
- Making recommendations to enhance multidisciplinary responses to DV, including through collaboration with local, state, and/or community-based partnerships.

These four steps can be applied to all focus areas (e.g., sexual assault, homicide). After completion of the VSA, the PSN TTA team will provide a report with recommendations, which will include tailored TTA recommendations based on needs identified in the VSA.

TTA Provider/Subject Experts

National Center for Victims of Crime and CNA

Local Personnel to Participate in the Assessment

- U.S. Attorney's Office
- Police department(s) victim services department liaison or representative
- Police department(s) investigators
- State-level victim services (e.g., statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, state-level Department of Health and Human Services)
- Local-level victim services, (e.g., local domestic violence and sexual assault shelters/coalitions/centers, crisis response centers, population-specific centers (e.g., LGBTQ+, immigrant, or formerly-incarcerated), family justice centers, reentry and transitional housing programs, mental health centers, YWCA, faith-based organizations, university departments of public safety, Salvation Army, etc.)
- County prosecutors
- Parole and probation agencies
- Court personnel

Activities for the Pre-Assessment (Online Questionnaire)

- Identify topic area(s) within victim services that your site wants to examine.
- Identify existing services, programming, and current partners that are playing a role in the area(s).
- Develop goals for the assessment and site visit.

Activities for the Assessment Site Visit (In-Person)

- Interviews and collaborative meetings with the above federal, state, and local personnel.
- Review department policies and procedures.
- Attend meetings with police department and victim services organizations.

Estimated Time to Completion

- The PSN TTA Team will deliver an assessment report within two months after the site visit.

General Areas of Examination and Discussion for Every Assessment

- *Collaboration and Leadership*
 - Level of integration, collaboration, and overlap of services provided by different organizations.
 - Memorandums of Understanding in place.
 - Level of buy-in for victim services from justice entities (police, prosecutor, courts, Sheriff, etc.), providers and key leaders within the community.
 - General awareness by the public of the range of services available collective for victims.
- *Effectiveness of Service Provision*
 - Organizational policies and written/standardized programming or procedures concerning victims.
 - Standard procedures on interviewing, speaking, and interacting with victims
 - Policies or procedures for reaching out to victims and/or engaging with the community or specific local populations
 - Objective measures of and perceived effectiveness of the services victim services available on the area(s) of focus.
 - Victim participation inclusion to ascertain the experiences of victims with the particular organization or task force (i.e., what their needs were and whether they were met)
 - Utilization numbers/volume from providers for the area of focus including demographics of victims served.
 - Victims served by from particular populations (e.g., elderly victims, LGBT+ victims, child victims, etc.)
 - Victims served based on type of crime (e.g., sexual assault, hate crimes, domestic violence, homicide, etc.)
 - Total number of requests for services or programming from victims, as well as number of requests that are met and unmet
 - Caseload of service providers.
 - Key challenges to effective provision/delivery of victim services and factors that contribute to these challenges.

- *Training*
 - Organizational definition and understanding of what a victim/crime survivor is, what victimization is, and what trauma is.
 - Awareness of and training on trauma-informed approaches when investigating and interacting with victims.
 - If law enforcement, training on victim-related topics in the academy and in-service.
 - Organizational training on trauma-informed or victim-centered care
 - Supports available to service providers as they deal with trauma in their profession.
- *Victim Engagement*
 - Intake process across providers.
 - Investigation policies, procedures, and processes with the PD (varying by crime type) including realities and perceptions of coming forward as a victim.
 - Victim notification both on the front end (investigation/adjudication) and back end (jail/prison/release/parole).
 - Availability of victim advocates and placement of advocates within the system.
- *Access to Services*
 - Location of services relative to victims that utilize or need these services typically.
 - Availability of services to victims, particularly in off hours.
 - Connecting with services (24/7 hotline, website, walk-in, call for service, etc.)
- *Resources and Funding*
 - Amount of support the victim-related programming, services, and/or unit receives from the organization as a whole, from other PSN task force organizations, and from the local and/or state government
 - Identifying current and possible streams of funding to support victims in focus area(s).

Topic Specific Areas of Examination and Discussion (Example)

- *Domestic Violence (DV)*
 - Identifying the agency's definition and understanding of what constitutes DV; how it identifies domestic violence; what, if any, understanding of DV trauma and victimization it has (including the effects on children and communities); how it distinguishes the dynamics of DV and intimate partner violence; and whether it has an understanding of the unique dynamics of underserved and/or at-risk DV survivors.
 - Identifying the range of housing supports for DV survivors including emergency shelters, as well as transitional and permanent housing.
 - Identifying the legal supports available for DV survivors.
 - Identifying job opportunities and supports available for DV survivors.
 - Officer training as it relates to responding to DV calls.
 - Topics for prosecutors, court personnel, and probation and parole
 - Identifying the DV investigation and prosecution strategies
 - Identifying whether there is federal-state-local DV coordination and agency partnerships
 - Identifying whether there is an understanding of applicable DV criminal statutes