

2015 Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Strategic Planning Process and Outcomes

Victims' Services Advisory Committee

March 2016



Background

In December 2014, President Obama signed into law the “Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriation Act, 2015.” The law raised the cap on annual expenditures from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Fund from \$745 Million to \$2.361 Billion. This unprecedented funding increase presented numerous opportunities for states and territories to greatly enhance the services available to meet the critical needs of victims of all types of crimes.

For Pennsylvania, the lifting of the VOCA cap meant a four-fold increase in federal VOCA funding. The state’s annual allocation jumped from \$17M to \$77M. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), as the administrator of VOCA funding for Pennsylvania, bears the responsibility for overseeing the VOCA funding. As the lead criminal justice system planning agency for Pennsylvania, PCCD’s mission is to enhance the quality and coordination of criminal and juvenile justice systems, facilitate the delivery of services to victims of crime and increase the safety of Pennsylvania’s communities. PCCD utilizes various advisory committees, representing all areas of the justice system, to inform its decisions.

The advisory committee on issues related to crime victims is the Victim’s Services Advisory Committee (VSAC). VSAC is a legislatively established committee to PCCD consisting of 15 members. Five members are public officials representing the state departments of Human Services, Aging, Corrections, the state’s Office of the Victim Advocate, and the Pennsylvania State Police. The remaining 10 members are appointed by the Governor, and include a district attorney, a crime victim and representatives of statewide domestic violence and sexual assault coalitions, victim service organizations, local government, the courts, and agencies working directly with children.

VSAC advises PCCD on functions related to the approval and disbursement of financial assistance. This includes the power and duty to review and comment on applications for funding. Additionally, VSAC advises on the definition, development and correlation of programs and projects and the establishment of priorities for direct victim services and compensation. VSAC considers whether funding strategies are coherent in focus and based upon a sound understanding of the social, demographic, criminological and economic forces affecting the state. Given these duties, VSAC was the logical body to undertake the strategic planning process for the use of the unprecedented increase in VOCA funding.

In order to ensure that Pennsylvania used a fiscally and programmatically responsible process for allocating this infusion of VOCA funding, VSAC assessed the current status and capacity of victim services in the state, regardless of funding source, with special attention paid to identifying the needs of victims, un-served and underserved victim populations, emerging issues and current demographics. VSAC also completed the critical task of revisiting the processes that Pennsylvania had been using for awarding VOCA funding.

While PCCD as a state agency administers a number of federal and state funding streams, it delegates the management of them to specific offices within the agency. The Office of Victim Services administers the federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), state Rights and Services (RASA), state Victims of Juvenile Offenders (VOJO), and federal STOP Violence Against Women (VAWA) Grant funding streams, since all of them relate to providing services and support to crime victims. Taken together, these funds average over \$80 million per year, providing support to more than 172 programs throughout Pennsylvania that

provide direct services to hundreds of thousands of crime victims annually. Each of these funding streams serves a specific purpose.

The federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Formula Grant Program provides services designed to respond to the physical, emotional and financial needs of crime victims by helping them stabilize their lives after the victimization, assisting them in navigating the criminal and juvenile justice systems and providing them with a safe and secure environment. The VOCA fund has one source: criminal fines and penalties paid by federal offenders. No taxpayer money is used. Each year, the U.S. Department of Justice allocates VOCA funding to the states and territories. These allocations are based on population, with a \$500,000 base amount given to each state. In Pennsylvania, funding from VOCA primarily supports direct services like hotlines, crisis intervention, hospital accompaniment, shelter, support groups and therapy. Funding is provided to all 67 counties and supports rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, child advocacy centers and programs that assist victims of drunk driving, child abuse and survivors of homicide.

The state Rights and Services (RASA) Formula Grant Program supports services to victims whose cases progress through the criminal justice system. The money comes from a \$25 penalty assessed against offenders. This money is placed into a special non-lapsing fund at the state level, which is then used to support grants. In Pennsylvania, RASA funds are used to provide procedural services such as court accompaniment, assistance with victim impact statements, notification of court dates and assistance with filing compensation claims.

The state Victims of Juvenile Offenders (VOJO) Formula Grant Program funds enable victims of juvenile offenders to assert their rights and navigate the juvenile justice system in Pennsylvania. VOJO-funded programs assist victims of juvenile offenders as their cases proceed through the juvenile justice system. The funding to support VOJO is a line item in Pennsylvania's State Budget. In Pennsylvania, the VOJO funding is used to support procedural services such as court accompaniment, assistance with victim impact statements, notification of court dates and assistance with filing compensation claims.

The Services Training Officers Prosecutors (STOP) Formula Grant Program is one of several funding programs established under the federal Violence Against Women Act. The purpose of STOP is to develop and strengthen the criminal justice system's response to violence against women and to support and enhance services for victims. STOP funding is formula funding at the federal level; however, Pennsylvania awards it to the counties utilizing a competitive solicitation process because the allocation that the Commonwealth receives is not sufficient to provide each of the 67 counties with an amount for a viable project.

The Victims of Crime Act, like many pieces of federal legislation, contains broad guidelines covering the eligibility requirements for services and programs receiving VOCA funding. It permits individual states to further refine eligibility requirements under VOCA, something that Pennsylvania has done since first receiving the funding nearly three decades ago. The federal VOCA guidelines state that VOCA funding is to be used for the following purposes:

1. To respond to the emotional and physical needs of crime victims;
2. To assist primary and secondary victims of crime to stabilize their lives after a victimization;
3. To assist victims to understand and participate in the criminal justice system; and

4. Provide victims of crime with a measure of safety and security such as boarding up broken windows and replacing or repairing locks.

The federal VOCA guidelines further define a crime victim as “a person who has suffered physical, sexual, financial or emotional harm as a result of the commission of a crime.” Pennsylvania has accepted the federal definition of crime victim and integrated the four federal purposes into its administration of VOCA funding with the exception of providing funding to assist victims to understand and participate in the criminal justice system (procedural services). The decision to exclude this type of service was a result of other state funding being available.

Additionally the federal VOCA guidelines define the eligibility criteria for eligible applicants to include the following:

1. Must provide services to crime victims and be operated by a non-profit organization or public agency, or a combination of such agencies or organizations. Eligible organizations include victim service organizations whose sole mission is to provide services to crime victims.

Examples given include: sexual assault and rape treatment centers, domestic violence programs and shelters, child abuse programs, centers for missing children, mental health services and other community-based victim coalitions and support organizations including those who serve survivors of homicide victims.

2. Or a public or non-profit organization that has a component which offers services to victims, if the funds are used to expand or enhance the delivery of crime victim services.

Examples given include: criminal justice agencies, religiously affiliated organizations, state crime victim compensation programs, hospitals and emergency medical facilities, etc.

Pennsylvania imposed an additional requirement that any program receiving VOCA funding must have a minimum of two years experience in serving victims of crime as the principal mission of the organization. The unintended effect of this requirement was making it difficult for the state to develop new services, particularly for un- or underserved populations of victims.

Another reality informing VSAC’s strategic planning process was the erosion of funding stability caused by the national recession that occurred in the mid-2000’s. For many years, the federal and state victim service-related formula funding streams administered by PCCD offered a predictable and somewhat stable source of support for the diverse network of victim services across Pennsylvania. All of this rapidly changed with the recession that occurred in the mid 2000’s. The recession at the national level and its ripple effects at the state and local levels ushered in a several year period of funding decreases. This took a heavy toll on non-profit and system-based victim service programs who struggled to provide services despite funding cuts -- from PCCD, local governments, the general public and philanthropic organizations.

It is important to note that the funding provided through the federal VOCA Grant Program has been used by Pennsylvania to build a network of experienced victim service providers across the Commonwealth. VSAC accomplished this through an intentional strategy of repeatedly funding specific

programs in counties across the Commonwealth over the past 30 years, making it possible for local victim service organizations to build and maintain a presence in their communities and provide consistent services. Additionally, VSAC has collaborated with its partners at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), administrators of federal and state funding through the federal Centers for Disease Control and Injury Prevention and State Department of Human Services, to further ensure the quality of services to victims. By investing resources in many of the same agencies and working collaboratively to address service provision issues, PCCD and the coalitions have built a strong network of victim services across Pennsylvania.

VSAC also relied on local input in awarding federal VOCA funding. This was done through a mechanism known as a county-based “local policy board” (LPB). LPBs were constructed to include stakeholders in the criminal and juvenile justice systems as well as victim services who were to come together periodically to analyze the needs of victims in each county and recommend to PCCD which agencies in their communities should receive the grant funds. VOCA, RASA and VOJO were each allocated based on LPB recommendations.

This system was used for over 25 years and worked well in times of abundant resources. As the recession took its toll, and federal and state funding allocations decreased over successive years, the local policy board process broke down.

Severe and protracted disagreements over funding allocations took place in some counties. As PCCD staff attempted to mediate the disagreements, three issues consistently appeared. First, not all local policy boards were following their own agreed upon policies and procedures for distributing funding. Second, there was an inconsistent understanding of both the role of the local policy board and the local policy board process. Finally, many individuals who sat on local policy boards lacked awareness of the differences in purpose among the VOCA, RASA and VOJO funding streams. These shortcomings of the local policy board process came sharply into focus when programs had to compete for funding.

With such an unprecedented amount of VOCA funding flowing to states, the United States Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) issued some broad guidance to states and territories for use of the VOCA funding. In their solicitation for 2015 VOCA Formula Grant funds, OVC stated that:

“The increased funds can be used to stabilize and institutionalize support for core victim service organizations, build capacity, or provide services to un-served victim groups... Congress has made it clear that experienced organizations have priority. We also believe that the substantially higher funds will allow states to direct resources to existing organizations to build and institutionalize capacity...capacity issues of existing organizations, including low salary pay and benefits, lack of access to professional development and training, and declining revenue have greatly hindered momentum in the field. The increased funds will allow states and sub-recipients to address these long-standing capacity issues and foster collaborations to further victims’ rights and services. Additionally the appropriation allows states to fund victim serving organizations or programs that have not received VOCA funding in the past.”

Given the unprecedented level of VOCA funding available, the direction coming from the DOJ’s OVC, and the tremendous opportunities that these circumstances provided, the Commission, at its March 11, 2015 meeting, delegated authority to VSAC to engage in a strategic planning process to determine how to spend the additional VOCA funding.

The Strategic Planning Process

In January 2015, VSAC undertook a year-long comprehensive strategic planning process to determine how to best allocate the increased VOCA funds. All of VSAC's planning sessions were conducted considering three foundational assumptions:

1. Pennsylvania's 2016 federal VOCA allocation would at least equal the \$77M received in 2015;
2. The foundation for VSAC's VOCA Strategy should be the creation of a stable and predictable funding mechanism for victim services in Pennsylvania; and
3. The VSAC VOCA Strategy should be developed within the broader context of how funding is being provided to support procedural services in Pennsylvania.

A fundamental part of the planning process involved an examination of eligibility, not only of the types of agencies that could apply for the VOCA funding but also of the types of services that could and should be supported with VOCA funding.

In early January 2015, VSAC Chair John Delaney and Director of the Office of Victims' Services Lynn Shiner convened a conference call of VSAC members to convey critical information regarding the 2015 increase in federal VOCA funds and begin to outline a high-level framework for the planning process that would unfold over the next year. During that call, three significant areas of focus were identified for the planning process:

1. Current approaches to funding victim services in Pennsylvania needed to be reviewed;
2. Processes used to identify agencies eligible to receive federal VOCA funding, as well as current eligible services, needed to be examined; and
3. The needs of crime victims in Pennsylvania, with a special focus on identification of unserved or underserved populations, as well as barriers to receiving services, needed to be assessed.

Identification of Short Term Needs

VSAC began to address the short-term needs of the victim services field. There was significant discussion about the impact that funding cuts and repeated fluctuations in funding had on victim service programs over the last several years.

Much information was provided to VSAC by PCCD staff about victim needs and victim service agency needs. Specifically, VSAC members were provided with:

- Survey data presenting both a national and state perspective. OVS staff presented an overview of the findings of a 2013 survey of VOCA funded agencies conducted by the National Association of VOCA Administrators, the National Center for Victims of Crime, and the National Network to End Domestic Violence.

- An overview of input received by OVS from both community- and system- based organizations regarding the impact of funding cuts and identification of program needs. This information was captured through monitoring reports and site visits.
- An overview of the decision-making process used by VSAC in 1997 when Pennsylvania experienced a three-fold increase in VOCA funding.

The information confirmed what VSAC and OVS were hearing anecdotally from the field. The 2013 National VOCA Survey results showed that an overwhelming number of victim service programs said there was a “critical” need for additional VOCA assistance, with more than 82% of respondents saying they desperately needed additional VOCA funds. Of the Pennsylvania programs participating in that survey, 88% of the responses aligned with the national perspective. The data further outlined that if the funding were ongoing, Pennsylvania respondents wanted to sustain services and increase their capacity to serve more victims. With one-time funding, they would focus on technology improvements. After technology, there was an equal need for shelter, housing renovations, repairs and research, strategic plans, needs assessments, and evaluations.

Many of Pennsylvania’s victim service agencies were caught in an involuntary cycle of retrenchment brought about by over five years of diminished funding. The impact of the VOJO cuts was particularly severe, with the number of victims and witnesses of juvenile offenders provided with services being sharply reduced. From 2000 to 2014, VOJO funding was reduced from \$3,500,000 to \$1,300,000. Across the state, victim/witness staff were being forced to prioritize who received what service, and the quality of service provision was suffering. Community-based agencies were being forced to liquidate assets to make up for losses in funding, wages were stagnating, benefits were being cut and it was becoming difficult to recruit, hire and retain qualified staff. When trained and experienced staff left victim service agencies, positions were not being filled, limiting the capacity of programs to meet demands for services. Those responsibilities were either shifted to existing staff, increasing the likelihood of burnout, or agencies cut services. Loss of counselors for adults and children and decreased availability of legal advocates caused decreases in clients served and hours spent.

Allocation of Funds to Address Short Term Needs

Based on the available data, a stopgap measure was proposed to meet the immediate needs of victims and victim service programs in the Commonwealth. VSAC sought to make a conservative amount of additional funds available. This was based on 1) uncertainty over whether the increase in VOCA funds was a one-time event; 2) a belief that releasing too much VOCA funding too quickly without a strategy for its use would not be prudent; and 3) a realization that there was an urgent need to provide an increase that would meaningfully impact services across the commonwealth.

In deciding what amount of additional funds to release, VSAC ascertained from the Bureau of Labor Statistics the yearly inflation rate from 2000 to 2013. They also reviewed the current maximum, median, minimum and average VOCA allocations and noted the fact that 46% of all VOCA funded agencies were receiving less than \$100,000, with the average amount being \$59,919. In addition, they considered the impact of various percentage increases on counties that had multiple agencies serving crime victims within the county. At its January 29, 2015 meeting, VSAC approved the following recommendations to meet the short term needs of victim service programs across Pennsylvania:

- For the 2015/16 VOCA funding cycle, counties would receive a 35% increase in VOCA funds above the amounts they received in 2014. This would equate to \$5.85 Million.
- Establish a set-aside of \$17.5 Million in VOCA funds to support this 35% increase for three additional years, to guard against the federal increase being one-time only.
- For procedural services (RASA & VOJO), setting aside \$2.52 Million to provide counties a 35% increase above the amount they received in the prior funding period.
- To set aside \$7.56 Million of the VOCA increase as a reserve to be allocated as needed to sustain the 35% increase for procedural services for three years.

VSAC then committed to spending the remainder of Calendar Year 2015 to formulating a strategic plan (i.e. setting funding and policy priorities) for the use of VOCA funding over the next three years. On March 11, 2015, the Commission approved VSAC's short-term recommendations and formally assigned it the task of creating a strategic plan for the use of VOCA funding in Pennsylvania.

Identification of Mid Term Needs

A significant part of VSAC's strategic planning efforts was gathering data:

- Representatives from PCCD's Office of Research, Evaluation and Strategic Policy Development presented on Pennsylvania crime trends from Uniform Crime Report Data, Census Information and an overview of the federal Bureau of Justice Assistance's National Victimization Survey.
- OVS staff provided an overview of the federal Office for Victims of Crime's Vision 21 Report with an accompanying discussion of its implications for service provision in Pennsylvania.
- OVS staff compared eligibility under the federal VOCA guidelines with Pennsylvania's more restrictive eligibility requirements.
- OVS staff presented the proposed changes to the federal VOCA guidelines.
- OVS staff shared updates on the strategic planning efforts of other states.

VSAC also identified stakeholders and information sources missing from the strategic planning process, and ways to engage these groups and collect this critical data. Missing stakeholders were surveyed to identify underserved populations, unmet needs of victims, barriers to receiving services and training needs. The survey also allowed respondents to provide suggestions on what they thought would be helpful to inform VSAC's decision-making. The web-based survey link was disseminated to a wide variety of organizations including, but not limited to:

- Pennsylvania Department of Aging and County Area Agencies on Aging
- Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

- Governor’s Commissions on African American, Latino and Asian American Affairs
- Equality PA
- State and Local Drug and Alcohol Programs
- Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumer’s Association
- Pennsylvania Immigrant Resource Center
- Pennsylvania Chapter of Child Advocacy Centers and Multi-Disciplinary Teams
- Pennsylvania Children and Youth Agencies

The 2015 VSAC Strategic Planning and Capacity Building Survey sent to current OVS grant recipients contained questions to gauge their levels of capacity in the following areas: staffing, financial administration, technology, and service provision. Regardless of audience, VSAC ensured that each survey included the questions: who is underserved, what are the unmet needs of victims, what are the barriers to receiving services and what are your training needs related to understanding victimization, services, rights, etc.

Two separate surveys were developed specifically for the Children and Youth Agencies and the Chief Juvenile Probation Officers. The Children and Youth survey was developed to gain a better understanding of whether child victims and their families were being connected with victim service agencies in their communities, and whether they were being made aware of crime victims’ compensation. The survey for Chief Juvenile Probation Officers was developed to gain a better understanding of what services were being delivered in light of the significant funding decreases under the Victims of Juvenile Offenders (VOJO) Program.

In addition to surveying the field, VSAC compiled a list of VOCA-eligible programs and activities that it wanted to learn more about prior to making any recommendations on the utilization of the VOCA increase. They included the following:

- Civil Legal Representation
- Hiring credentialed staff to provide therapy
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)
- Unmet needs of Child Advocacy Centers
- Sexual Violence Protection Orders
- Changing demographics (specifically Pennsylvania’s aging population)
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs)

- Services to victims of Human Trafficking
- In-person testimony before the Parole Board
- Placement of victim advocates within local police departments
- Pennsylvania Legal Aid Network
- Victims with mental illness
- Service to young men of color

VSAC heard presentations on each of these topics. After each presentation, a facilitated discussion occurred to identify information yet to be provided, how that information could be obtained and whether the appropriate stakeholders were included. Finally, OVS staff developed templates, based on the presentations, to structure the analysis of each service to consider need, cost, impact, whether it would be a new or enhanced service, whether other funding was available to support it, other facts that should be considered and possible unintended consequences.

Once the information had been gathered and discussed within the broader context of the state and national research, current and proposed federal guidelines and stakeholder survey results, VSAC voted on priorities for the upcoming VOCA funding cycle. VSAC also established funding processes, eligibility, discussed the viability of “carve-outs” for specific types of initiatives and crafted a framework for distribution of the VOCA funding.

Review of Funding Formulas

OVS uses funding formulas to allocate most of its federal and state victim-related funding streams. For over a decade, the following formulas were used:

VOCA and RASA: 25% county population, 50% collection of fines from criminal offenders, and 25% specific crimes from the Uniform Crime Report: murder, negligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and arson.

VOJO: 25% county population, 50% juvenile delinquency dispositions and 25% collections of fines from criminal offenders

In 2004, VSAC incorporated a “governor” or control mechanism on each of the funding formulas to ensure that no county would see a decrease of more than 1%, if overall allocations remained the same or increased. This provided a measure of stability and predictability. However, the increase in VOCA funding presented an opportunity to open these formulas up for re-examination.

Convening of Stakeholder Group

In August 2015, PCCD convened a meeting of outside stakeholders with expertise in budgeting, economics, statistics and victim services to examine the current funding formulas for VOCA, RASA and VOJO. The group reviewed a list of performance factors as possible variables that could be included in a formula. These included population, target crimes, collection of fines from criminal offenders, number

of victims served, community outreach, number of victims compensation assistance claims filed, and hours of service provided.

All stakeholders recommended removing collections from the VOCA formula since grantees had no control over whether judicial officials collected them. The group agreed to keep population as a variable because it had significant stability and is a reasonable indicator of need. Crime was also retained as a variable as it is indicative of need. The stakeholder group agreed that variables could be added as long as there was a logical connection to the fund. Examples discussed included the use of incentives such as improved service delivery, improvements in restitution collection, amount and increases in compensation awards. The stakeholders recommended retention of the current RASA formula.

The stakeholders suggested the VOJO formula eliminate collections and change population to juvenile population. The group agreed to keep juvenile delinquency dispositions as a factor.

The final consideration of the stakeholder group was the method for changing the funding formulas. They recommended immediate adoption of the new formulas -- given the fact that all counties stood to receive a significant increase in VOCA funding over historical allocations. Realizing the potential for this to be a one-time event, the group advised PCCD staff to take a proactive approach by identifying the counties which would see increases and decreases in future years so that these counties could be educated about the funding formulas and the potential impact. All in the stakeholder group members agreed that counties could receive at least what they received previously, barring an across-the-board decrease. Many observed that it was common practice across state government to grandfather historic amounts.

The stakeholder group then made these recommendations to a small group convened by VSAC. The VSAC Workgroup recommended the following refinements to the formulas:

- VOCA and RASA - 75% County Population, 25% Target Crime
- VOJO – 75% County Juvenile Population, 25% Juvenile Dispositions

The VSAC workgroup further recommended removing collections from the RASA formula since RASA recipients cannot exercise control over whether court officials collect assessments on offenders.

Modification of Funding Formulas

At the November 4, 2015 VSAC meeting, the following changes to the funding formulas were recommended to and adopted by VSAC:

VOCA – 75% County Population and 25% UCR target crimes to include: Murder, Non-Negligent Manslaughter, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary and Arson.

RASA - 75% County Population and 25% UCR target crimes to include: Murder, Non-Negligent Manslaughter, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary and Arson.

VOJO – 75% Juvenile Population, with juvenile population representing ages 0-17, and 25% Juvenile Delinquency Dispositions.

The VSAC members recognized that the transition to formulas that did not include collections as a factor would cause some shifts in allocation amounts to several counties over time. However, due to the significant increase in VOCA funding, VSAC decided there would be no loss in funding experienced by existing VOCA grantees. It is also important to note that the removal of the 1% governor from all of the formulas would now make it possible for counties to see decreased allocations if they experienced changes in the data variables used in the formulas.

Allocation of Funds for Infrastructure Improvement and Service Enhancement

The VSAC remained concerned about the lasting impact of the funding reductions from prior years. The workgroup acknowledged that the revisions to the funding formulas had the potential, over the long term, to stabilize funding for victim services in Pennsylvania. However, the members remained concerned about fixing the cumulative damage to programs in the field brought about by several years of funding cuts. For this reason, the workgroup committed itself to finding a means to provide a percentage increase to VOCA-funded programs for infrastructure strengthening activities. For RASA and VOJO funded programs, the workgroup specified that any increase be used for enhanced services.

Results of VSAC VOCA Strategic Planning Process

VSAC's year-long strategic planning process produced the following funding framework which was adopted by the Commission at its December 9, 2015 meeting.

Pennsylvania's VOCA Funding Framework

All VOCA grants will run on a three-year funding cycle.

- There will be no funding set aside for any specific VOCA eligible programs or activities.
- PCCD will conduct a two-part solicitation process: Noncompetitive and Competitive.
- For the Noncompetitive VOCA solicitation process, every currently funded agency in good standing will:
 - Receive its prior year allocation of VOCA funding (This is based on a total state 2015 VOCA allocation of \$22,578,750);
 - Be able to request up to a 25% increase for infrastructure improvement activities (This equates to \$5,644,688 in additional VOCA funding to programs across the state); and
 - Receive a two percent (2%) cost of living increase during the second and third years of the VOCA funding cycle.
- PCCD will make \$10 Million in VOCA funding available through a competitive solicitation process having the following parameters:
 - Current and new applicants are eligible to apply.
 - There is no requirement of prior services to victims of crime.
 - The applicant agency or a component of the applicant agency must have as its principal mission serving crime victims;

- Children’s Advocacy Centers (CAC's) that have achieved Accredited or Associate Membership Status are eligible to apply;
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs that establish partnerships with existing VOCA-funded local victim service agencies for service delivery, referrals, and training are eligible to apply.
- Priority will be given for applications that demonstrate broad, relevant local support.
- Priority will be given for applications that meaningfully address one or more of the following VSAC-identified priority areas for enhanced VOCA service provision:
 - Emergency Legal Services
 - Credentialed Therapists
 - Services for Victims of Human Trafficking
 - Sexual Violence Protection Orders
 - Increasing/Strengthening Services for Elderly Victims of Crime
 - Child Advocacy Centers
 - Services/Programs for Victims of Crime Who are Young Men of Color
 - Services for Victims with Mental Illness
 - Services for Victims with Low English Proficiency

RASA grants will run on a one year grant cycle.

- Every currently funded county in good standing will:
 - Receive its prior year allocation of RASA funding (This is based on a total state 2015-2016 RASA allocation of \$7,201,088); and
 - Be able to request up to a 25% increase to enhance service delivery (This equates to an additional \$1,800,272 in VOCA funds).

VOJO grants will run on a one year grant cycle.

- Every currently funded county in good standing will:
 - Receive its prior year allocation of VOJO funding (This is based on a total state 2015-2016 VOJO allocation of \$2,430,000); and
 - Be able to request up to a 25% increase to enhance service delivery (This equates to an additional \$607,500 in VOCA funds).

Additionally, VSAC made the recommendation to set aside VOCA funding, not to exceed \$65,000, as part of a statewide initiative to support one staff position at the Office of the Victim Advocate to coordinate in-person testimony before the parole board.

VOCA Discretionary Training Grant Project

The federal Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) recognized that the significant increase of VOCA funding to the field would create a need for states to provide training. In May 2015, OVC released an invitation to each state and territory to apply for funding under its Victim Assistance Discretionary Grant Training Program for VOCA Victim Assistance Grantees. The goal of this program was to provide training and technical assistance to VOCA victim assistance service providers and others who work with crime victims. Pennsylvania’s allocation under the VOCA Discretionary Training Program was \$939,371.

In coordination with VSAC's strategic planning process, Pennsylvania submitted a plan to OVC for use of the VOCA Discretionary Training Funds. The plan has five objectives:

1. To enhance and expand Pennsylvania's existing web-based training portal for victim service providers.
 - Retool the existing organizational capacity-building portal into a Learning Management System (LMS).
 - Work with subject matter experts in web-based learning and identified topics in victim service provision to produce up to 30 original modules for inclusion on the LMS.
2. To enhance and expand training opportunities for Pennsylvania victim service providers through provision of scholarship opportunities for national conferences.
 - Establish an application process for victim advocates to apply for scholarships to attend national conferences at which they may learn best practices and increase their knowledge of victim issues.
3. To support one statewide Pathways for Victim Service Providers Annual Conference in May 2017.
 - Underwrite, plan and coordinate one statewide conference for Pennsylvania victim service providers and allied professionals.
4. To provide cross training to improve collaboration and referrals between Pennsylvania's Adult and Older Adult Protective Services agencies and Pennsylvania's community and system-based victim service providers.
 - Coordinate with experts in protective services and victim services to design web-based modules to educate protective service workers about victim issues, and services available.
 - Hold a series of regional symposiums bringing together county protective service staff and victim advocates to learn about victim issues of mutual concern and foster networking at the local level.
5. To provide for additional modules for inclusion on Pennsylvania's existing Virtual Training Network for Law Enforcement.
 - Work with the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association to produce up to seven web-based learning modules for Pennsylvania municipal police officers on topics including, but not limited to: Elder Victims of Crime, Death Notification, Victims' Rights, Understanding the Impact of Trauma and Underserved Victim Populations.

Over the next three years, OVS staff will work cooperatively with OVC to implement this plan. The anticipated impact of this project is that the knowledge, skills and abilities of Pennsylvania victim advocates and allied professionals will be strengthened, resulting in improved services to and referral of crime victims.

Identification of Long Term Needs

Pennsylvania is one of a handful of states in the nation to undertake a Victim Services Needs Assessment. In 2012, VSAC and OVS worked with the Penn State Center for Survey Research to design

and implement a statewide victim services needs assessment. It is important to note that Pennsylvania began its needs assessment process in mid-2012, prior to any VOCA increase. During the next 18 months, the VSAC Access to Services subcommittee worked with researchers to complete the project. The results of this initial needs assessment effort are to be considered “emergent research,” given the constraints of time, finances and confidentiality. The 2012 Needs Assessment told VSAC how much it did not know about the unmet needs and service gaps for victims while showing potential paths to getting this information. The subcommittee recommended, and VSAC agreed, that a second phase be added to the needs assessment. This would provide richer, more in-depth information about the needs of underserved populations, the services needed by certain types of crime victims, information from victims who may have never come forward for services and whether existing services are meeting the needs of victims of crime. Furthermore, whatever is designed in Phase Two needs to be a process that is repeated at continuous intervals, so that VSAC gathers information in a way that allows it to detect changes in the service provision environment and adjust its policy and funding processes in a timely manner.

Conclusion

In early 2015, VSAC set out to create a stable and predictable funding mechanism for victim services in Pennsylvania. For the next 12 months, VSAC engaged in a rigorous planning process during which it re-examined long established funding formulas, policies and practices that PCCD used to award funding to non-profit and system-based victim service agencies. While the driving force behind this work was the lifting of the cap on the federal Crime Victims Fund and subsequent infusion of federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Formula Grant funding to Pennsylvania, it made sense to look at the entire landscape of federal and state victim service-related formula grant funding. The culmination of VSAC's planning work was the creation of a VOCA Funding Framework, which was formally adopted by the Commission at its December 9, 2015 meeting. This framework addressed several areas key to achieving the goal of stable and predictable funding over the next three years for victim services in Pennsylvania including:

- Revising the funding formulas used to allocate VOCA, and state Rights and Services Act (RSA) and Victims of Juvenile Offenders (VOJO) funds to include variables that tended to have more stability over time and more accurately address a need for services;
- Ensuring that previously funded programs in good standing received the same amount of funding that they received during the last year under VOCA, RSA and VOJO;
- Designating a portion of the VOCA increase for infrastructure enhancements at existing VOCA-funded programs and cost of living adjustments over the remaining two years of the VOCA funding cycle;
- Designating a portion of the VOCA increase for a competitive solicitation for new or enhanced victim services; and
- Ensuring that additional funding was available for procedural services in both the adult and juvenile justice systems.

The framework also amended state eligibility requirements for programs wanting to apply for VOCA funding and established nine priority areas for enhanced service provision, based upon a variety of information about needs in the field reviewed by VSAC members during the VOCA Strategic Planning Process. It is intended that this framework will provide the structure necessary to strengthen and enhance Pennsylvania's diverse network of victim services over the next three years.