



# vision 21

## Transforming Victim Services

### ***FINAL REPORT***

### ***EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS***



Innovation • Partnerships  
Safer Neighborhoods



JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS  
JUSTICE FOR ALL

Office for Victims of Crime

**OVC**

**U.S. Department of Justice**  
**Office of Justice Programs**  
810 Seventh Street NW.  
Washington, DC 20531

**Eric H. Holder, Jr.**  
*Attorney General*

**Mary Lou Leary**  
*Acting Assistant Attorney General*

**Joye E. Frost**  
*Acting Director, Office for Victims of Crime*

---

**Office of Justice Programs**  
Innovation • Partnerships • Safer Neighborhoods  
[www.ojp.usdoj.gov](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov)

---

**Office for Victims of Crime**  
[www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov)

---

NCJ 239957

May 2013

*The mission of the Office for Victims of Crime is to enhance the Nation's capacity to assist crime victims and to provide leadership in changing attitudes, policies, and practices to promote justice and healing for all victims of crime.*

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) provides federal leadership in developing the Nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at [www.ojp.gov](http://www.ojp.gov).

# vision 21

Transforming Victim Services

## *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS*



Innovation • Partnerships  
Safer Neighborhoods





# Executive Summary

The goal for Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services (Vision 21) is simple yet profound: to permanently alter the way we treat victims of crime in America. The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) at the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and many others who work in the victim assistance field recognize the need for a better way to respond to crime victims. We seek a comprehensive and systemic approach, drawing from a wide range of tangible yet difficult to access resources, including legislation, more flexible funding, research, and practice, to change how we meet victims' needs and how we address those who perpetrate crime. We have heard the call for a better way, and it is our fervent hope that Vision 21 creates that path.

Vision 21 grew from a series of meetings sponsored by OVC across the country, to facilitate conversations about the victim assistance field. These meetings brought together crime victim advocates and allied professionals to exchange information and ideas about enduring and emerging issues and how we treat victims of crime. What emerged from those intense and fruitful discussions was a common understanding about current challenges facing victims and, most importantly, a shared expression of the urgent need for change. Vision 21 is the result of those conversations. We believe it can be our call to action—the motivation to address the needs of crime victims in a radically different way.

Our discussions and research centered on four topics: (1) defining the role of the victim assistance field in the overall response to crime and delinquency in the United States; (2) building the field's capacity to better serve victims; (3) addressing enduring issues in the field; and (4) identifying emerging issues in the field. It was an ambitious agenda for a relatively brief timeframe, but one that was long overdue.

## History

Vision 21 began with the perspective that the crime victims' movement is still a fledgling field—

a phenomenon of the past 40 years. The movement crystallized at the national level in 1981 with the proclamation of the first National Crime Victims' Rights Week to honor courageous victims and their surviving family members. The release of a groundbreaking report a year later—*The Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime*—led to the passage of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) of 1984. This landmark legislation established the Crime Victims Fund to provide stable funding for victim assistance programs and to change the landscape of a criminal justice system that was unwelcoming and all too often hostile to victims' interests.

The next major examination came in 1998, with OVC's release of *New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century*, noting substantial progress made since 1981 with recommendations for improving victims' rights, services, and freedom from discrimination. By 2010, OVC leadership recognized it was time for the field to revisit those goals, assess the progress made toward reaching them, and chart a course for the future. At the same time, an outpouring of concern from victim advocacy groups and their allies illuminated a growing number of victims being turned away for lack of funding or the ability to provide appropriate services. The advocates detailed the additional challenges in reaching and serving victims of emergent crimes such as human trafficking, child commercial sexual exploitation, and financial fraud. Clearly, the time is here for a renewed assessment of the state of victims' services, which can only come from those who know it best—crime victims, victim service providers, and advocates.

The Vision 21 strategic initiative, launched by OVC in fall 2010, competitively awarded funding to five organizations: the National Crime Victim Law Institute, the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC), the Vera Institute of Justice Center on Victimization and Safety, OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center, and the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center of the Medical University of South Carolina. For 18

months, the partners examined the status of the victim assistance field and explored both new and perennial challenges. Five stakeholder forums were held, with representatives of traditional and non-traditional victim service providers, from NCVJ to a community rape crisis center, from sexual assault nurse examiners to prosecutors. They discussed the problems they saw in the field and recommended ways to advance the state of victim assistance in the United States. OVC and its partners also conducted a review of relevant literature, hosted interactive discussions at conferences and meetings with state VOCA administrators and other key constituencies and, through OVC's Web site, invited interested parties to join the discussion.

This final report reflects those discussions. As such, it is a document created by the field, for the field. We at OVC hope that crime victim service providers and advocates embrace Vision 21 as their own. OVC and its partner organizations believe that it unites voices from the field, including crime victims and those who speak on behalf of victims who are not able to speak for themselves. The success of this vision lies with the field and its desire to overcome challenges—for only the field can drive transformational change.

## Challenges

All who took part in Vision 21 quickly identified a great need to expand the base of knowledge about crime victimization. This report examines the need for victim-related statistical data, evidence-based practices, and program evaluation. Although Vision 21 identifies some exemplary applications of current research, there is no comprehensive body of empirical data to guide policymakers, funders, and practitioners. We know that research is the road, not the roadblock, to victim-centered practice and policy.

Equally troubling was the absence of certain victims' voices and perspectives in criminal justice policy debates, which remain focused primarily on the prosecution and incarceration of offenders. OVC and stakeholders in the field, on the other hand, routinely heard from individuals who shared a

different vision of justice. For those victimized by family members rather than strangers, as well as victims from Indian Country and crime-ridden city neighborhoods, justice is not always about a retributive system. These victims brought to the conversation a passion for promoting broader policies of prevention and innovative public safety programs to hold offenders accountable and reduce recidivism while promoting healing for victims.

Another of the report's findings affirms the increasing difficulty of defining the victim assistance field. We grappled with the question of whether or not "victim assistance" includes allied practitioners—that is, professionals who do not self-identify as victim service providers, such as emergency room physicians, prosecutors, and court personnel. We agreed that we must cast a wide net to connect with the mental health, indigent defense, juvenile justice, and other fields that intersect with victim assistance. We discussed the historically low salaries for victim service providers who perform some of society's toughest jobs. We also acknowledged the inherent conflict between a focus on responding to a specialized type of victimization and the need to expand that focus—beyond the presenting victimization—to the holistic needs of the victim.

Report findings reflect the sobering reality that although some violent crime rates may be decreasing, the incidence of other types of victimization in this country—including crime perpetrated in cyberspace, human trafficking, and crime committed against older people and those with disabilities—may not even be captured by traditional survey instruments or reported to law enforcement. A staggering 42 percent of victims never report serious violent crime to law enforcement.<sup>1</sup> We need to know why. Stakeholders described a maze of overlapping, complex legal issues facing victims; for example, a single victimization can involve immigration status, civil legal assistance, administrative law remedies, and rights enforcement.

The use of technology was woven through the Vision 21 discussions as well. Although it can drive new types of crime such as online child pornography and can facilitate other crimes such as stalking, technology can be a powerful tool in expanding

<sup>1</sup> *Victimizations Not Reported to the Police, 2006–2010*, National Crime Victimization Survey: Special Report, August 2012, <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/vnrp0610.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2012).

victims' access to services. Web-based and mobile technology offer amazing potential for outreach and collaboration and increasingly can be used to bring services directly to victims. There are challenges: technology is not cheap, we must address privacy and confidentiality concerns, and too many organizations that already struggle with funding do not have the money to invest in technology. However, technology is critical to building the infrastructure for the systematic collection and analysis of victimization data and evaluation of programs. It also offers a potential solution to the increasing burden placed on providers by administrative and financial reporting requirements.

Overcoming these barriers, including the research gap, lack of a technology infrastructure, obstacles to collaboration, and insufficient funding, means taking a hard look at the statutory framework for the funding and administration of much of the victim assistance at the state and local levels—VOCA. VOCA is permanently authorized but has been amended infrequently since its passage. It remains rooted in the practices of the early 1980s: direct services focused on crisis response provided through a substantially volunteer workforce. VOCA is largely silent on the issues of prevention, research, and program evaluation; the use of technology; the need for collaborative and multi-jurisdictional responses to victims; and the capacity of organizations to provide increasingly complex and longer-term support to victims. Raising the cap on Crime Victims Fund spending as proposed in the President's 2014 Budget provides additional resources to begin to drive transformative change in the victim assistance field.

These challenges offer an unprecedented opportunity to craft a new vision for the future. Against this background, we present our vision for transforming victim services in the 21st century.

## Vision 21 Beacons

Appearing throughout the report are boxes containing "Vision 21 Beacons." Each Beacon provides examples of innovative programs and practices in the topic area of the chapter in which it appears that may help to "light the way" into the future framed by Vision 21.

## Recommendations

The discussions that formed the basis for Vision 21 demonstrated that only a truly comprehensive and far-reaching approach would achieve the vast changes needed to move the field forward. Stakeholders saw that a holistic approach to victims' needs is essential but will require unprecedented collaboration among service providers, an ongoing challenge for the field.

Vision 21's reach must extend to mental health, medical, indigent defense, research, homeless advocacy, juvenile justice, legal services, and other fields that play an integral role in promoting safe and healthy communities. Substantial, systematic, and sustained collaboration will be essential to fulfilling the promise of Vision 21. The final chapter of this report outlines Vision 21 stakeholders' recommendations for beginning the transformative change, which fall into the following four broad categories:

1. **Conduct continuous rather than episodic strategic planning** in the victim assistance field to effect real change in research, policy, programming, and capacity building.
2. **Support the development of research** to build a body of evidence-based knowledge and generate, collect, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on victimization, emerging victimization trends, services and behaviors, and enforcement efforts.
3. **Ensure the statutory, policy, and programmatic flexibility to address enduring and emerging crime victim issues.**
4. **Build and institutionalize capacity through an infusion of technology, training, and innovation to ensure that the field is equipped to meet the demands of the 21st century.**

When OVC and its project partners first embarked on the Vision 21 process, we hesitated to use "Transforming Victim Services" as part of the Vision 21 title. We wondered if advocates and service providers in the field would interpret "transforming" as dismissive of the current state of practice or minimizing the extraordinary successes of the pioneering advocates in the field. Yet, we found that Vision 21 clarified that practitioners in this field,

which began as a transformative movement, would not be content with maintaining the status quo or a less than bold exploration of the issues.

Now, 30 years after the release of the 1982 *Final Report of the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime*, we believe that the *Vision 21: Transforming*

*Victim Services Final Report* captures another seminal opportunity in the history of the crime victims' movement. Armed with the information summarized in this report, we must take the next step: turning today's vision into tomorrow's reality for crime victims in this country.

## CHAPTER 6

# Making the “Vision” a Reality: Recommendations for Action

This Vision 21 report describes a watershed opportunity in the history of the victim assistance field. Although stakeholders recounted tremendous progress over the past three decades in securing victims’ rights, protections, and services, the lack of qualitative and quantitative research on the experiences of crime victims in this country makes progress difficult to define. Despite advances, stakeholders were adamant that far more must be done to serve crime victims. They shared their concern, bolstered by available data, that many crime victims receive little or no assistance; and too many victim service organizations, especially programs serving victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child maltreatment, struggle to maintain the status quo—to provide even baseline services for victims. Stakeholders embraced the idea of transformational change, but warned that the lack of data, inadequate funding, and statutory restrictions pose formidable barriers.

The victim assistance field began as a movement for change that swept across this Nation; the passage of VOCA transformed advocacy into meaningful rights and services for crime victims. Now, as decades ago, we must continue to work with Congress to further the cause of crime victims. We believe the recommendations in this chapter can shape this important national dialogue.

## Recommendations

### 1. Strategic planning at all levels should be continuous, not episodic.

Vision 21 is an important first step in facilitating an ongoing national conversation about the future of this field. Participants indicated that Vision 21 provided their only opportunity to engage with a broad spectrum of providers, advocates, and policymakers to address crime victim issues through a lens broader than their

everyday work. Recognizing the need to continue engagement with the field and the complexity of implementing the recommendations outlined in this chapter, the strategic planning process initiated by Vision 21 should continue—at OVC and all levels of the field.

At the federal level, OVC should institutionalize an ongoing strategic planning process to fulfill its federal leadership mission, perhaps by establishing a working group comprising representatives from major crime victim constituencies to calibrate federal efforts with continuous feedback from the field and to analyze available data.

At the state and community levels, organizations and agencies should institutionalize a cross-cutting strategic planning process involving all stakeholders. Planning should focus on coordinated community responses and system linkages, program evaluation, and funding diversification to ensure a continuum of services for all crime victims. Strategic planning at the state level would maximize the impact of limited resources and eliminate duplicative funding efforts. State-level planning processes should include other state agencies; VOCA sub-recipients; state domestic violence, sexual assault, tribal, and other crime victim assistance coalitions; and victim assistance organizations integral to providing a continuum of services for crime victims.

### 2. End the research gap.

No comprehensive body of empirical data exists to guide policymakers, funders, and practitioners in the victims field, yet we know information is critical to victim-centered practice and policy. Expanding the body of knowledge about victimization is a collective responsibility to be embraced by all. At the federal level, OVC should partner with BJS and NIJ to shape the direction

of crime victim-related research. Other federal and state agencies, including OVW, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, relevant agencies from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and major stakeholder constituency groups, including state VOCA administrators, should also participate and provide input. Together, these agencies should address gaps in basic research, evidence-based practices, and program evaluation as outlined in this report to develop a cohesive and strategic research agenda. Specific issues include the need to pursue the following:

- **Generate, collect, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data at the local and national levels on the incidence and prevalence of all forms of criminal victimization by—**
  - Expanding NCVS to capture richer data, including more detailed data on the pervasive crimes of domestic violence, sexual victimization, and child abuse, as well as new data on emerging types of victimization. The expansion should include more descriptive information about victims, the services they do or do not receive, and help-seeking behavior. This research will help identify the service gaps the field has shared anecdotally for years, but has never documented scientifically.
  - Expanding the use of the FBI's NIBRS to complete a nationally representative system of police administrative records describing crimes, victims, and police responses to victimization. This information will generate a greater understanding of specific types of victimization and subgroups of victims not currently captured by victim surveys. The data will also allow comparison between victims known to law enforcement with those served by victim service agencies to more readily identify underserved groups.
- **Develop a pragmatic and strategic approach to the development of evidence-based practices (EBPs) and program evaluation for victim-serving agencies and organizations.** Crime victim service providers should expand their use of practices that have been proved to be

effective and reliable for the broad array of victims they serve. These providers must also make ongoing evaluation an integral part of their programming to ensure continual quality control and improvement in support of victim safety and well-being. They must continually assess the effectiveness of practices now in use and new practices as they are developed. In addition, state VOCA administering agencies should explore ways to encourage funding applicants through incentives to use EBPs and program evaluation. The strategy should focus on providing additional funding, training, and technical assistance at the community level, not penalizing programs that lack the capacity to implement an empirical approach.

- **Develop federal agency-wide standardized performance measures.** Federal agencies should work together to develop standardized performance measures related to the provision of federally funded victim-related services and training and technical assistance. Ultimately, this would streamline the reporting burden on organizations receiving federal funding and provide more meaningful data for state and federal agencies, as well as Congress, to assess the overall impact of federally funded victim assistance. At the state and local levels, state administering agencies and sub-recipient organizations should commit to working with OVC, OVW, and other federal agencies to standardize performance measures related to victim services and related training and technical assistance. Standardized performance measures would serve as a critical first step toward streamlining and standardizing federal grant reporting.
- **Systematically study not just programs and practices but also the underlying infrastructure of victim-serving agencies and organizations in this country.** This assessment should look at factors such as reliance on volunteers, salaries and benefits of paid practitioners, access to evidence-based training and technical assistance, use of technology, sources of funding and subsequent administrative and reporting requirements, and demographic makeup of staff and leadership.

- **Evaluate the extent of enforcement of crime victims' rights and statutes at the tribal, state, and federal levels.** The evaluation should also address the impact and adequacy of professional legal representation on the broad array of crime victims' legal needs, including rights enforcement, immigration relief, and civil legal assistance.
- **Solve the research-to-practice gap.** Recognizing the need to bridge the longstanding and seemingly intractable translation gap between researchers and practitioners in the victim assistance field, federal agencies that administer victim-related grant funding must move beyond supportive language to take concrete action. They should work with Congress to find a solution, such as a third-party crime victim research and practice translation center, to institutionalize the communication necessary to translate research to practice and practice to research.

### 3. Build and institutionalize capacity.

Vision 21 stakeholders believe victim assistance in this country should be as universal as law enforcement response. Even in the face of prohibitive barriers, they outlined concrete first steps the victim assistance field can take to institutionalize access to rights and services for all crime victims in the United States. The building blocks of an innovative and results-oriented culture for the field include strategic planning; the use of technology to improve access to services and reduce administrative burdens; investments in human capital to recruit, train, and retain a diverse and professional workforce; and reliance on victimization data, EBPs, and program evaluation.

At the federal and state levels, OVC should establish an interagency working group to work with state VOCA administering agencies to—

- **Identify steps needed to develop a technology infrastructure** to increase the profile, accessibility, and responsiveness of victim-serving organizations and agencies and foster efficiencies and increased accountability.
- **Promote the systematic and innovative use of technology** to expand practitioner access to evidence-based training and technical assistance.
- **Promote and begin to institutionalize the application of EBPs and program evaluation in the victim assistance field.**
- **Foster adaptation of sustainability models that are used successfully in the nonprofit sector for victim assistance and advocacy organizations,** including the use of strategic planning, investments in human capital, and funding diversification.

Tribal, state, and national level victim organizations should formally link and leverage their largely separate advocacy efforts to develop unified and comprehensive policy and programming initiatives, address the intersection of prevention and victim services, raise national consciousness about victimization, and promote the critical system linkages that are needed in the 21st century to serve all victims of crime.

### 4. Partner with Congress to ensure flexibility and innovation in programming and funding.

During a time of financial constraint, when many victim assistance organizations struggle to maintain daily operations, stakeholders could have viewed Vision 21 as an intriguing but ultimately theoretical exercise. They could have dismissed the idea of extending victims' rights and services to support those who never report their victimization, as well as the crime victims who never receive services. Instead Vision 21 stakeholders were clear that timidity and resignation are not part of this field's vocabulary. They systematically outlined initial steps to promote progress, yet initial steps are just the beginning. Stakeholders believe it is time to work with Congress to provide the statutory and programmatic flexibility to meet the challenges of the 21st century. They outlined the following actions to catalyze needed change.

- **Recognizing the extremely complex funding formulation language in VOCA, OVC should join with state VOCA administrators and other key constituencies to work with Congress to address the following:**
  - Revision of the funding formula to expand assistance to more crime victims and strengthen the administrative framework to effectively manage funding. Although

the majority of VOCA funding goes to states, the administering agencies may use only 5 percent of that funding to administer and monitor the funding at the sub-grantee level, as well as to support training, technical assistance, and program evaluation. For example, incremental raises of the Fund cap and increased administrative funding could be tied to state and OVC commitments to expand programmatic data collection, standardize performance measures, and integrate EBPs to the extent practicable.

- The implications of increasing the amount of formula funding for state and territorial crime victim compensation funds. Currently, VOCA funding is directly tied to the amount of state funding used to reimburse crime victims; consequently, increases or decreases in the annual cap on the Fund impact only the formula victim assistance funding going to the states, not formula victim compensation funding. Substantive variations in the types of expenses covered and crime victim eligibility among the states and territories could also be addressed.
- The advisability of revising statutory language to address emerging issues. VOCA's statutory framework sometimes hinders the use of funding to solve myriad policy and programmatic issues. It is largely silent on the value of research and program evaluation, the use of technology, the need for collaborative and frequently multijurisdictional responses to victims, support of services at the national and international levels, and the capacity of organizations to address what we now understand are the complex and longer-term needs of crime victims.
- **Recognizing that new challenges call for new solutions, it is worth revisiting the authorizations for VOCA-funded programs to address their reach, efficacy, and accountability.** Innovation has always been the hallmark of the victim assistance field; improving and better aligning funding to improve research, capacity building, and

accountability would promote exponential progress. Stakeholders called for attention to the following:

- Support of critical victim-related research by BJS and NIJ to initiate and continue foundational work to address the research gaps identified in this report.
- Support for improved assistance to victims, including information, referrals, and online and hotline services. At the national level, the goal would be to assist victims who do not receive assistance from existing state programs. There is currently no authorizing language in VOCA allowing OVC to support operational expenses of organizations that could provide these services, similar to community-level organizations.
- Support for building capacity and infrastructure at the state and local levels. More flexible assistance might be allocated to states, over the course of several years, to target statewide needs assessments and strategic planning, an expanded use of technology, comprehensive program evaluation, and the provision of evidence-based training and technical assistance. States might be permitted to use funding to develop and evaluate demonstration projects to reach and serve more victims and to build the capacity of organizations that have not been able to access VOCA funding.
- Support of holistic legal assistance for crime victims. Funding could build on the promise of the Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2004 and other landmark federal legislation, such as VAWA and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, to transform the legal landscape for crime victims. Stakeholders spoke of a national network of wraparound legal assistance to address not only the enforcement of crime victims' rights, but also the wider range of victims' needs, such as assistance with identity theft and other forms of financial fraud and civil legal assistance. These networks would provide the linkages between existing pockets of available legal services and fill critical gaps on a statewide and perhaps regional basis.

- Support for American Indian and Alaska Native victims. Stakeholders recognized the need to target resources for federally recognized tribes, tribal organizations, and federal agencies responsible for victim assistance in Indian Country. OVC and the victim assistance field, particularly tribal advocacy organizations, should work with Congress to ensure that victims in Indian Country are no longer a footnote to this country's response to crime victims.
- Successfully positioning the victim assistance field in the 21st century is the responsibility of many. The Vision 21 initiative was a labor of resolve, intense examination, passion, and courage to transcend conventional boundaries to focus on a goal grander than our everyday work. We stand ready to work with one another and Congress to fulfill the promise of Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services.





