JRSA
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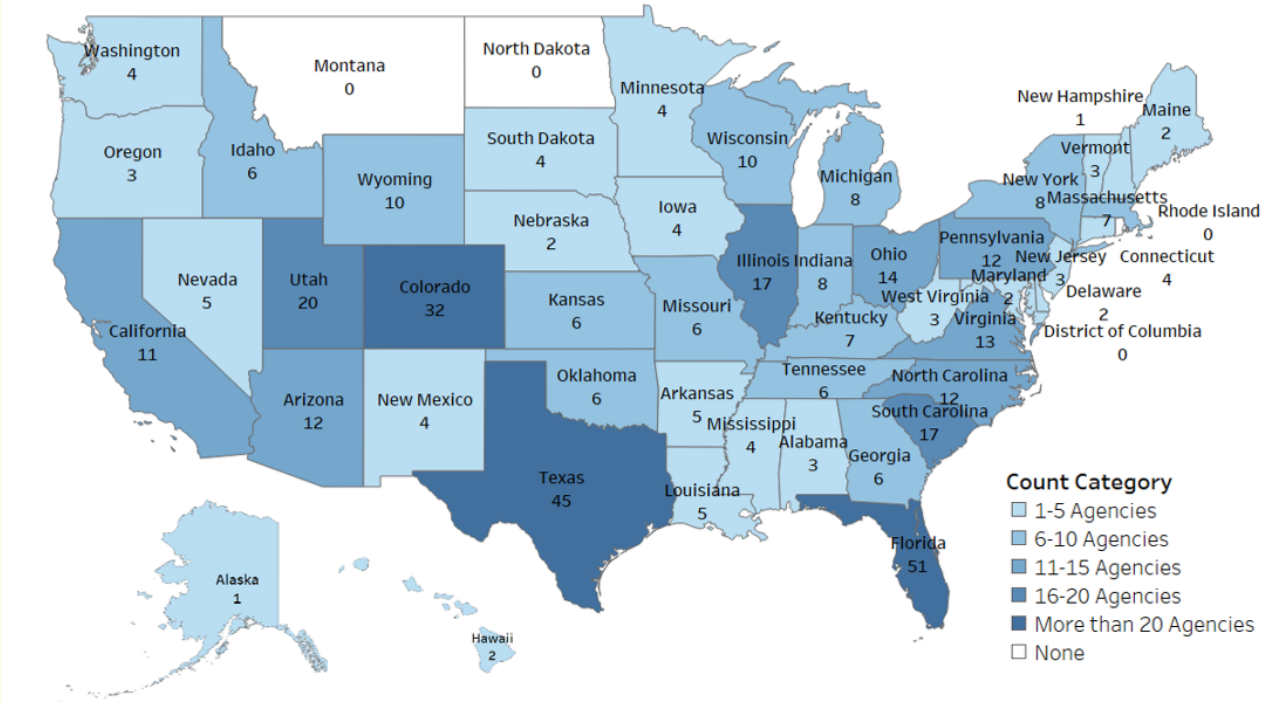
DECEMBER 2021



Survey Sample by State (n=420)

SURVEY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT-BASED VICTIM SERVICES

A NATIONAL SURVEY ON LAW ENFORCEMENT-BASED VICTIM SERVICES

REPORT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

THIS REPORT WAS PRODUCED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE BY THE JUSTICE RESEARCH AND STATISTICS ASSOCIATION UNDER COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT NUMBER 2018-V3-GX-K049 AWARDED BY THE OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME, OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE. THE OPINIONS, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS REPORT ARE THOSE OF THE CONTRIBUTORS AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE OFFICIAL POSITION OR POLICIES OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE.

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OVERVIEW

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) receives funding from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to serve as the training and technical assistance provider for the Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV) Program. Through the LEV program, IACP supports law enforcement agencies in either establishing new victim services programs or enhancing existing programs. As part of this initiative, IACP partnered with the Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA) and the Center for Victim Research to administer a survey to law enforcement-based victim services programs.

The survey, entitled the LEV Mapping Survey, aimed to gain knowledge of the landscape of law enforcement-based victim services across the country. Survey data were supplemented by information gained through interviews with a set of survey respondents. IACP recognizes that law enforcement agencies are providing victim services through a range of approaches but there is no real picture of where and how these programs exist across the country. Results from this survey will illuminate the current state of law enforcement-based victim services and identify needs for technical assistance and future research.

Results can also help identify common practices in this growing field and support program development and sustainability.

This survey was conducted in two phases. The first phase targeted only law enforcement-based victim services programs funded through the OVC Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV) Program and/or OVC Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants. The second phase expanded the sample to all law enforcement agencies indicating they address victim services in the 2016 Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of survey respondents from both phases. This allowed respondents to expand on survey answers and respond to questions on topics that were not included in the survey. This project received an exemption from the JRSA Institutional Review Board.

The following provides a brief overview of findings and recommendations. Select findings include basic descriptives of survey respondents, including program funding and staffing, victims served and services provided, and the benefits and challenges of law enforcement-based victim services.

SELECT FINDINGS

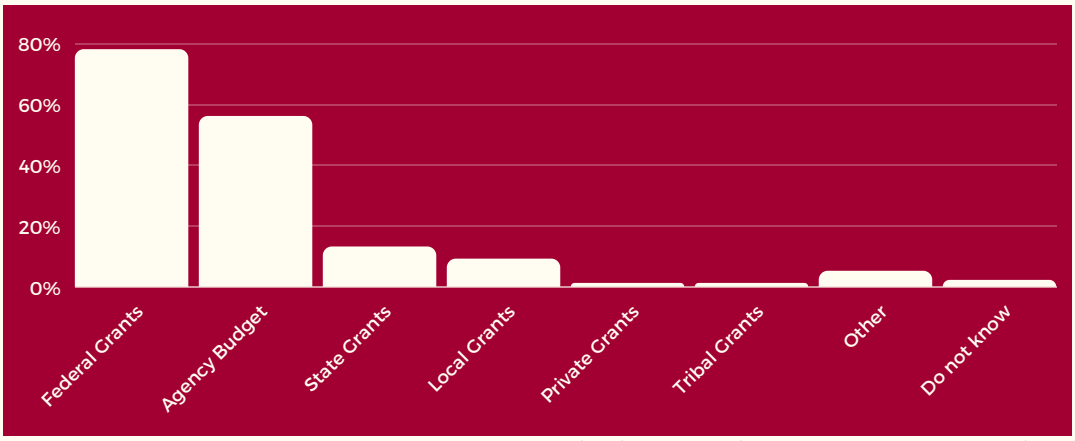
Of the 2,520 agencies included in the sample, a valid response was received for 445, representing an 18% response rate. 420 agencies were included in the final sample, spanning 47 states.

- Responses represented diverse law enforcement agency types. About 2 out of 3 (67%) responding agencies were local/municipal police agencies; 26% were sheriff's offices; 4% were state police/highway patrol agencies; and the remaining 4% fell into a residual category that included campus police, tribal police, or other.
- 81% of responding agencies had 250 or fewer officers.
- Over 70% of responding agencies indicated they provide victim services via a specialized victim services unit with personnel assigned part- or full-time.
- Victim service programs in the sample had been in existence for an average of 16 years.

> "I CAN HONESTLY SAY IT WAS THE COMMANDERS THAT MADE THIS HAPPEN. HAVING A MAJOR, LIEUTENANT, AND SERGEANT GOING TO BAT FOR YOU ALL THE TIME WAS GREAT."
> –VICTIM SERVICES SUPERVISOR

The vast majority of responding agencies utilized federal grant funds and half of agencies reported utilizing a mixture of funding sources. 43 (15%) responding agencies indicated their entire victim services budget is covered by the overall agency budget. On average, these agencies' victim services programs had been in existence for 19 years and included a wide range of agency sizes from 11-25 officers to more than 1,000 officers.

> IT IS SOMETHING WE WOULD HAVE DEVELOPED ANYWAY BECAUSE WE NEEDED IT, BUT IT WOULD HAVE TAKEN LONGER BECAUSE OF THE FUNDING ISSUE. THANK GOD BECAUSE OF THE GRANT, WE GOT IT OFF THE GROUND FASTER.
> –ASSISTANT CHIEF OF POLICE



Victim Service Program Funding

61% had 2 FTE or less

Victim service programs on average were staffed with 4 FTE. This average, however, is inflated by several outlying agencies. Of note, 61% of responding agencies had 2 FTE or less, spanning in size from 10 officers or fewer up to more than 1,000 officers. Small staff sizes were often supplemented with interns or volunteers. 58% of responding agencies had recently utilized interns or volunteers. 53% of responding agencies paid entry-level victim services personnel a starting full-time equivalent (FTE) salary of $35,000 to $49,999. Minimum education requirements for entry-level victim services personnel were most often a bachelor's degree (46% of agencies). 47% of responding agencies had at least one victim services personnel with an advanced degree (e.g., M.A., M.S., J.D., Ph.D.). The vast majority (82%) of all surveyed victim services programs are directly supervised by sworn law enforcement personnel while only 10% are supervised by a professional staff supervisor.

- Only 11% of responding agencies indicated that their services were limited to specific groups of victims (e.g., children or adolescents) or those victimized via certain victimization categories (e.g., homicide, domestic violence, human trafficking).
- In 2019, survey respondents reported serving an average of 1,321 victims (n=245 agencies). In 2020, an average of 2,212 victims were served (n=102 agencies).

> OUR ADVOCATES ARE TRAINED TO HELP PEOPLE IN DISTRESS. IT MAY NOT BE ANYTHING GRANT RELATED, BUT WE STILL HAVE ABILITY TO HELP PEOPLE...GIVE THEM OPTIONS AND EMPOWER THEM TO HAVE A CHOICE.
> –VICTIM SERVICES SUPERVISOR

Respondents were asked to indicate services available to victims of crime, excluding only referrals for the service. General information about crime and victimization, prevention, or risk reduction was most commonly available while assistance applying for public benefits assistance was a service available at less than half of responding agencies.

96% of Agencies

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT CRIME AND VICTIMIZATION, PREVENTION, OR RISK REDUCTION

57% of Agencies

EMERGENCY FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE (INCLUDES EMERGENCY LOANS, PETTY CASH, PAYMENT FOR OR ASSISTANCE IN PROCURING ITEMS SUCH AS FOOD, CLOTHING, ETC.)

33% of Agencies

ASSISTANCE APPLYING FOR PUBLIC BENEFITS ASSISTANCE (TANF/WELFARE, HOUSING, SOCIAL SERVICES, ETC.)

Services Available

The primary benefit of a victim services program or unit in a law enforcement agency is, of course, an improved response to the victims, with more immediate support and targeted referrals to community resources. Having a skilled advocate available to support the victim also benefits law enforcement officers by allowing them to concentrate on the investigation. Multiple interviewees also stressed that having clear roles for investigators and victim advocates helps the whole department function better as a team and provide better services to the community. This increased functionality can also result in cost savings to the department by making the best use of staff time. Interviewees further observed that providing immediate support to victims can keep them engaged and improves the chances for successful prosecution.

> "OUR STAFF MAKING CONTACT WITH VICTIMS BEFORE THE DETECTIVE AND GIVING THEM INFORMATION ON RESOURCES CAN CHANGE WHETHER THEY WANT TO INTERACT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. –VICTIM SERVICES SUPERVISOR"

Benefits

Challenges Word Cloud

For those that had faced challenges, agency size/available resources were most common (24%) followed by difficulty maintaining funding and leadership changes (20% each). Other challenges described included difficulty recruiting quality and qualified volunteers, limited community resources, overwhelming workload, and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic such as being unable to respond to victims in person.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services Program Sustainment

Law enforcement-based victim services programs can be sustained through long-term funding, strategic growth, agency integration, data collection and evaluation, and training and technical assistance.

- Agencies may start with a grant, but then would be well-served to strive to have core funding for victim services as part of the agency's overall budget going forward.
- Agencies should engage in strategic planning for growth in the areas of funding, volunteer and intern programs, data collection and analysis, and stakeholder input.
- Steps to integrate victim services staff, including through the use of policies and procedures, are important steps to take right from program inception.
- Systematic data collection and formative evaluations should take place in a diverse group of law enforcement-based victim services programs.
- Training and technical assistance (TTA) areas: creating a library of sample programmatic documents, highlighting successful methods of program integration, sharing materials on volunteer/internship program development, and providing data collection and evaluation support.

Future Analyses of These Data

To fully utilize the LEV Mapping Survey data, and further build out our knowledge of LEV programs, JRSA recommends further analysis of survey results, supplemented by additional interviews and/or focus groups with law enforcement-based victim services personnel. For example, responses should be further analyzed across different types of law enforcement agencies (i.e., sheriff vs. local, agency size, type of victim service staff utilized, funding sources, etc.). One specific area that is recommended to be explored further is funding barriers.

Future Iterations of the LEV Mapping Survey

Conduct the LEV Mapping Survey once every three years in order to stay up to date with the current landscape of law enforcement-based victim services and the training and technical assistance needs of the programs.

FOR INFORMATION ON ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES UNDER THIS PARTNERSHIP, VISIT: HTTPS://WWW.JRSA.ORG/PROJECTS/LEV-TTA.HTML

QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS CAN BE DIRECTED TO BAILEY MARYFIELD AT BMARYFIELD@JRSA.ORG

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