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S o l i c i t a t i o n

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Evaluation of Victims of Crime Act State Compensation and Assistance Programs

APPLICATION DEADLINE:

April 28, 1998

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Office of Justice Programs
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EVALUATION OF VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT STATE COMPENSATION AND ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

I. Introduction

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) are undertaking a multi year evaluation effort to assess the effectiveness of the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funded compensation and assistance programs in meeting the needs of crime victims. The overall effort will yield: a) a needs assessment from the victim's point of view; b) an assessment of the services available to victims through VOCA compensation and assistance programs and other federally-funded victim services, as well as other state, local and private victim services; c) identification of unmet needs such as gaps in service or access to compensation; and d) suggestions for improving the delivery of and payment for services to all crime victims. The products from this effort will provide an evaluation of VOCA compensation and assistance programs, along with guidelines for increasing their utility and effectiveness in meeting the needs of crime victims.

The first phase in the effort has begun with funding of a pilot test of methods to identify crime victims and their needs, the sources of aid they sought and received to meet these needs, the adequacy of this aid in meeting those needs, and the impact of VOCA in meeting those needs. The pilot test will provide a basis for subsequent separately-funded national research on the general population. (See below under "IV. How to Apply" for instructions on how to obtain a copy of the solicitation "Effectiveness of Victims of Crime Act Funding in Meeting the Needs of Crime Victims," or of the proposal entitled "Development of a National Study of Victim Needs and Assistance Sought" after it is funded.)

This solicitation is for the next phase: a national evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of

VOCA funded victim compensation and assistance services in meeting the needs of their clients. It will include an examination of the service providers, and their clients. It will be based on a sample of states, and within states, of victim compensation and assistance providers, and their clients. One grant award not to exceed \$750,000 will be made for the 30 month period of the grant.

II. Background

Currently VOCA dollars supplement state funding for victim compensation programs in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. VOCA block grants to the states also support victim assistance provided by over 2,500 community-based organizations in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the territories of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa. Victim compensation programs reimburse crime victims for crime-related expenses such as medical costs, mental health counseling, funeral and burial costs, and lost wages or loss of support, to the extent that these expenses are not covered by other collateral resources such as private insurance or offender restitution. Victim assistance programs provide services to crime victims such as crisis intervention, counseling, emergency shelter, criminal justice advocacy, and emergency transportation. The overall goal of these programs is to provide a seamless web of services and support to reduce the financial, physical, psychological, and emotional costs of victimization. From FY 1986 through FY 1997, OVC distributed more than \$637 million in VOCA compensation funds, and more than \$1.1 billion in VOCA assistance funds. In addition to receiving compensation and assistance from VOCA funded programs, crime victims may have private insurance, help from their family and friends, their churches and communities, and personal savings.

There are also many charitable organizations offering victim assistance and other state and federal programs like the Violence Against Women Grants Office (VAWGO), which is authorized by Congress to distribute \$800 million to the states from 1995 to 2000.

With this solicitation, NIJ and OVC plan to conduct a systematic evaluation of VOCA funded programs, taking account of the other federal, state, local, and charitable sources of assistance that serve similar victim clientele. Some of these programs, e.g., the VAWGO Stop Program, are already being evaluated.

III. Areas of Research Required

Sampling Frame

Sampling of States. The Victims of Crime Act allows each state to develop its own legislative and administrative response to VOCA, for both assistance and compensation programs. In over half the states the two programs are administered by the same agency; in the remainder of states they are administered by different agencies. Aside from the few statutory requirements for VOCA funding, the states may structure and administer their VOCA compensation programs in many different ways, including how eligibility is determined, how much compensation is provided, for what needs, and for how long. States also have great discretion in allocating their VOCA assistance dollars as long as the subgrantees meet the minimum requirements for eligible victim service providers. While evaluations of compensation and assistance are described separately in this solicitation, one of the tasks of the evaluation is to examine how well the two programs are coordinated in the sampled states to satisfy the needs of crime victims. Another task is to assess the coordination between VOCA funded programs and other victim assistance programs, which vary somewhat from state to state.

Considerations for the sampling of states would

be based on (1) VOCA factors such as legislation, administration, and unique features, (e.g., funding strategies, eligibility criteria, types of service provided); (2) non-VOCA factors such as population size and density, demographics, education, income, degree of urbanization, politics, region of the USA, non-VOCA victim assistance programs, etc.; and (3) Victim Assistance in Indian Country (VAIC) grants, which now go directly to eligible tribes. The results are not likely to be generalizable to all VOCA activities in all states; the applicant should describe how the proposed sampling approach will yield information on the most important questions, applicable in the broadest range of contexts.

Sampling within States. Sampling within states must include both the VOCA compensation program and victim assistance providers, and their clients. For assistance providers, sampling would be from all providers within a state that receive any VOCA funds. (Many providers will also receive funds from other federal, state, local, or charitable sources). The assistance provider sample should reflect the proportion of VOCA funds that goes into a program area; (e.g., shelters and rape crisis centers should be adequately sampled since so much of VOCA funding goes to them). But proportion of VOCA dollars should not totally drive the sample: there may be interesting smaller or newer types of service that are of particular interest, such as emergency legal services for victims of domestic violence.

Just as applicants must explain and justify their approach to sampling of states, they must do the same for their sampling of VOCA funded victim assistance providers within each sampled state. Sampling of clients of the VOCA funded compensation program and victim assistance providers must also be explained and justified, in terms of how it will yield an adequate victim perspective on the issues of this VOCA evaluation.

NOTE: While participation in this evaluation effort will not be a condition for receiving VOCA

funds at either the state or subgrantee level, OVC will strongly encourage all grantees and subrecipients to participate if chosen as part of the sample. OVC plans to disseminate the findings from this study to all states and subgrantees to improve services for crime victims and further the goals of VOCA. Applicants should show evidence that cooperation of grantees and subrecipients has been obtained, or indicate how it will be obtained.

State-Level Evaluation

Certain considerations at the state level apply to both **compensation and assistance**:

- **Management.** How effective is the state in collecting fines that fund victim compensation and services? What other state funds are available or appropriated for victim compensation and assistance? Does the state conduct assessments to measure victim needs, identify gaps in services, and develop strategies to fill these gaps? Are the programs required to report to state legislatures or the executive branch? Do they have advisory boards that include victim representatives? Do they survey victims to learn how well the programs are meeting the needs of their clients? How are the programs being held accountable? Are they making appropriate use of available technology to improve the management and delivery of services to victims?
- **Outreach and Training.** Do they have public information campaigns to increase awareness of VOCA compensation and assistance? Do they conduct training for service providers and allied professionals and set standards for training? Are there victim populations that are not being reached, e.g., those in public housing, Native Americans, immigrants, those in institutions, victims of gang violence?
- **Coordination.** Are compensation and assistance jointly administered at the state

level? If not, where is each administered? Does location affect how effectively they are coordinated and managed? Does someone at the state level know where all the dollars are that fund programs for crime victims and coordinate them? What mechanisms are there to coordinate VOCA with e.g., VAWA and other programs to avoid duplication and insure coverage? What training and exposure do assistance and compensation personnel get to each other's programs?

Other considerations at the state level apply primarily or exclusively to **victim assistance**:

- **Planning:** Is the state active in encouraging appropriate applications in implementation of the state's victim rights goals and legislation? How are new or unmet needs identified and innovative solutions developed?
- **Funding Decisions:** What victim needs information is used to develop funding priorities and allocate total dollars among types of assistance (domestic violence, child victims, etc.)? What victim needs information is required of subgrantee applicants? What mechanisms are there to coordinate VOCA and non-VOCA programs at the time applications are awarded? What percentages of continuation versus new applications are awarded; what are the process and criteria for these decisions?
- **Program Monitoring:** How are program standards operationalized? Are appropriate performance indicators used? Do these indicators accurately measure what the applicant stated the requested funds would accomplish for victims? Do these indicators include input from program clients indicating how well their needs were met? How are these indicators communicated to subgrantees? What records does the state require subgrantees to keep? What use is made of these records

for monitoring? What procedures are there to achieve accountability for proper use of funds?

- Training: What procedures are there to insure that subgrantee staff have the appropriate training and experience for their assigned duties? Is there training to subgrantees to monitor and improve their performance?

Other considerations at the state level apply primarily or exclusively to **victim compensation**. A useful resource document is “Program Standards” created by the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards, with funding from OVC; (See below under “IV. How to Apply” for instructions on how to obtain a copy of this document). It highlights four issues:

- Effective Outreach, Training, and Communication. How do the programs attempt to reach the claimants who need them; how effective are these efforts; is non-awareness a barrier to utilization? How does the program cope with possible bias in claims processing? Are other professionals making appropriate referrals? Are there identifiable impediments to outreach, communication, and utilization?
- Expedient and Accurate Claims Processing. Does the system have consistent, cost-effective, and accurate procedures for distinguishing among eligible and ineligible claims? Are the burdens the system places on claimants necessary and reasonable ones? Are victim waiting times for payment reasonable? Do the programs seek and obtain client (victim) input on claims processing equity, burden, and promptness? If there are excessive delays, what are the causes and how does the system attempt to minimize them? How are standards operationalized and claims processors trained in them?
- Good Decision Making. Does the process

allow claimants to adequately assert and defend their views concerning the validity of their claims?

- Sound Financial Planning. Does the program show good accountability for the funds it handles? Is it effective in maximizing its funding, and in recovering its payouts from offenders and other responsible parties under governing legislation?

The applicant’s proposal should indicate how the information from clients of the sampled compensation programs will provide a valid assessment whether these programs are effective in the eyes of the clients in meeting their need for compensation, and what areas can be singled out for improvement.

An issue for the evaluator is how to best establish comparability across states, because of the variation among them in how compensation is structured and administered. Other considerations in an evaluation of VOCA compensation include the current situation and trends over time in the following indicators:

- Ratio of number of claims to number of victims who qualify for compensation.
- How is the issue of contributory conduct managed and what is its effect on claims application and payment?
- If reporting to the criminal justice system is a payment requirement, what is its effect on claims application and payment and on successful prosecution?
- Percent of claims paid versus percent rejected. Are there differences in definitions of “claim” and how they are counted?
- What is the proportion of primary and secondary victims?
- Percent of clients who reach the maximum reimbursable amount but still claim need?
- Percent of costs absorbed by the victim after receipt of allowable compensation.
- Possible changes in types of crime victim and types of need.
- Use of unmet victim needs information to

open up appropriate new areas of compensation.

Subgrantee-Level Evaluation

The subgrantee level applies only to **victim assistance programs**. A useful resource document is “Model Victim Assistance Program” prepared by the National Organization for Victim Assistance, with funding from OVC and the Bureau of Justice Assistance; (see below under “IV. How to Apply” for instructions on how to obtain a copy of this document). The evaluation issues at the subgrantee level include:

- Organization and Planning: What data and other indicators are used to determine victim need in the service area? Are the program’s services, staffing, and budgets reflective of identified need? Is there a process for generating innovative services and solutions to meet victim needs? Does the program have clearly stated and measurable goals? What measures of program effectiveness and efficiency are in use, and do they include client recovery and satisfaction? How is client input obtained to ascertain recovery and satisfaction? Does the program’s location (e.g., community vs criminal justice system) affect how effective it is? How are VOCA dollars distinguished from other funds?
- Coordination: How successfully does the program coordinate with other VOCA and non-VOCA programs in its service area, in terms of outreach and referral, and eliminating service duplications and gaps? Do they get information from appropriate coalitions dealing with need, client satisfaction, and coordination? How is coordination achieved? Are there barriers to coordination, and how are they overcome? Is there outreach to and education of the community to respond to victim needs and take steps to prevent revictimization? Are they making appropriate referrals to compensation programs?
- Facilities and Staffing: Are the physical facilities and equipment appropriate and adequate, and properly located? Are levels of staff and volunteers, and time commitments, appropriate to types and levels of client demand, and the timing of demand? Are the experience and training of staff and volunteers appropriate for the duties they perform? Do they receive ongoing training and continuing education as appropriate? Are the hours of operation appropriate to when the clients need services?
- Compliance: Is the program meeting the grant conditions established by the federal and state funding documents? Does it provide the assistance to which victims are entitled by statute and regulations? Are required records being properly kept?
- Service Delivery: What is the waiting period for victims to receive services; are exceptions made for victims needing immediate attention? Do clients receive adequate amounts of staff time? Is the duration of services adequate to the client’s recovery process? What is the breadth of relevant services offered to each type of client; how many different persons must the client see to receive these services? Do clients receive information to reduce the likelihood of revictimization? Is there special attention to repeat victims? Does the program inform clients of all phases of the criminal justice system process? What is the program’s vigor and success in advocating for the client in transactions with the criminal justice system and other agencies? Does the program foster self-reliance or dependence among its clients?
- From the Client’s Perspective: The information from clients of these service providers will indicate the match or

mismatch between the views of the service provider staff and their clients in terms of what was delivered and how well the victim's needs were met. How can we define and measure a good outcome, with measures that capture what victims wanted and what the service providers actually gave them? How can we disentangle victim satisfaction with VOCA funded services from their feelings about other parts of the criminal justice system? What were the victim's expectations about what the service provider would do for them; were they realistic? How did they learn about the availability of services? What services did the victim receive, and what percent is that of the services the victim could/should have received? Did services received differ because of whether the case went to juvenile vs adult court? Is the victim still experiencing problems (physical, financial, emotional)? Is he/she receiving any help with these problems; from whom? Besides the effects of the victimization, are there other problems in the victim's life (financial, health, family, social, work, housing, psychological, etc.) that will affect speed and degree of recovery? What evidence is there of the effect of receipt of services on the client's willingness to cooperate with the criminal justice system? What percent of victims return to do volunteer work with the service provider? Which types of victim (in terms of sex, age, race, education, disability, type of crime victimized by, etc.) appear to

benefit most, and least, from the program activities?

IV. How to Apply

Those interested in submitting proposals in response to this solicitation must complete the required application forms and submit related required documents. (See below for how to obtain application forms and guides for completing proposals.) Applicants must include the following information/forms to qualify for funding:

- Standard Form (SF) 424 Application for Federal Assistance
- Assurances
- Certifications Regarding Lobbying, Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters; and Drug-Free Workplace Requirements (one form)
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities
- Budget Detail Worksheet
- Budget Narrative
- Negotiated indirect rate agreement (if appropriate)
- Names and affiliations of all key persons from applicant and subcontractor(s), advisors, consultants, and Advisory Board members. Include the name of principal investigator, title, organizational affiliation (if any), department (if institution of higher education), address, phone, and fax numbers.
- Proposal abstract
- Table of contents
- Program narrative or technical proposal
- Privacy certificate, as appropriate
- References
- Letters of cooperation from collaborating organizations
- Résumés of key personnel
- Appendices, if any (e.g., list of previous NIJ awards, their status, and products [in NIJ or other publications]).

Proposal abstract. The proposal abstract, when read separately from the rest of the application, is meant to serve as a succinct and accurate description of the proposed work. Applicants must concisely describe the research goals and objectives, research design, and methods for achieving the goals and objectives. Summaries of past accomplishments are to be avoided, and proprietary/confidential information is not to be included. Length is not to exceed 400 words. Use the following two headers:

Project Goals and Objectives:
Proposed Research Design and Methodology:

Due date. Completed proposals **must be received** at the National Institute of Justice by the close of business on April 28, 1998. Extensions of this deadline will not be permitted.

Eligibility. Because Office for Victims of Crime funds are supporting these projects, the OVC legislation authorizing its programs will govern, i.e., the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, as amended, 42 U.S. Code 10601, et. seq. Eligibility for grants is limited to non-profit organizations and public agencies, 42 U.S. Code (10603(b)(1)(A). However, profit-making organizations will be eligible for subgrants or subcontracts under applicable regulations if selected by the grantee.

Award period. The award period is not to exceed 30 months.

Number of awards. NIJ anticipates supporting one grant under this solicitation.

Award amount. The award amount is not to exceed \$750,000.

Applying. Two packets need to be obtained: (1) application forms (including a sample budget worksheet) and (2) guidelines for submitting proposals (including requirements for proposal writers and requirements for grant recipients). To receive them, applicants can:

- Access the Justice Information Center on the

Web: <http://www.ncjrs.org/fedgrant.htm#NIJ>. At this site, the NIJ application forms and guidelines are available as electronic files that may be downloaded to a personal computer.

- Request hard copies of the forms and guidelines by mail from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at 800-851-3420 or from the Department of Justice Response Center at 800-421-6770 (in the Washington, D.C., area, at 202-307-1480).
- Request copies by fax. Call 800-851-3420 and select option 1, then option 1 again for NIJ. Code is 1023.

Guidance and information. Applicants who wish to receive additional guidance and information may contact the U.S. Department of Justice Response Center at 800-421-6770. Center staff can provide assistance or refer applicants to an appropriate NIJ professional.

Send completed proposals to:

EVALUATION OF VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT
STATE COMPENSATION AND ASSISTANCE
PROGRAMS
National Institute of Justice
810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531

NIJ is streamlining its processing of proposals anticipated under this and other current solicitations. Researchers can help by sending NIJ a nonbinding letter of intent by February 10, 1998. The Institute will use these letters to forecast the numbers of peer panels it needs and to identify conflicts of interest among potential reviewers. To send these letters you can (1) send e-mail to *tellnij@ncjrs.org* and identify the solicitation you expect to apply for, or (2) write a letter with the same information to Evaluation of Victims of Crime Act State Compensation and Assistance Programs, 810 Seventh Street N.W., Washington, DC 20531. Thank you for helping us to help you.

For more information on the National Institute of Justice, please contact:

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