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EVALUATING DATA COLLECTION AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEM PROJECTS
FUNDED UNDER THE STOP PROGRAM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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National Center for State Courts
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From 1996 to 2001, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) conducted an evaluation of data collection and communication system projects undertaken with Violence Against Women Act STOP (Services, Training, Officers, Prosecution) grant funds. The NCSC evaluation was one of four purpose area evaluations funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in 1996. The other purpose areas included victim services, law enforcement and prosecution, and services for Indian women. The purpose area evaluations were intended to complement a national evaluation of STOP projects initiated by the Urban Institute in 1995. This summary reports the findings for 1998-2001, which examined the uses of STOP grant funds intended to improve data collection and/or communication systems to address violence against women.

Methodology

The Urban Institute provided the basic data to identify grantees for the periods 1995-98 and 1999-2000 that reported using STOP grant funds for data collection or communication system projects. The findings reported here are based on (1) responses to a basic questionnaire from 171 1995-98 subgrantees and 69 1999-2000 subgrantees;¹ (2) responses to a follow-up questionnaire from 36 1997-98 subgrantees and 15 1999-2000 subgrantees;² (3) telephone interviews with 46 STOP subgrantees (27 in 1999 and 19 in 2000/2001); and two site visits to one STOP subgrantee, the Center for Court Innovation, which developed the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link in the Brooklyn and Bronx Domestic Violence Courts.

Basic survey findings

The combined findings from the basic survey (see Table 1) indicate that subgrantees most commonly used STOP grant funds to purchase hardware or software (80 percent) and to develop or improve case or client tracking systems (50 percent). About a third of the subgrantees applied STOP funds to coordinate or plan for an integrated data system (32 percent). A quarter of subgrantees reported purchasing communications equipment, while 20 percent used STOP

¹ The response rates to the basic questionnaires were 53% for the 1995-98 subgrantees and 39% for the 1999-2000 subgrantees (76 subgrantees returned questionnaires, but only 69 of these were applicable).

² The response rates to the follow-up questionnaires were 45% for the 1997-98 subgrantees and 33% for the 1999-2000 subgrantees.

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funds for victim notification systems. Lower proportions of the subgrantees used STOP funds to train staff to use the data or communication systems (18 percent), to develop or improve a protection order registry (16 percent), to implement an integrated data system (11 percent), and to develop software or establish communications networks (10 percent).

Table 1: Combined Report of Uses of STOP Grant Funds for Data Collection and Communication Projects: 1998-2000 (n=240)

Use of STOP Grant Funds	Number	Percent
Purchase hardware/software	192	80
Develop/improve case/client tracking system	120	50
Interagency coordination/planning for integrated data systems	77	32
Purchase communications equipment	59	25
Develop/improve victim notification system	48	20
Training to use data collection/communication systems	43	18
Develop/improve protection order registry	38	16
Implementation of an integrated data system	27	11
Establish communications network	23	10
Software development	23	10

The findings shown in Table 2 indicate no major changes over time in how subgrantees used funds for data collection and communication. For example, the most common use of funds across time was to purchase hardware and software. The proportion of subgrantees developing or improving case or client tracking systems remained relatively high across the years, moving up from 47 percent to 58 percent. However, there was a small but detectable shift away from the purchase of hardware and software to more specific programmatic applications. For example, the proportion of subgrantees using STOP funds for victim notification systems also increased, from 17 to 28 percent. The rise in subgrantees reporting the use of funds to implement an integrated data system from 9 percent in 1998/1999 to 17 percent in 2000 also is an indication that STOP subgrantees are improving their technological capacity, whether directly from STOP funds or through other resources.

Table 2: Comparison of Reported Uses of STOP Grant Funds for Data Collection and Communication Projects: 1998/1999 and 2000 (n=240)

Use of STOP Grant Funds	1998-99 (n=171)		2000 (n=69)	
	N	%	N	%
Purchase hardware/software	147	86	45	65
Develop/improve case/client tracking system	80	47	40	58
Interagency coordination/planning for integrated data systems	53	31	24	35
Purchase communications equipment	40	23	19	28
Training to use data collection/communication systems	29	17	14	20
Develop/improve victim notification system	29	17	19	28
Develop/improve protection order registry	26	15	12	17
Establish communications network	16	9	7	10
Software development	15	9	8	12
Implementation of an integrated data system	15	9	12	17

Follow-up survey findings

In the follow-up surveys, 51 subgrantees reported information about various aspects of their projects, including the geographic scope, timing, and level of STOP funding for the project, what types of data they collected and with whom it was shared, how information in their data or communication system was used, and how the data or communication system had affected their response to violence against women. Table 3 presents the reports from subgrantees on the perceived effects of the data or communication system on their response to violence against women and the importance of STOP funding to the development and continuation of the system.

Table 3: Reported Effects of Data Collection/Communication System Projects: 1999/2000 Follow-up Questionnaires (n=51)

Questions	Number	Percentage
Has the existence of this data collection/communication system affected your response to violence against women in any of the following ways?		
More reliable/immediate information on which to base decisions	31	61%
Better able to provide services to victims because of enhanced communication across agencies	28	55%
Stronger linkages across agencies to provide a more coordinated response to victims	25	49%
Increased victim safety through notification measures	18	35%
Improved police response due to available information on prior incidents	13	25%
Increased batterer accountability through the ability to track compliance	13	25%
Stronger enforcement of protection orders through their collection in a centralized registry	10	20%
Increased case tracking for district attorney accountability	10	20%
Sentencing enhancements for repeat offenders not previously tracked	9	18%
Earlier identification of domestic violence/sexual assault cases	6	12%
How likely would a data collection/communication system have been developed in your jurisdiction without STOP grant funds?		
Very unlikely/unlikely	33	65%
Somewhat unlikely	9	18%
Will this data collection/communication system be maintained without STOP grant funds (i.e., incorporated into organization's operating budget)?		
Project is not likely to continue without STOP grant funds	15	29%
Permanent financial support already included in budget	14	27%
Plans are in place to permanently fund the system	8	16%

Although the responses of 51 subgrantees are not necessarily representative of all subgrantees that engaged in data collection or communication system projects, they do provide an indication that these funds have had a positive effect on the subgrantees' capacity to address violence against women. Sixty-one percent of these subgrantees reported that they can base decisions on more reliable or immediate information in the system. Over half of the subgrantees (55 percent) said they are better able to provide services to victims because communications across systems have been enhanced, while nearly a half (49 percent) report stronger linkages across agencies to provide a more coordinated response to victims. Over a third of these subgrantees (35 percent) said that victim safety has been increased through notification measures made possible by their projects.

Other important aspects of the projects reported by subgrantees include: improved police response because information on prior incidents is available (25 percent), increased batterer accountability through compliance tracking (25 percent), stronger enforcement of protection orders made possible by central registries (20 percent), more sentencing enhancements for repeat offenders (18 percent), and earlier identification of domestic violence and sexual assault cases (12 percent). Nearly half the subgrantees (47 percent) reported they are collecting statistical data to measure how their data or communication system is affecting their response to violence against women.

The survey responses from these subgrantees also suggest that the STOP grant funds were essential to improving this capacity. For example, 65 percent of these subgrantees reported that the likelihood of their project developing without STOP funds was low or very low. Unfortunately, 29 percent of the subgrantees said their project was not likely to continue without STOP grant funds. On the other hand, 43 percent of the subgrantees reported either that permanent financial support was in the agency's budget or plans were in place to permanently fund the system. Over half the subgrantees (55 percent) reported having no data or communication system before they received STOP funds, and a third had only a manual data collection system. These responses suggest that for many subgrantees, STOP funds have been the catalyst for securing institutional support.

Telephone interview findings

Telephone interviews with 46 STOP subgrantees provided a more detailed picture of the types of activities subgrantees identified as data and communication system projects. Software included office automation software, forms development software, database management software, and database development software. Hardware ranged from personal computers, radio repeaters, and video or still cameras to network infrastructure. A communications network might be defined as a telephone notification protocol for shelter vacancies or availability of services for batterers or victims. The interviews revealed little emphasis on inter-agency communication through electronic means; the pooling of data concerning violence against women among law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and service providers in some type of integrated automated system; or the coordination of grant funds to local recipients to achieve regional or statewide strategic goals.

Training for most subgrantees was not focused on using the data or communication equipment or system, but instead encompassed training of law enforcement, prosecutors, and community stakeholders in the indicators of domestic violence, the creation and implementation of a safety plan, and the completion of domestic violence incident reports. Development covered a wide range of objectives, from creating forms and curriculum to building case management and services management systems. Integration most typically

included regular communication of information by any means, not typically electronic, among justice partners and non-governmental entities responding to domestic violence.

For many of these subgrantees, data collection and communication equipment were subsidiary aspects of the STOP-funded project. Several programs used computers to collect and compile data, but few subgrantees reported that they analyzed the data to assess the quality of their operations or services. Several subgrantees collected data solely for the purpose of meeting grant reporting requirements. Data collection aimed at increasing the total knowledge base of violence against women either at an individual or aggregate level was less typical.

Several statewide and some local projects achieved greater success in meeting the goals outlined by VAWA through more coordinated efforts. For example, Virginians Against Domestic Violence created a web-based statewide data collection system that is accessible 24 hours a day/seven days per week (www.vadata.org). The system has been used to enhance operations and increase services to survivors across the state. Delaware, which requires gun owners who are subject to a protection order (PFA) to relinquish firearms, automated printed notices from the court to registered gun owners when the PFA is issued. A component of this system application monitors the gun owner's compliance with the relinquishment notice.

Case study of the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link (Center for Court Innovation)

The Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link (Technology Application) is a prime example of a STOP funded project that fully addressed the goals of the data collection and communication system purpose area of the STOP grant program. The Center for Court Innovation partnered with the New York State Unified Court System to develop and implement the Technology Application in the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court and the Bronx Domestic Violence Court. The Technology Application is a web-based intranet system. It provides electronic links between the specialized domestic violence criminal courts and the district attorneys offices, probation, victim advocates, and treatment providers involved in cases under the jurisdiction of the domestic violence courts. The Technology Application facilitates court case processing; creates criminal protection orders on-line with the judge's electronic signature; tracks defendants' compliance with court-ordered batterer intervention, substance abuse treatment, and other terms of pre-trial release and probation; reports pertinent information from victims about safety issues, including alleged violations of protection orders; and coordinates service delivery to survivors.

Users of the Technology Application report that the system has improved practice within the court and among the partners in the specialized courts.³ Judges can instantly check the current status of the defendants' compliance with court-ordered batterer intervention and other terms of orders of protection. Legible and standardized protection orders are available immediately for in-court service on the defendant and can be printed out by justice system partners in their offices. Signed orders are transmitted to the state protection order registry. Victim advocates are better able to advise the court in a timely manner of defendant behavior that suggests heightened danger to the victim or the need for stronger controls on the defendant. All these technology features reduce significantly defendants' ability to use system gaps to evade accountability for their abuse and violence.

The Technology Application project achieved success because the project partners engaged in the strategic planning and collaboration necessary to implement an integrated data system across several agencies and levels of government:

- An advisory board composed of high-level representatives of criminal justice system agencies, victim service providers, and treatment providers assisted in conducting a thorough needs assessment of the partners already working together in the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court and the Bronx Domestic Violence Court.
- The Center and its partners used funds strategically to develop the Technology Application: VAWA STOP grant funds to build the system for the Bronx Domestic Violence Court; VAWA Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies funds to implement the Technology Application for the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court; and State Justice Institute funds to link criminal justice system partners, non-court victim service agencies and batterers' treatment programs to the Brooklyn Court.
- The Technology Application was implemented first in the Brooklyn Domestic Violence Court (450-500 felony cases per year) and then in the Bronx Domestic Violence Court (approximately 2500 misdemeanors at any one time). Starting with the lower volume court allowed the Center and the partners to identify and try to work out problems before moving to a higher volume court.
- Center staff consulted with line-staff of the system partners to ensure that the application addressed the partners' operational needs and practice and security concerns. When the lead technology staff resigned just as the Technology Application was to be rolled-out, the Center recruited a technology coordinator who had worked for the New

³ Young, P. (2001). *An Informed Response: An Overview of the Domestic Violence Court Technology Application and Resource Link*. New York, NY: Center for Court Innovation.

York State Unified Court System Division of Technology and was familiar with court operations and information systems.

- Finally, as implementation proceeded, the Center's domestic violence program and technology staff continued to work closely with the direct users of the Technology Application to identify and solve problems.

Conclusions and recommendations

In the period from 1996 to 2000, STOP funds were most commonly used to purchase computer equipment, software, cameras, fax machines, cellular phones, additional phone lines for agencies, and other communications equipment. Some subgrantees created computer databases, but most of these databases are free standing and support only the individual agency's operations. Relatively few subgrantees used STOP funds to develop data systems within or across agencies.

These findings indicate that subgrantees interpreted the definition of data collection and communication systems expansively to address acute local needs to increase access to services, support the prosecution of domestic violence cases, and enhance safety at the scene of domestic violence calls. These uses of the funds improved the ability of subgrantees to provide services and to accomplish the general goals of the Violence Against Women Act. Many subgrantees reported system improvements made possible by their data or communication system project, and several grantees produced very useful and innovative systems to improve the response to violence against women. Furthermore, many data or communication systems would not have been developed in the absence of STOP grant funding.

Accurate and reliable data systems and competent and secure communication methods are essential elements of a coordinated, coherent, and comprehensive government and community system for reducing violence against women. These components may not be the most visible or immediately helpful features of a systems approach to violence reduction and prevention programs, but they are the tools needed to identify victims, help them access services, assess system and services gaps, manage and monitor programs and services, measure performance, evaluate effectiveness, and continually improve the system.

In continuing to fund projects in this purpose area, the Department of Justice might consider the following recommendations:

- Developing a small set of standardized performance measures for statewide and national reporting.

- Providing training and technical assistance to STOP administrators in strategic planning for the development and sustainability of state and local data systems to reduce violence against women.
- Creating an information clearinghouse for current and potential grantees about state and local funding sources that are available to complement, supplement, and potentially sustain support provided by federal funds.
- Focusing future funding priorities on:
 - collecting standardized, statewide data that is complemented by common data element definitions
 - developing computer aided dispatch centers with automatic query capacity (i.e., when law enforcement responds to a domestic violence call, central dispatch can access court information and tell the responding officer what is pending)
 - creating direct electronic links between civil and criminal protection order databases and courts to track violations and enhance enforcement (in addition to law enforcement, prosecution, and other criminal justice agencies involved in enforcing orders)
 - developing systems to easily and quickly check statewide civil court records, criminal records, arrest histories, warrants, in custody status (jail), and photos of offenders
 - connecting local data systems to other local and state systems pursuing a common goal to reduce violence against women.

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