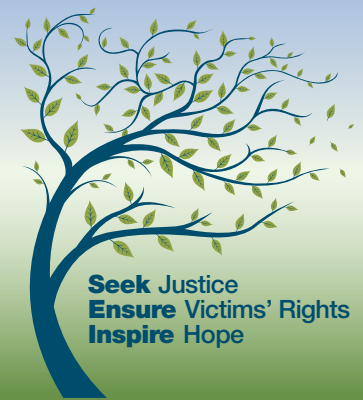


# Resource Guide

# Communicating Your Message: Media Tips & Tools



National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW), which takes place April 19–25, 2020, is a time to celebrate the progress made in victims' rights and services. It also recognizes the challenges that crime victims still face, along with the ongoing efforts to uphold and deliver those rights and services. This year's theme—Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope—underscores the importance of seeking justice for all victims of crime, ensuring that crime victims' rights are honored, educating the public about those rights, and inspiring hope for individual survivors and communities.

NCVRW is an excellent time for your organization to increase its visibility in the community, promote valuable resources for victims of crime, build or reactivate partnerships, and engage in a dialogue with diverse audiences. By creating a comprehensive NCVRW public awareness campaign involving social media, traditional media, and public events, you will reach colleagues, local organizations, and the wider community with important information on crime victims' issues, rights, and services—including the services offered by your organization.

This section presents sample draft text for a range of different media. Marked with symbols that represent recommended platforms for sharing, these pieces can be used as they stand or tailored to your particular audience and message. Also included are tips and tools for pitching stories, maximizing outreach efforts, increasing engagement, and advocating for victims with the media. By customizing the sample media and adapting it to fit the activities and priorities of your organization, you will increase your visibility, reach a greater audience, and increase the success of your NCVRW campaign.

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# MEDIA PLANS

## ***Crafting an NCVRW Media Plan***

A well-thought-out media plan is an effective way to share your message and increase your organization's exposure. Engaging a wide audience for your NCVRW activities can be time-consuming and may feel overwhelming for an organization with a small staff. However, an active social media presence is easy to achieve and can vastly increase your connections and reach.

You can tailor the sample media plans described here to meet the needs and capacity of your organization, and to set media and outreach goals for the entire year. It can take as much (or as little) time as you have to dedicate to it.

## **Considerations When Crafting a Media Plan**

- Who is your audience?
- What is your message? What do you want to accomplish?
- Where do you want to engage your audience (local, state, or national level)?

- What is the best method for communicating your message? (Your mode and method should be adapted for each communication.)
- When and how often should you communicate?
- Why is this message important to your audience?

## **Important To Remember**

- Social media is about two-way communication. To have successful engagement, consider following organizations in your network and then engage with their posts.
- Content is key. Posts should be relevant, timely, and consistent.
- Be intentional with what you share and post. Make sure your content fits into your overall messaging strategy and brand.
- Use #NCVRW2020 in your posts.



# CRAFTING AN NCVRW MEDIA PLAN

## Sample Plan 1

### For those—

- interested in building a stronger media presence, and
- able to dedicate a small amount of staff time (approximately 1 hour) each week.

### Throughout March and April—

- post on Twitter and Facebook two or three times each week. Share posts by OVC and other relevant organizations, copy a sample post from this guide (see pages 7–9), or craft your own content.
- if you already have an established blog, write one blog post about your organization’s NCVRW activities.

## Set Achievable Goals

Support your organizational activities by setting achievable, measurable goals such as—

- increasing your followers by 5 percent.
- achieving an engagement rate of 1 percent or higher. (Engagements include likes, shares, retweets, URL clicks, and any other action a user takes on your post. You can find your engagement rate in any of the social platforms’ reporting areas.)
- establishing online connections with other organizations by liking or following their pages.

## Sample Plan 2

### For those—

- interested in building a stronger media presence and forming relationships with local news organizations, and
- able to dedicate a moderate amount of staff time (4–8 hours each week).

### Throughout March and April—

- post at least four times on Twitter and four times on Facebook each week. You can respond to another organization’s post, inform the public about your resources, post a relevant news article, or use the sample posts on pages 7–9.
- write one blog post about how your organization is participating in NCVRW this year.
- write a news release about your organization’s recognition of NCVRW.
- submit a letter to the editor or an opinion-editorial to your local newspaper.

## Set Achievable Goals

Support your organizational activities by setting achievable, measurable goals such as—

- increasing your followers by 10 percent.
- achieving an engagement rate of 1 percent or higher. (Engagements include likes, shares, retweets, URL clicks, and any other action a user takes on your post. You can find your engagement rate in any of the social platforms’ reporting areas.)
- having a letter to the editor or an opinion-editorial published in the local newspaper.



## Sample Plan 3

### For those—

- interested in reaching a wide audience and increasing visibility, and
- able to devote significant staff time (8 or more hours each week).

### Throughout March and April—

- post at least once 5–7 times per week on Twitter and Facebook. Use a variety of tactics—share others' posts, respond to other organizations, post news articles, highlight neighboring events and services, use the sample posts on pages 7–9, or craft your own NCVRW messages related to this year's theme, *Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope*.
- write two blog posts about NCVRW. Publish the first one the week before NCVRW, detailing the history of the week and what your organization is doing to commemorate the week. Publish the second post after NCVRW as a followup on your organization's events and national NCVRW events, such as the U.S.

Department of Justice's National Crime Victims' Service Awards Ceremony.

- submit a letter to the editor and an opinion-editorial for print in your local newspaper each month.
- write two or more news releases. Possible topics include your participation in the mayor's proclamation, your own organization's NCVRW activities, and other events commemorating the week.

### Set Achievable Goals

Support your organizational activities with achievable, measurable goals such as—

- increasing your followers by 10–20 percent.
- achieving an engagement rate of 2 percent or higher. (Engagements include likes, shares, retweets, URL clicks, and any other action a user takes on your post. You can find your engagement rate in any of the social platforms' reporting areas.)
- connecting with professionals and community members in a variety of ways.



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## SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to alerting traditional journalists to important stories, social media allows you to engage directly with the public and build relationships through succinct messaging that is unfiltered by traditional journalism outlets. The most important social media platforms for your campaign are available for free, though many allow you to pay for access to a larger audience.



Many organizations already have a Facebook business or cause page. Rather than opening a new page specific to a particular topic, use these established pages with built-in audiences to promote NCVRW activities and information. Post photos, videos, organizational content, invitations to upcoming events, and links leading back to your website. Engage your audience by replying to their comments on posts and liking or sharing posts from other people and organizations in your network.

Use the Facebook Live feature to stream live events or answer questions in real time. You can also temporarily pin a post highlighting NCVRW to the top of your page to increase its visibility. Use the sample posts below or create your own to launch your NCVRW Facebook campaign. To download NCVRW theme artwork sized specifically for sharing on Facebook, visit [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020). Be sure to use applicable hashtags, and add #NCVRW2020 to your NCVRW posts.

## 6 Tips for an Effective Facebook Post

- Keep your content concise; readers should be able to easily access the information they need.
- Include a link to a relevant article or website.
- Be timely.
- Post at varied times throughout your social campaign for maximum impressions.
- Post intentionally, as part of a consistent sharing strategy.
- Include an image (images receive more engagement and are favored by Facebook's algorithm).

## Sample Facebook Posts

- Join us throughout the week as we raise awareness for victims' rights. Learn how you and your community can get involved. #NCVRW2020
- Justice can take different forms for each individual victim. This year's #NCVRW2020 theme—Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope—focuses on the rights of all victims of crime. [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020)
- The victims' rights movement began through a shared hope for healing, a hope for change, and a hope to be heard. The legacy of commitment and passion lives on today. We remember the movement's first leaders as we seek justice and inspire hope for the future. #NCVRW2020
- When victims feel understood and supported, they are more likely to seek services, which leads to a stronger and more resilient community. #NCVRW2020 [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020)
- #NCVRW2020 recognizes the crime victim advocates, allied professionals, and selfless volunteers who have worked toward a future of inclusive and accessible resources and services. This year's theme is "Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope." Learn more at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020) to get involved.
- Did you know? In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established the President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, cementing a path for progress in the victims' movement. #NCVRW2020
- National Crime Victims' Rights Week begins Sunday, April 19. Visit the Office for Victims of Crime's NCVRW website for information about resources and help for planning events and activities. #NCVRW2020 [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020)



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- Looking to plan, promote, or locate victims' services events? Visit the National Calendar of Crime Victim Assistance-Related Events. <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ovccalendar> #NCVRW2020
- April 19–25, 2020, is National Crime Victims' Rights Week. Find webinars on victims' rights on OVC TTAC. #NCVRW2020 [www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspWebinars.cfm](http://www.ovcttac.gov/views/TrainingMaterials/dspWebinars.cfm)
- Visit [ovcttac.gov](http://ovcttac.gov) for the tools and resources you need to build your capacity to serve all victims of crime. #NCVRW2020
- Visit the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards for information on crime victim compensation in your state: [www.nacvcb.org/index.asp?sid=6](http://www.nacvcb.org/index.asp?sid=6) #NCVRW2020
- Do you know what victims' rights exist in your state? Visit <https://victimlaw.org> today to research state, federal, or tribal law. #NCVRW2020
- If you or someone you know has been a victim of elder fraud, reporting is the first step to getting results. <https://justice.gov/stopelderfraud> #NCVRW2020

## TECH TIP

### Embedding Links in Facebook

To embed a link in a Facebook post, copy the URL into the text field and wait until Facebook generates a thumbnail and page description. Then delete the URL text, enter the rest of your content, and complete the post.



Twitter is an information-sharing network where each post, or “tweet,” is limited to 280 characters. If you set up a new account, choose a Twitter handle (username) that other users will recognize (often the name or abbreviation of your organization) and an easily identifiable profile picture. To be an active Twitter user, follow other individuals and organizations, follow their followers, retweet their tweets, and promote them to your audience. Post your own tweets that link back to your website or your other social media pages and use images and graphics when possible. Create longer form messages by replying to your own tweets and creating a “thread.” Maximize your Twitter presence by staying engaged in conversations on subjects that are important to your mission, and by quickly responding to other users’ tweets and mentions of your organization or causes. Adding a hashtag groups your tweet with related posts from other users, and is a useful way to become part of a conversation. Make sure to use the most applicable tags, and add #NCVRW2020 to your NCVRW tweets.

## 6 Tips for Tweeting

New users of Twitter may have difficulty adhering to a character limit. Use the tips below to make your tweets more concise:

- Replace spelled out numbers (“nine”) with numerals (“9”).
- Replace “and” with “+,” “&,” or “/” when appropriate.
- Use contractions.
- Replace long words with shorter synonyms.
- Shorten links with sites like TinyURL or Bitly, or remove “http:” and “https:” from the beginning of links, when possible.

## Sample Tweets

- National Crime Victims’ Rights Week begins on April 19. Visit [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020) for information about resources and events. #NCVRW2020
- The theme for #NCVRW2020 is “Seek Justice | Ensure Victims’ Rights | Inspire Hope,” which reminds us of what drives our commitment and inspires us to keep pushing forward to a future of accessible services for all victims.
- National Crime Victims’ Rights Week is April 19–25, 2020. Follow #NCVRW2020 to stay connected and download awareness posters at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020).
- Download the #NCVRW2020 Resource Guide at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020) for tips on observing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.
- In 1982, President Ronald Reagan established the President’s Task Force on Victims of Crime, cementing a path for progress in the victims’ movement. #NCVRW2020
- #NCVRW2020 starts today! This year’s theme is “Seek Justice | Ensure Victims’ Rights | Inspire Hope.” Download posters at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020) to promote awareness.
- #NCVRW2020 recognizes the crime victim advocates, allied professionals, and selfless volunteers who have courageously worked toward a future of inclusive and accessible resources and services. This year’s theme is “Seek Justice | Ensure Victims’ Rights | Inspire Hope.”
- Spread awareness and inspire hope! Download 3 free awareness posters for your #NCVRW2020 activities at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020).





- When victims of crime receive the services and support they need, they are more likely to remain engaged in their community. Together, we can support strength and resilience. #NCVRW2020
- This NCVRW, we think of the bravery and perseverance of those in the victim services field who created change and hope for victims of crime. #NCVRW2020
- Looking for ways to get involved in #NCVRW2020? Find tips on raising awareness at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020).
- Resources are available to help victims of elder fraud this #NCVRW2020. Visit <https://justice.gov/stopelderfraud> to learn more.
- Find talking points and useful promotional materials for your #NCVRW2020 activities on [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020).
- Have you or someone you know been a victim of crime? The #NCVRW2020 Referral Flier lists national resources that can offer support. [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020)
- Need inspiration for your #NCVRW2020 event? See the NCVRW Resource Guide for helpful tips and direction on advocating for victims in the media. [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020)
- See the #NCVRW2020 Commemorative Calendar of crime victim-related observances at [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020) and support victims throughout the year.
- Learn how to report elder fraud and assist others this #NCVRW2020. <https://justice.gov/stopelderfraud>
- @OJPOVC offers a calendar of upcoming #victim assistance events. Learn more or add your events at [ovc.ncjrs.gov/ovccalendar/about.asp](http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ovccalendar/about.asp). #NCVRW2020
- Do you know what victims' rights exist in your state? Visit [www.victimlaw.org](http://www.victimlaw.org) to research state, federal, or tribal law. #NCVRW2020
- Visit [ovcttac.gov](http://ovcttac.gov) for the tools and resources you need to help build your capacity to serve victims of crime. #NCVRW2020
- @OJPOVC hosts a searchable database of victims' rights laws. Learn more: [www.victimlaw.org](http://www.victimlaw.org). #NCVRW2020
- @OJPOVC TTAC offers free trainings on victim advocacy and assistance. Learn more here: [www.ovcttac.gov](http://www.ovcttac.gov). #NCVRW2020
- By pooling expertise and resources, we can support the healing and recovery of all crime victims and build thriving communities. Open your #NCVRW2020 activities with the proclamation on [www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020](http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw2020).



## BLOGS

Consider sharing more in-depth messages with your community online through a blog, such as [WordPress](#) and [Blogger](#). Post as frequently as you wish, with a goal of at least once a month. Be sure to provide a link to your blog on your Facebook, Twitter, and other social media pages.

### ***Steps to an Engaging Blog Post***

- Target your audience by using an appropriate reading level and relevant content.
- Check your facts—use only statistics that come from reliable sources, and cite them.
- State your main points in your introduction and again in the conclusion.
- Limit your post to no more than 750 words.
- Time the release of your blog post to coincide with events and current news.

### ***Ideas for Blog Posts***

- Information for crime victims, such as crime victim compensation or victims' rights.
- Details about an upcoming event or a recap following an event.
- Awareness days, weeks, and months.
- Suggestions for self-care.
- Personal stories including suggestions for self-care and how victims used local resources to assist in their recovery.
- Lists of important resources and services.
- Relevant interviews with important local officials or executives in the organization.



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## Sample Blog Post

### Advocacy as a Path to Justice

Seeking justice in court is one way for victims of crime to make progress toward healing. Some victims decide that the path of advocacy is the way forward for them in the aftermath of crime.

The President's Task Force on Victims of Crime, established in 1982, was a watershed moment for crime victims in the United States. The recommendations of this task force led directly to the passage of the Victims of Crime Act in 1984, an unprecedented recognition that crime victims' rights must be formally codified and protected. This landmark achievement of the victims' rights movement would not have been possible without years' of work by advocates who transformed their own painful experiences into a force for legal and legislative change.

For these victims and their families, the stories of previous generations in the crime victims' rights movement are a powerful testament to the use of advocacy as a means for achieving healing and justice by changing the justice system. Across the decades, these advocates have contributed to the passage of crucial federal and state laws that protect crime victims.

One of the most prominent examples of early justice through advocacy is the family of Matthew Shepard, an openly gay man attending the University of Wyoming. On October 7, 1998, Shepard met two men in a bar. After leaving with them, he was found brutally tortured, maimed, and murdered. It was suspected, due to his injuries, that his murder was a hate crime based on his sexual orientation. His family rallied through their pain to advocate for protections for the LGBTQ community. Their efforts resulted in the Matthew Shepard Act. The law provides monetary and educational resources to law enforcement agencies for the investigation and prosecution of hate crimes. It also makes it illegal to attempt or cause harm, injury, or death to individuals under one of six protected classes, including sexual orientation.

We continue to find examples of hope today, through the pioneering advocacy work of victims. Brenda Tracy, a sexual assault survivor, has spent years raising awareness of sexual assault and helping pass laws to support victims of those crimes. In 1998, Brenda was sexually assaulted by four men, two of whom were college football players at Oregon State University. Finding the courage to tell her story publicly in 2014, Brenda began speaking at colleges and universities in Oregon and across the Nation. Her words have made people in the higher education community understand the severe physical, psychological, and emotional impact of sexual assault. She has also worked closely with Oregon legislators to expand victims' rights, extend the state's statute of limitations for prosecuting sexual assault crimes, and provide protection and resources for campus sexual assault victims.

Similarly, Shari Kastein, a domestic violence victim, has worked tirelessly as an advocate both to change victim services and to increase them. In 2013, Shari joined the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation and developed the Western Iowa Survivors of Homicide Unit. This unit specializes in providing compassionate care and services to families and friends of those who have been murdered or seriously injured by crime. In 2015, she helped create a statewide domestic violence helpline that fields calls from sexual assault victims, human trafficking victims, and homicide survivors. Her extraordinary work has helped countless women, men, and children maintain hope in the midst of their victimization.



Because of trailblazers like the Shepards, Brenda Tracy, and Shari Kastein, each year the victims' rights movement comes one step closer to ensuring that all victims of crime can seek justice, know their rights, and feel a sense of hope for the future. Their work, which is truly justice through advocacy, has allowed victims and communities to find hope and healing in the wake of trauma. Advocacy gives victims a voice in shaping their future—and it's a future that you can help create, by elevating the voices of crime victims in your own community.

If you would like to learn more about advocacy by and for victims of crime, *[link to local resources from your organization and others]*.



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# OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

## YouTube

YouTube is the second most-visited site on the Internet, making it a powerful platform for sharing information. To begin, set up a [YouTube channel](#) for your organization, which will then link to any Google accounts you have. Choose a name that matches your brand and post your channel URL on your website, Facebook page, and other social networking profiles. If applicable, register for a [YouTube Nonprofit Program](#) account, which gives you more features, including the ability to add clickable “asks” on top of videos and upload longer videos. Use YouTube to upload recordings of presentations and trainings from your organization, as well as highlights of your NCVRW events. Visit [OVC’s YouTube channel](#) for examples of videos to post.

## Instagram

Instagram is a photo-sharing application that lets you upload and share images with your network. Download the Instagram app, [set up an account](#), snap photos of your NCVRW events on your mobile devices, and give your followers a sneak peek before you post them on your website. Expand the audience for your photos by [tagging](#) them with keywords and hashtags to identify or organize them, and be sure to add #NCVRW2020 to relevant posts. Instagram also has a “stories” feature that allows users to post a series of photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. Instagram interfaces with Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms.

## LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional network for individuals and organizations. To create a [LinkedIn company page](#) for your organization, follow the “setup wizard” to complete a company profile. Be sure to include header and profile images, and focus on keywords from your mission

statement throughout your description. Additionally, use LinkedIn Showcase pages to highlight specific initiatives, such as NCVRW.

## Periscope

[Periscope](#) is Twitter’s live-streaming public video app. Similar to Facebook Live, it allows the user to broadcast and watch live videos in real time from around the world. The application has useful features, such as the ability to attend meetings remotely and share events with the public. You can choose whether to keep broadcasts indefinitely or let them expire after 24 hours. Use Periscope to share your NCVRW events with community members who are unable to attend in person.

## Additional Tips for Social Media Posts

In addition to the sample Facebook and Twitter posts listed here, use the following ideas to generate more NCVRW content for your social media sites.

- Download NCVRW Theme Artwork from the [NCVRW website](#), including NCVRW-specific Facebook and Twitter images.
- Post photos or videos of your organization’s NCVRW planning sessions or events.
- Share posters from OVC’s [gallery of awareness posters](#) on crime- and victim-related topics using your social media platforms.
- Post links to NCVRW op-eds or news releases from your local newspaper or television station’s website.
- Post links to NCVRW statements or proclamations made by local or state officials, and include brief descriptions about these statements.



- Allow other Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn users to post stories, event reminders, pictures, and updates on your timeline by opening your Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn settings. If you allow the general public to engage with your content, be sure to monitor your timeline frequently for negative or offensive posts.
- Post bios and photos of your NCVRW event speakers on your Facebook page in advance of the events, and promote them on Twitter and your other social media channels.
- Ask your social media followers to repost your status updates on their social media networks.
- Post current and recent NCVRW videos on YouTube.



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## TRADITIONAL MEDIA

Traditional media reach a broad, general audience through print newspapers, online publications, and radio and television broadcasts. These venues provide additional opportunities to draw attention to crime-related issues in your community, share information about the work of your organization, and ask for community support. The following sample media can be modified for use by your organization during NCVRW and throughout the year.



The purpose of a press release is to generate media coverage for your organization’s participation in NCVRW and other events throughout the year. Edit the sample press release to reflect specific issues in your community and to highlight activities, events, and commemorations.

Make sure to share the release with your contacts and local media, but don’t forget to post it to your own website, link to it on Facebook, and tweet the link as well. Use this opportunity to generate exposure for your organization, highlight issues related to your mission, and position your spokesperson as an expert in the field. For best results, distribute your release at least 10 days prior to your event. Use the lead time to follow up with reporters and partner organizations, identify spokespeople, answer questions, and create media materials for each important event.

## ***5 Elements of a Noteworthy Press Release***

- Craft an attention-grabbing headline.
- Include the main point in the first paragraph and be sure to address who, what, when, where, and why.
- Use relevant statistics.
- Incorporate a strong quotation to engage your reader.
- Include contact information and additional resources.





## Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

[Name/Title/Organization]

CONTACT:

[Phone Number]

[Email]

### [Your City/Organization] Commemorates National Crime Victims' Rights Week, April 19–25, 2020

*[Customize subheading to highlight local events, activities, partnerships, key issues, etc.]*

[City, State] – [Organization's name], in commemoration of National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW), April 19–25, 2020, is hosting [list special events or activities] to raise awareness about crime victims' issues and rights and introduce the community to the important resources and services available. This matters to our community because, according to the most recent National Crime Victimization Survey from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, about 3.3 million Americans age 12 or older were victims of violent crime in 2018..

[Your city/organization] will commemorate the advancement of victims' rights and highlight issues surrounding victimization by holding [insert description of event, date, time, and venue]. [Your city/organization] is also honoring [name, title] and [name, title], champions in advocating for expanded support and services for communities affected by crime.

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) leads communities throughout the country in their annual observances of NCVRW by promoting victims' rights and honoring crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. This year's theme—*Seek Justice | Ensure Victims' Rights | Inspire Hope*—recognizes the individuals and groups whose advocacy has propelled the victims' rights movement forward for the past half century, inspiring in victims and their loved ones a feeling of hope for progress, justice, and healing.

*[Include a quote from a recognized leader or official in your community/organization about the importance of NCVRW in your community.]*

OVC and [your local organizations] encourage widespread participation in the week's events and in other victim-related observances throughout the year. OVC will host the annual National Crime Victims' Service Awards Ceremony on April 24, 2020, Washington, D.C., to honor outstanding individuals and programs that serve victims of crime.

For additional information about this year's NCVRW and how to assist victims in your own community, please contact [organization] at [telephone number] or visit [organization]'s website at [web address]. For additional ideas on how to support victims of crime, visit OVC's website at [www.ovc.gov](http://www.ovc.gov).

###

[Your organization's mission statement/boilerplate]



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Readers' letters and comments are often the most read sections of newspapers and news websites. They are great tools for building awareness about National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). By writing a letter to the editor, you can link NCVRW or one of your organization's programs to a current local, state, or national issue by showing why readers should care about the rights and concerns of crime victims. Ideally, you would cite a reliable recent study, quote statistics about the crime or issue, or stress the need for more research about crimes that are often hidden or underreported.

Consider asking local law enforcement agencies or other organizations to partner with you, or encourage them to write their own letters to highlight the needs of crime victims and how the public can help. Letters that are endorsed by multiple community groups will receive more attention. When you submit your letter to the editor, include your contact information so the newspaper can

reach you if it decides to print your letter. If the newspaper does not publish your letter, consider submitting it to a local organization that publishes a newsletter, post it on your website, or share it on social media.

### ***5 Elements of an Attention-Grabbing Letter***

- Respond to an article or commentary recently published. Begin your letter by citing this article.
- Keep it brief—no more than 250 to 300 words.
- Include a call to action.
- Use verified facts and reference the original sources.
- Include information on where people can learn more about the issue.



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## Sample Letter to the Editor

### *Unsure How To Help Crime Victims? Start by Learning About Their Rights*

Victimization and its aftermath may be one of the most difficult periods in a person's life—and victims' families, friends, and communities often face their own challenges as well. Loved ones may struggle to understand what kind of support victims need, or even how to talk to them about what happened. Service professionals may be uncertain how their roles intersect with victims' own sense of what justice looks like for them.

Each crime victim's healing process will be different, but one step everyone can take is to learn what rights crime victims have. These rights will be best protected when all participants in the criminal justice process—and not only victims—are appropriately educated about victims' rights.

A great place to start learning about crime victims' rights is *[website of your organization, or a local crime victims' rights organization]*. There you can find information about supporting victims in our community. Looking beyond local efforts here in *[city/county name]*, *[your state]* has resources at the state level too: *[state office or resource on victims' rights]* is a good place to learn more.

At the national level, the [National Crime Victim Law Institute](#) promotes victim-centered legal advocacy, education, and resource sharing. And [VictimLaw.org](#) is a centralized resource for legal provisions regarding victims' rights across the country.

Recovering from crime is a complex and deeply personal process for victims, but you can help ensure they have the support they need—and inspire them to hope for future progress and healing—by making education about victims' rights a priority for yourself and your community.



Newspaper editorial pages—both in print and online—are highly popular among readers. Opinion-editorials (op-eds) are longer than letters to the editor and afford the opportunity to delve more deeply into issues. An op-ed is your chance to influence opinions, affect policy, and highlight the work you or your organization is doing to support crime victims' rights.

One way to develop an op-ed is to research local crime coverage and important issues in your community. For example, does your community offer services for victims of human trafficking? How would a partnership between law enforcement and victim service agencies benefit your community? Use or adapt the sample op-ed on the following page or craft your own to highlight an issue local to your community.

### ***5 Elements of an Attention-Grabbing Op-Ed***

- Be persuasive. Include the latest research and structure a logical argument or rationale.
- Be confident. You are the expert in this field.
- Stay up to date on related events and the cultural conversations about them.
- Use plain language that a wide audience can understand.
- Keep your submission to 800 words or less.



## Sample Op-Ed Column

### ***Crimes Against Older Adults Must Not Be Overlooked***

The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that in just 15 years, adults over age 65 will outnumber children under age 18 for the first time in U.S. history. By 2060, older adults will make up about a quarter of the U.S. population. Aging and the changes that come with it can make our elders particularly vulnerable to crime, abuse, and neglect, but crimes against older adults are not as well studied or understood as crimes against other vulnerable groups.

These crimes need our attention. Elder abuse has been referred to as a “hidden epidemic” in the United States, with estimates that it affects 10 percent of persons age 60 and older. Elder abuse takes a heavy toll on the dignity, safety, and financial security of older adults. These crimes can lead to increased hospitalizations, anxiety, depression, and premature deaths. But without proper training, professionals working with older Americans too often miss signs of elder abuse. Studies have shown that as few as 1 in 24 cases of elder abuse are reported, and few of those are ever prosecuted.

The most likely place for older adults to experience victimization is where they live, and the perpetrator is most likely to be a family member or someone they know. Maltreatment is not always a criminal offense, but the intimate nature of many of these victimizations means that older victims are less likely to report offenses committed by someone close to them.

We can’t address these crimes effectively until the victims are more widely recognized, and until older adults receive the support they need to report crimes, seek services, and pursue justice.

All members of the community can [learn to identify possible signs of elder abuse](#), from physical injuries and bruises to unchanged bed linens and evasive staff at care facilities. The U.S. Administration on Aging has an [Eldercare Locator](#) to help older adults and their families connect with services, and its [National Center on Elder Abuse](#) offers advice and resources to professionals, advocates, and families around the Nation. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has an [office dedicated to helping older Americans](#), their family members, their caregivers, and the professionals who assist them identify and avoid unfair, deceptive, abusive, and discriminatory financial practices. And the Office for Victims of Crime recently launched a new [National Elder Fraud Hotline](#) for understanding elder fraud and getting help.

Locally, *[discuss local resources and/or initiatives for addressing and educating the public about crimes against older adults]*.

Learning how to recognize and respond to crimes against older adults is just the first step, but it’s one that we can all take to ensure that our community, and the Nation as a whole, is a safer and more just place for our seniors.





Broadcast media (radio and television) are required by the Federal Communications Commission to serve “the public interest.” Many stations donate portions of their commercial time to non-commercial causes and air community calendars with information about local events and activities. Public service announcements, or PSAs, are short video or audio messages that advertise a public service or event and are broadcast for free by radio or television stations.

To get a PSA broadcast on the air, contact your local radio or television stations about 2 months in advance to inquire about submission guidelines and the stations’ policies on airing PSAs. Find out who is in charge of selecting which PSAs will run. This person could be the public affairs director, traffic director, program director, promotions manager, or station manager. Be sure to include local cable (sometimes called “community access”) stations and college stations in your outreach.

Once you’ve made contact with the stations, inform them that you will be sending a PSA to air. Include basic information about your organization in the delivery, such as a cover letter and informational material. Follow up with a phone call to ask if the PSA was received and when it will be aired. Continue to reach out to the station—persistence is key.

## Sample 15-Second PSA

Every year, millions of Americans are affected by crime. April 19–25 is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, a time to celebrate progress, raise awareness of victims’ rights and services, and stand with those whose lives have been forever altered.\* Call [organization name] at [phone number] to learn how you or someone you know can get the help they need.

## Sample 30-Second PSA

Every year, millions of Americans are affected by crime. Many will need ongoing care and resources. April 19–25 is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, a time to celebrate the progress achieved, raise awareness of victims’ rights and services, and stand with our families, neighbors, friends, and colleagues whose lives have been forever altered by crime. Show victims that they are not alone. Reach out, and speak up. When you give victims a voice, you give them hope.\* Call [organization name] at [phone number] to learn how you or someone you know can get the help they need.

## Sample 60-Second PSA

Every year, millions of Americans are affected by crime. Many will need ongoing care and resources. April 19–25 is National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, a time to celebrate the progress achieved, raise awareness of victims’ rights and services, and stand with our families, neighbors, friends, and colleagues whose lives have been forever altered by crime. We resolve to reach out, listen, and support them as they press forward on a path to recovery. We commit to making our services more accessible and to building partnerships across the community so that we can continue to seek justice, ensure victims’ rights, and inspire hope for crime victims. This National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, show victims they are not alone.\* Call [organization name] at [phone number] to learn how you or someone you know can get the help they need.

### \*Alternate Ending

**You can also end each PSA with the following national helpline information:**

Call 855–4–VICTIM or visit [VictimConnect.org](https://www.victimconnect.org) to learn about victims’ rights and options, confidentially and compassionately.



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# WORKING WITH REPORTERS

NCVRW is a perfect opportunity to focus the media's attention on crime issues relevant to your local community. Research local crime victims' stories on the Internet and note which reporters cover these stories in your area. Find their contact information and follow those reporters on social media. Check with the news desk or outlet's website for the appropriate reporter's contact information.

If your agency is holding a newsworthy event, either for NCVRW or at another time during the year, contact local reporters by phone and email and use social media to engage with reporters and send out invitations and alerts. Briefly describe the event and offer yourself as a resource.

Reporters are on tight deadlines, so any information that you can share ahead of time is useful and appreciated. Reporters will often ask for a local or human-interest angle. Be prepared for the following types of questions when pitching your event:

- Has a local victim triumphed over tragedy or found a way to help other victims restore their lives? Is there a victim who would be willing to share his or her story?
- Do you have a reliable source for up-to-date statistics on a particular type of crime? (Position your organization as a resource.)
- Have there been any other recent examples of the crime you are discussing in your area or in other communities around the country?
- Who could brief the reporter on the status of the law in this area?
- Can your organization's director provide an on-the-record comment?



# ADVOCATING FOR VICTIMS WITH THE MEDIA

Media coverage of crime greatly influences public perceptions about victims. As reporters rush to meet deadlines, particularly in the immediate aftermath of crimes, their reporting may not reflect the desired sensitivity to traumatized victims. Because many reporters do not receive training about how to interact with victims, you have an opportunity to help them approach crime stories with sensitivity. As a victim advocate who understands the perspective of victims and knows what reporters need to include in their stories, you play a key role in advocating for victim-sensitive coverage of crime.

## Tips for Reporters

In writing news stories about crime, reporters have the difficult task of seeking interviews from victims and conducting those interviews in an ethical manner when victims agree to speak. Advocates can help reporters prepare to speak with victims by offering suggestions about how to approach victims so that they feel comfortable and safe. Educate reporters on how to approach crime victims by sharing the following guidelines.<sup>2</sup>

### Asking for the Interview

- Recognize that the victim may be coping with shock and trauma.
- Approach the victim initially without equipment—notebooks, tape recorders, cameras, and lights—and try to make a human connection.
- Introduce yourself as a reporter, give the victim your name and title, and briefly explain what you hope to achieve with your story.
- Express concern for the victim by saying, “I am sorry for what happened to you” or “I am sorry for your loss.”

- Ask victims how they would prefer to be addressed, and observe that preference in all of your questions.
- Give the victim a reason to speak with you by explaining the purpose of the story, the fact that it will be published, and why the victim’s participation is important.
- Tell the victim how much time you need and observe that time limit.
- Courteously accept the victim’s refusal if he or she is unwilling to be interviewed.
- If the victim declines, express interest in a future interview, leave a business card, or send an email with your contact information, and ask for the names of others who may be willing to speak.

### Logistics and Other Considerations

- Make the victim comfortable—offer a chair or suggest a comfortable, safe place to talk.
- Ask permission to record the interview.
- Respect the victim’s space—because people experiencing trauma often do not want to be touched, hand the microphone to the victim and explain how to adjust it.
- Clarify ground rules—explain that anything the victim says may be used in the interview.

### Victim Advocacy During Interviews

With the help of victim advocates, reporters can approach the interview with sensitivity toward the victim and the understanding that he or she may be undergoing trauma associated with the crime. Advocates who are present

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Bucqueroux and Anne Seymour, *A Guide for Journalists Who Report on Crime and Crime Victims*, (Washington, DC: Justice Solutions, 2009), 2–10, accessed November 20, 2018 [www.mediacrimevictimguide.com/journalistguide.pdf](http://www.mediacrimevictimguide.com/journalistguide.pdf).



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during the interview may step in if the reporter's questions become too invasive or difficult or if the victim becomes upset. By making the victim's needs a priority, advocates can keep the interview on track and encourage the reporter to do so as well.

## ***Tips for Victims***

Advocating for victims with the media also includes helping victims decide whether to accept interviews, how to minimize invasions of their privacy, and how to exercise their rights and options in dealing with reporters. Advocates can also help victims anticipate questions and prepare how to answer them.

### **Before the Interview**

By giving victims the following checklist of questions and walking through it with them, you can help victims decide whether to participate in an interview.

- **What are your goals in speaking to the media?** What purpose do you hope the interview will serve? Will it help the community learn more about your loved one or understand the impact of crime on victims? Are you willing to answer questions from reporters who might not understand your pain or your point of view?
- **Would the interview invade your privacy?** If you are still struggling with the emotional, physical, or financial impact of the crime, would speaking to a reporter disturb you or violate your privacy? You may want to discuss the pros and cons with a victim advocate before making your decision.
- **Does refusing the interview increase or decrease your control over what is published about the crime?** Denying an interview will not prevent publicity about your case. If the story is newsworthy, the media will publish the story with or without interviewing you. Also, an interview may provide you with an opportunity to offer your perspective on the crime.

- **Would you prefer that someone else speak for you?** If you would rather not be interviewed, you may ask someone else—an attorney, a victim advocate, a clergy member, a family member, or a friend—to represent you in media interviews. That person can also release written statements on your behalf or accompany you to interviews if you decide to accept them.
- **Would granting an interview affect the investigation or prosecution of the crime?** Giving an interview may compromise the investigation or prosecution of a crime. You may want to speak with an advocate or an attorney before deciding to grant an interview.
- **Do you want to set conditions for the interview?** Although reporters and producers may not agree to the conditions you suggest, they will most likely comply with reasonable requests if they want your interview. You have the right to ask or express your wishes regarding—
  - o time and location of the interview;
  - o visiting the set or location before an interview;
  - o advance information about questions, the reporter's angle, or plans for using your interview;
  - o requesting that a victim advocate, lawyer, or support person be present;
  - o issues you will not discuss;
  - o requesting a specific reporter or producer;
  - o protecting your identity (through silhouettes and electronic distortion of your voice);
  - o excluding children and other family members from the interview;
  - o excluding photos and other images you find offensive; and
  - o excluding offenders or other participants to whom you might object.



## Preparing Victims for the Interview

Share the following tips with victims who agree to interviews:

- Bring a trusted individual to provide support.
- Prepare for the interview by having an advocate list questions the reporter may ask and rehearsing responses.
- Refuse to answer a question by using the following tactics:
  - o Polite refusal: “I’m sorry, but I don’t want to talk about that.”
  - o Bridging, or changing the subject to what YOU want to talk about. Answer by saying, “What is really important about that issue is ...” and then talk about what you think the audience should know.
- Never speak “off the record.” Reporters may publish or broadcast anything you say.
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, simply say you don’t know. Don’t guess or speculate.
- You may request a correction if the article is inaccurate or you are quoted out of context. Newspapers and other outlets may publish corrections and television news may correct serious errors (although the option to do so is theirs). You can also contact management at the news outlet prior to publication or broadcast if the reporter was aggressive, insensitive, or obtained information dishonestly.
- You may refuse a followup interview, even if you have previously agreed to be interviewed a second time.

Victim advocates can play a key role in mediating between reporters and victims, especially when victims feel vulnerable and stressed. The victim, their family, and the wider community have an important interest in ensuring that media coverage is sensitive, accurate, and does not put the victim under duress or at risk.



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