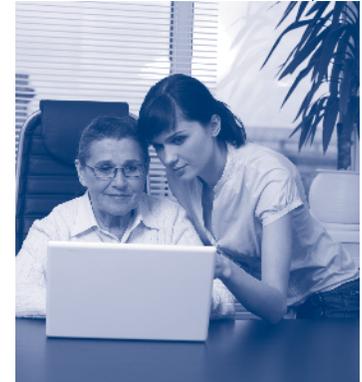




Crime Victim Compensation Program Initiative

The Crime Victim Compensation Program Initiative was instituted to further the Department of Justice's mission to provide crime victims with the services they need to recover from their victimization. Through this Fiscal Year 2013 initiative, OVC awarded funds to three state crime victim compensation programs over 3 years to help them develop or enhance innovative strategies to increase their program's efficiency, responsiveness, and accessibility for crime victims, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of underserved victims. The three programs—the California Victim Compensation Program (CalVCP), the Iowa Crime Victim Compensation Program (Iowa CVCP), and the Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services (VCCVS)—are models of responsiveness for other states to replicate.



What Is a Crime Victim Compensation Program?

Every state, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico has a crime victim compensation program, with funds available to help crime victims recover from financial losses resulting from their victimization. These programs are funded through the federal Victims of Crime Act Compensation Formula Grant Program, which disperses funds from the Crime Victims Fund (www.ovc.gov/about/victimfund.html) to supplement a state's efforts to financially assist and reimburse victims for crime-related, out-of-pocket expenses. These expenses may include fees for medical and dental care, counseling, funeral and burial expenses, and lost wages and income. Compensation programs may also reimburse victims for other types of expenses related to their victimization, such as travel, temporary lodging, crime scene cleanup, and dependent care.

Starting Out

To begin, the grant recipients examined the needs of their states' crime victims and identified critical gaps and challenges in their procedures that may prevent victims from applying for the compensation they deserve. Next, the

programs planned innovative projects, policies, and practices to address any deficiencies. Finally, each program established local partnerships to collaborate on implementing their projects and achieving their respective goals.

Assessing Victim and Program Needs

California

CalVCP (www.vcgcb.ca.gov/victims) conducted a statewide needs assessment that used research on victimology and included a survey of mental health providers, community-based organizations, and government agencies. Staff also interviewed victims, service providers, and victim advocates to identify underserved communities, their unmet needs, and barriers to accessing compensation and services.

The needs assessment identified that—

- California has 13 underserved populations, including tribal communities; people with disabilities; immigrants; Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and limited English-proficient (LEP) communities; human trafficking victims; homeless individuals; LGBTQ communities; and residents of rural communities.



- victims' compensation, mental health care, housing, and child-care needs are not being met.
- availability of victim advocates and trauma-informed services needs to be increased.
- linguistic and culturally appropriate materials and services need to be expanded.

Iowa

Iowa CVCP (www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/for-crime-victims/crime-victim-compensation-program) assessed the state's use and enforcement of restitution orders. Twenty-one interviews were conducted at the county level, which included surveying 46 judges from all 8 judicial districts.

These efforts revealed that—

- localities often do not have the resources they need to locate victims and register them for restitution, or to maintain a collections staff to track individuals who were formerly incarcerated and collect payments.
- some victims do not register for payments because they think they will never be paid, and they fear retaliation.
- there is no state-level integrated technology to help staff track restitution to victims.
- a state statute requires that restitution collection go to a centralized collections unit after 30 days—or when the formerly incarcerated individual is 1 day late on the payment plan—which impedes counties' abilities to collect.

Additionally, the program analyzed reading levels of 22 paragraphs taken from 10 county crime victim registration forms for restitution. This revealed reading levels ranging from eighth grade to doctoral degree, far above the reading level for seventh to eighth grades recommended for this type of form.

Vermont

In June 2015, VCCVS (<http://www.ccvvs.state.vt.us/about-vccvs>) assessed its program using two surveys it developed with the Crime Research Group in Montpelier, Vermont: the Compensation Program Applicant Survey and the Service Provider Survey.

Through the Compensation Program Applicant Survey, VCCVS determined—

- how applicants learned about the program, how they obtained an application form, and their suggestions for outreach efforts.
- what would make both the application process and receiving services easier, including communication methods and types of technological assistance that would be helpful.
- what type of assistance the victims needed, whether their applications were approved, and whether they received as much compensation as they requested.

- whether these victims had considered not applying for assistance and, if so, why.

Through the Service Provider Survey, VCCVS determined that—

- many respondents were not aware of the program before becoming victims.
- the application process needed to be easier and support should be available to encourage people to apply and to assist them in filling out and filing the application.
- targeted outreach is needed for older adults and specific populations with disabilities.

Addressing Needs With Innovation

California

CalVCP translated its application, principal brochure, and correspondence into Spanish and 12 other languages. It also developed a plan for reaching underserved victims through collaboration and conducted two regional training conferences for crime victim advocates, service providers, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, and medical personnel, titled "Strategic Collaborations for Reaching Underserved Victims of Crime." The program also provided web-based training courses for victim-witness and community-based advocates, mental health professionals, medical personnel, and the general public on helping victims access the compensation program.

CalVCP's plans for assisting the state's service providers included—

- creating a database of partners' contact information for sending program announcements and updates.
- providing tools and materials to CalVCP satellite offices to enable uniform outreach to community-based organizations.
- disseminating audience-specific toolkits to external stakeholders to inform them of the compensation and services available to victims.

The CalVCP Board agreed that CalVCP would pursue legislation or policy modifications to—

- raise the benefit limits on victim relocation, crime scene clean-up, and residential security.
- raise the funeral and burial benefits limit and expand covered expenses to include travel expenses of immediate family members.
- reimburse childcare and transportation expenses that are related to medical, mental health, and other crime-related appointments.
- reimburse lost income when victims attend crime-related appointments and when caretakers miss work to take victims who are minors to medical, mental health, and other crime-related appointments.
- reimburse mental health providers for the case management they provide for victims.

CalVCP will hire an objective third-party evaluator to determine the effectiveness of its strategies to increase victims' and service providers' awareness and use of CalVCP's services.

Iowa

Iowa CVCP is working with the University of Iowa to pilot test the new registration forms, which were redesigned for an easier readability level. Applicants' comprehension of the forms is being tested in three counties to determine whether the new readability levels will lead to more victims registering for restitution.

Iowa CVCP is also working with the State Court Administrator to—

- partner with the Iowa Accountability Project (IAP) in designing a Financial Ability Assessment Tool that will suggest the amount of restitution a formerly incarcerated individual can afford to pay regularly and establish a payment plan.
- implement a statewide tracking system to monitor the formerly incarcerated person, restitution owed, and restitution paid to the victim.

In addition, the IAP will hire a judicial assistant to—

- help formerly incarcerated individuals fill out the Financial Ability Assessment Tool.
- inform the courts of the results.
- review case files and compile data on topics such as average time until restitution was paid in full, average amount per payment, and number of individuals brought back to court for willful nonpayment.

Vermont

VCCVS used results from its surveys to make its Victims Compensation Application more accessible to all victims, including individuals with disabilities and LEP communities. It also increased outreach efforts to enhance underserved populations' access to compensation.

VCCVS's efforts to improve its compensation application include—

- consulting with various disability organizations—including the Vermont Center for Independent Living, Disability Rights Vermont, and Green Mountain Self-Advocates—to identify accessible formats, fonts, languages, and websites.
- developing compensation forms in seven non-English languages.
- implementing assistive technology to create an online, fillable application form.
- developing an online compensation brochure.

VCCVS also increased its outreach efforts to—

- expand its marketing of the program, using television, radio, print, and social media.
- hold disability etiquette trainings for VCCVS staff and a service provider.
- create outreach presentations for disability, immigrant, and refugee service providers and produce a video explaining victim compensation broadly.
- educate and partner with service providers and agencies that have contact with victims and other vulnerable populations.
- publicize the program via other agencies' websites.
- place brochures, posters, and fliers where crime victims will see them (e.g., police stations, courthouses).
- increase staff members' personal contact with victims, particularly via phone.
- train service providers to help victims with the application process.

VCCVS will evaluate the changes it has implemented by—

- monitoring use of the accessible application form and requests for accommodations.
- collecting data on how individuals self-identify, such as being a person with a disability, an older or vulnerable adult, or a member of the LEP community.
- tracking victim compensation applicants' use of language interpretation services, including the use of American Sign Language interpreters.
- tracking the number of applications that are completed in languages other than English.
- collecting data analytics from the VCCVS website and social media platforms.

For more information about these Crime Victim Compensation Programs, contact—

- California Victim Compensation Program: publicaffairs@vcgcb.ca.gov.
- Iowa Crime Victim Compensation Program: robert.hamill@iowa.gov.
- Vermont Center for Crime Victim Services: outreach@ccvs.vermont.gov.

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