Prosecutorial Services to Crime Victims
FAQ

Updated May 4

Added May 4

Q: If a county has done their due diligence to execute a letter of support with community based programs, but the community based programs do not respond; is there any action, beyond submitting a letter of explanation, that the county can take to mitigate the negative impact to their application during the grant review process?

A: They should just submit the letter of explanation that includes steps they will undertake to develop collaboration and cooperation during the upcoming grant period.

Added May 3

Q: We are creating a new job description for a victim services advocate. Are there minimum qualifications we must include such as a college degree in Criminal Justice?

A: No. This is up to your office as you assess the types of jobs in your area, the going salary range, etc. It will be important to get the new staff person trained as quickly as possible, college degree or no.

Q: In our rural community the salary range is rather low compared to other parts of the state, while the fringe benefit percentage is very high. I'm worried about how reviewers will interpret this in our budget. What should we do?

A: Explain in the narrative the salary situation for your community and your county attorney's office, and the going rate for fringe benefits. This way reviewers will understand what they see in the budget. Don't make reviewers guess or assume – it's better to explain your situation clearly so reviewers understand the unique factors in hiring in your community.

Q: Our victim/witness staff works closely with the two community-based victim service programs in our county. Both have crisis lines covered by volunteers. Could we use their volunteer hours to meet the VOCA volunteer requirement for our application?

A: No. Those volunteer hours will be counted by those two programs within their own applications, and they are technically their volunteers, not yours.

Q: Our county attorney-based staff work together with a restorative justice program on behalf of victims impacted by crime. Most of the RJ people are volunteers. Could we count the hours working with these volunteers as match for our application?

A: Yes, as long as the time together is on behalf of victims, not offenders.

Added May 2

Q: How do we incorporate annual personnel raises into our budget request?

A: Your application budget should reflect the expenses for which you are requesting funding for during FY17 (not for future years). Being that your award will likely be the same for the subsequent 3-4 years, if you want your personnel line to increase in the future, you'd need to decrease some other line item you initially budgeted for FY17 to make that happen with OJP funds.

Added April 26

Q: Currently our county board funds our victim/witness program at $45,000 annually. We do not receive funding from any other source. Per the formula used by OJP, our county qualifies to apply for up to $70,000. Does that mean that we can really only request the $25,000 difference since the county funds the program at $45,000 or can we request $70,000, as long as, the funds are used for additional staff?

A: You may apply to OJP for what you need with regard to victim services, up to $70,000, for additional staff. We are not asking you to subtract the amount your county currently covers from the amount for which you are eligible to apply.

Q: Our county is concerned about the sustainability of OJP funding. While we currently do not have a victim/witness program and would like to be working more comprehensively with victims, we are hesitant to apply for fear the funding won't be sustained. Our community based programs are encouraging us to apply and we understand that currently there are VOCA funds available. How sustainable is this OJP funding to counties in the future?

A: There is much support at the federal level for crime victim services funding. Government funding is never 100% guaranteed, however we have grantees that have had fairly stable grants for over 30 years, (county government-based and community-based grantees). The VOCA increase appropriated by Congress these past two years is the result of a large contingent of people lobbying for more funds to be distributed to states and territories. We believe the higher appropriation level will continue because the crime victims' fund (that is the source of VOCA funding) is consistently pulling in significantly more money in fines and fees than what is currently being appropriated, and there is tremendous support across the country for the higher funding level.

While this is a competitive process and there is no guarantee you will be awarded funding, we encourage you to apply, as OJP wants to expand the number of county governments funded for victim service staff. Those awarded funding in the competitive process will receive the same funding amount for the subsequent 3-4 years (until the next competitive process) if federal and state funds remain stable. We believe this is likely.

Added April 11

Q: Under the Prosecutorial grant, the prosecutor's office needs a letter of collaboration from the local community based program. If there is more than one local community based program,

does the prosecutor's letter of collaboration need to include multiple programs or is a letter from one program sufficient? Will multiple letters be considered?

A: The letter of cooperation/collaboration is an opportunity to improve the ways programs work together. The prosecutorial application would be strengthened if letters are included for each community-based victim service program in the applicant's jurisdiction. Letters may simply be scanned together and submitted as one PDF document. If the applicant wants to combine agencies into one letter with multiple signatures, this is fine as long as the letter meets the requirements of the RFP instructions.

Q: Why are prosecutor programs required to write a letter of collaboration when community programs are not? Do they not have to work with us or does OJP think this will hold them accountable by requiring them to sign off on it? We sometimes seem to be viewed as the bad people who don't want to work with others when it's sometimes the community programs that find barriers to work with us. Secondly, since I'm assuming you will not take the requirement out of the application at this point, what big and wonderful things are you expecting that it's worth 15 points?!

A: The letter of cooperation/collaboration is an opportunity for both entities, the prosecutorial agency and the community-based victim services program, to define the ways they will work together. This letter isn't a letter of support to be "signed off on" by the victim services program, as if they're giving approval for the application. Criminal justice agencies have access to criminal justice information that non-profits do not have. In effect, there is the potential for a power differential between agencies. That is why the letter is part of the prosecutorial RFP. OJP feels strongly that to obtain the best outcome for victims, OJP-funded agencies in the same geographic area need to work together on victims' behalf. The section is valued at 15 points because the letter is that important. We recommend reviewing the rating sheet to know how reviewers will be evaluating this section.

Q: In the last competitive grant cycle you stated that the reviewers may be from other professions, not necessarily familiar with our programs, and that we should explain everything and assume they have no knowledge of victim services. Should we assume that for this competitive cycle too or will you be looking for reviewers that are familiar with the grant programs?

A: We will recruit reviewers broadly and it's like likely most will represent victim services programs or be part of the criminal justice system. It is important to describe your program and services thoroughly so reviewers understand who you are and what you do. Reviewers will already understand the harm that crime victims experience, so you don't need to go into depth about the impact of crime victimization on individuals.

Added April 7

Q: Our victim services program is not currently funded by OJP. The county has funded our program for the past several years. Are we eligible to apply under this RFP?

A: You are eligible to apply, however, any funding you were to receive from OJP cannot replace (supplant) county funds that currently support your program (unless the county funding is ending and there is documentation to support this). Any OJP funding would have to enhance your program beyond what the county is putting in. For example, if the county putting in $50,000 to the program currently, that $50,000 would need to remain in the program budget and be in addition to any OJP funding. The county funding could be used for the match.

Q: If a government based program is doing the crime victim notification work (the duties assigned to the prosecutor's office) but they are NOT under the county or city attorney office, are they only eligible to apply through the Direct Services to Crime Victims RFP or can they apply through the Prosecutorial Services to Crime Victims RFP?

A: OJP-funded government-based general crime programs that currently fulfill prosecutorial crime victim rights obligations per MN statute to address the needs of crime victims may apply under the Prosecutorial Services to Crime Victims RFP. Government-based applicants that are not housed in county/city attorney offices but currently fulfill prosecutorial crime victim rights obligations **through an agreement with the county/city attorney's office**, and <u>are not</u> current OJP general crime programs should also apply under the Prosecutorial Services to Crime Victims RFP. (It would be assumed that in this case the county/city attorney would not also apply, as this would be duplicative services.)

<u>Added April 1</u>

Q: Will there be Emergency Funds distributed July 2016?

A: Emergency fund grants in their old form will discontinue starting <u>July 2016</u>. There will be some additional funds made available for the same types of uses through a small number of agencies from July 1 – Sept. 30, 2016, to the start of FY17 (Oct 1). However, if you are also a direct services grantee and have budgeted funds in the "direct client assistance" line of your FY16 budget, you should spend down emergency funds first (which expire June 30th), and then utilize funds from that budget line. If you didn't budget any funds in that line and want to move funds around in your budget, call your grant manager for assistance.

In other words, OJP is discontinuing separate emergency fund grant contracts to the 61 emergency fund grantees and instead continuing to allow funds to be part of direct service grantee budgets under the "direct client assistance" line. This allows grantees to move funds in and out of the "direct client assistance" line if the victims' needs they cover vary from their original budgeted amount. This also expands funds for victim needs to all direct service funded agencies.

Grantees used to receiving an emergency fund grant need to apply for FY17 direct service funding (in any of the 3 RFPs listed below). Applicants should budget grant funds for victim needs in the "direct client assistance" budget line. Please call your grant manager if you have questions.

Note: These RFPs are the only opportunity for direct service funding to meet crime victim needs starting FY17.

- **Direct Services to Crime Victims**
- **Prosecutorial Services to Crime Victims**
- **Tribal Government-based Crime Victim Services Grants** (not released as of 3/25)

Q: On page 10, it refers to needing an "Administrative capacity and risk assessment review" before the grant becomes operational. Is this the "Comprehensive Site Visit" conducted by our OJP grants manager?

A: No, this is different than a comprehensive site visit. Upon being awarded and prior to a grant contract being released, grant managers complete this assessment for each grantee based on review of financial documents, amount of award, administrative capacity and the complexity of budget and funded activities. The assessment impacts how often formal grant monitoring occurs, specifically comprehensive site visits and desk reviews. This process complies with recommended federal guidelines for grant monitoring practices by state agencies.

Q: Re Volunteers: The only volunteers we use are at the county fair booth. Since we are not a 24-hour service, we collaborate with the Crisis Line & Referral Service whose phone number we provide on our voicemail for after hour services. Other than that, we do not use volunteers due to confidentiality. If we apply for a waiver, will it go against us?

A: While not quite fulfilling the VOCA intent of ongoing volunteer support, the volunteers at the booth qualify as volunteers and you will not need a waiver, just an explanation of the work those volunteers do. Requesting a waiver for the volunteer requirement doesn't "go against you." Grant managers will, however, explore with those requesting waivers if there is some way that a volunteer could be used, even once. It's preferable to have that situation than many waivers in the grantee files. If no use of volunteers can be found or the agency has a policy against volunteers due to confidentiality or something else, we will grant a waiver. Waivers are good for the one-year grant period.

Q: Re Match: 20% will be difficult, especially for our small agency. I plan to apply for other grants, however, if I can't secure enough, can I apply for the waiver at a later date? Or, is it better to apply for the waiver now and change it later?

A: It is better to apply for a waiver now with your application if you think you may not be able to meet the match requirement. There is no shame in requesting a match waiver – request it if you need it.