

Victim's Rights Education Project
Creating a Victims' Rights Public Education
Strategy Guidebook

A
Component of the
Victims' Rights Education Project

Prepared by:
National Victims' Constitutional Amendment Network

February 27, 2004

The National Victim Constitutional Amendment Network (NVCAN) is a non-profit organization comprised of leaders in the victim rights movement from across the nation. NVCAN is dedicated to advancing and supporting the rights of crime victims at all levels.

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Acknowledgments

This Project would not have been possible without the dedication and expertise of many groups and individuals. It is with profound gratitude that the NVCAN Project Team thanks the following people:

The volunteers who served as state liaisons, coordinating all local activities and providing feedback and direction to the project team.

The many victims/survivors and victim service providers, criminal justice professionals and allied professionals for participating in the group field interviews. Their contribution formed the scope and framework of these materials.

Project Team:

Mary McGhee, Steve Siegel, and Nancy Lewis, NVCAN Grant Managers, oversight of grant and Project

Anne Seymour, Victims' Rights Consultant, Project Team member, facilitation of group field interviews and development of educational materials

David Beatty, Executive Director, Justice Solutions, Project Team member, facilitation of group field interviews and development of educational materials

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Introduction

Victims' Rights Education Project

Despite the thousands of victims' rights that have become law in all 50 states and at the Federal level, there are still many victims, criminal justice officials, and members of the public who remain unaware that such rights exist. Victims cannot exercise rights they do not know they have. Criminal justice officials cannot implement rights of which they are unaware, and members of the public cannot support victims' rights if they have never heard of them.

These circumstances clearly define one of the greatest challenges the victims' rights movement has faced since its inception. Surprisingly, it is not the passage of victims' rights statutes or even victims' rights constitutional amendments that has proven most difficult. Rather, informing the world of their existence remains one of the greatest barriers standing between victims and their rights.

Thus, developing a strategy to educate crime victims and survivors, criminal justice officials and the rest of society about victims' rights, what they mean, and why they are important has become a priority for the victim policy agenda.

The Victims' Rights Education Project, sponsored by the National Victims' Constitutional Amendment Network has developed the Victims' Rights Education Project Toolkit to help victims, witnesses and the American public better understand victims' rights and how to exercise them. This Toolkit was designed with input from professionals and volunteers who include victims/survivors, victim assistance professionals, criminal justice professionals, and legal counsel. The Project conducted a series of group field interviews with crime victims/survivors, service providers, justice and other allied professionals in 12 states. The data resulting from this vital input from the field were collected and analyzed. In addition, a wide range of existing resources about victims' rights – including laws, brochures, handbooks, and web sites – were reviewed to contribute to the development of the Toolkit. The Tools include this *Guidebook* and:

- An *Introduction and Overview* that provides a complete description of the Project and its products and deliverables. It describes the target audiences; addresses the potential for “mixing and matching Tools”; and suggests considerations for funding and marketing the products customized by victim service providers, and organizations and agencies that assist victims of crime.
- A *Crime Victims' Rights Miranda Card* that includes the core rights of victims in a brief format that can be contained on a pocket-size “Miranda style” card to be handed to crime victims at the first point of contact with law enforcement.

- The *Victims' Rights Handbook* for use by victims of crime and the general public to increase awareness of victims' rights and how to exercise them, and their understanding of the criminal justice system.
- A *Victims' Rights Brochure Kit* that provides prototypes for victim service providers, and organizations and agencies that assist victims of crime to customize for their jurisdictions.
- A *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Kit* that includes a model for victim service providers, and organizations and agencies that assist victims of crime, to customize a FAQ List of commonly asked questions and issues of concern to crime victims in their state and/or jurisdictions.
- A *Talking Points Kit* for victim service providers, and organizations and agencies that assist victims of crime, to enhance training, educational materials and presentations that address the need for and value of victims' rights.
- *Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims' Rights Kit*, which provides guidance for victims to exercise their rights.

While each Tool was developed as a “stand alone” document, together they provide a comprehensive overview of core victims' rights, implementation, and compliance strategies. States and local jurisdictions can easily create a “Victims' Rights Public Education Strategy” by adapting each tool to their jurisdiction's laws, policies and protocols, and by utilizing the guidelines included in this Guidebook to promote greater awareness among victims and survivors, service providers, justice professionals and the public about crime victims' rights.

Victim Education and Awareness

The primary purpose of these resources is to provide victims with written information that can make them more aware of their rights under law; their role (when applicable) in exercising those rights; who can help them implement their rights; and action they can consider taking when they think their rights have been violated.

Public Education and Awareness

Virtually everyone in America is affected by crime and, statistically, most people in America will be a victim of or witness to a crime in their lifetime. Yet too often, people still believe that “crime happens to somebody else.”

These resources serve an important purpose in helping to create venues for greater public education and awareness about victims' rights and needs. This affects both the development of materials, and the target audiences to whom they will be distributed.

Criminal Justice System Education and Awareness

These resources provide excellent opportunities to engage criminal justice agencies and officials in a healthy discussion about victims' rights and needs. Efforts to increase victim awareness of their rights and how to implement them are *not* complete without involving justice practitioners in the dialogue.

The adaptation of the NVCAN resources to specific jurisdictions and agencies can be best accomplished with collaboration with and input from criminal justice officials. They can provide insights into what they perceive as their role in helping victims to exercise their statutory and constitutional rights and, at the same time, can become aware that efforts are underway to *inform* and *involve* victims at a greater level.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of the *Creating a Victims' Rights Public Education Strategy Guidebook* is to help states and local jurisdictions utilize the NVCAN Toolkit to plan, implement and evaluate a comprehensive strategy to educate victims and survivors and the general public about victims' rights, and the most effective techniques to exercise them. There are four objectives to reach this goal:

1. Identify target audiences for the strategy.
2. Define strategic goals and objectives for the strategy.
3. Identify the most effective tools to increase victim awareness and public education about victims' rights.
4. Identify measures to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the strategy.

NVCAN Tools for Building Your Public Education Strategy

The development of a victim and public education strategy can be challenging. For this reason, this Project developed specific Tools to provide a strong foundation, and offer creative approaches and editorial guidance for strategy development. Each Tool was crafted to allow the greatest possible flexibility in the design and implementation of an education strategy.

If your strategy calls for educating victims and survivors about their rights, the Toolkit includes seven model brochures that address the most critical victims' rights, and a sample "Miranda Card" that describes victims' core rights. It also offers a Tool to develop a "Frequently Asked Questions" document that lends itself to easy and mass distribution through a handbook, brochure, or website.

If your strategy seeks to empower victims by giving them the means to become their own best advocates for their rights, the Toolkit includes a Victims' Rights Handbook to provide victims with a basic education about their rights, and a

“Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims’ Rights” Tool to learn how they can exercise their rights.

If your strategy calls for educating and motivating members of your community through either public presentations or through written advocacy pieces (such as an editorial in a newspaper), the Toolkit includes an extensive “Talking Points” Tool to help develop effective and compelling messages about victims rights.

If you are convinced that policy-makers are the key to improved compliance with victims’ rights, the Kit includes a “Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims’ Rights” Tool that highlights model programs and approaches that have proven to be effective in various jurisdictions nationwide.

Creating a Public Education Strategy Team

The development of a comprehensive public education strategy about victims’ rights requires considerable planning and coordination. A strong team should be diverse by gender, culture, experience and geography, and include professionals and volunteers who have:

- Knowledge about victims’ rights and how to implement them.
- Knowledge about existing victim assistance programs that can contribute to the implementation of the public education strategy.
- Strong communication skills and experience in media relations.
- Experience in strategic planning and evaluation.
- Experience in cultural competence, and providing assistance to diverse populations.

In addition, representation:

- From crime victims and survivors on the strategy team will help ensure that “the voice of the victim” guides the strategy development and implementation process.
- From a news media or public relations professional can help you craft a strategy that utilizes the most effective venues for victim and public outreach and education.
- From professionals who specialize in translating English to other languages that are prevalent in your state or jurisdiction can help ensure that your educational resources can be adequately and effectively translated into multiple languages.

Creating Goals and Objectives For Your Victims' Rights Education Strategy

The first step to creating any strategy is to develop goals and objectives. The goal is the general expression of what you want to accomplish; the objectives are precise statements of how you will accomplish the goal.¹ Each objective should be stated in a way that allows its completion to be measured and evaluated.

For example:

Goal: Increase awareness about crime victims' rights and how to implement them among law enforcement officers.

Objectives:

1. Incorporate the law enforcement components of the Victims' Rights Handbook into a two-hour module for state law enforcement academy training by (date).
2. Develop five ten-minute training modules for law enforcement roll call training programs, utilizing the Victims' Rights Handbook and FAQs Tool, for use by local victim service providers.
3. Print and disseminate (#) copies of the Victims' Rights "Miranda Card" to all state, county and local law enforcement agencies by (date).

Excellent resources about how to develop strategic goals and objectives are included in the Office for Victims of Crime Strategic Planning Toolkit, which is available at: www.ovcttac.org/stratplan.cfm.

Target Audiences

In developing the NVCAN Victims' Rights Education Project Toolkit, three key audiences were identified that will ultimately benefit from use of the various Tools.

The *primary audience* for the Victims' Rights Education Project resources is crime victims and survivors, who can enhance their knowledge about their rights, their role in criminal justice processes, and measures to enhance the implementation of their rights.

The *secondary audience* for Project resources includes members of the public and communities – the families and friends, neighbors, co-workers and colleagues of crime victims who may have strong opportunities to help inform those they know and love about their rights and how to exercise them.

The *tertiary audience* includes professionals and volunteers who assist victims of crime, and help them understand and implement their rights and access available services, including:

- Community-based victim service providers.
- System-based victim service providers.
- Law enforcement.
- Prosecutors.
- Judiciary.
- Court administration personnel.
- Probation.
- Parole.
- Institutional corrections.
- Representatives from multi-faith communities.
- Mental health professionals.
- Medical professionals.
- Academia and schools.
- Social service professionals.
- Cultural diversity professionals.
- Public policymakers.
- Civic communities.
- News media.

You must decide both *whom you want to educate*, and *what you want to educate them about*.

If the target audience is law enforcement, the rights you would likely focus upon are those most relevant to the victim at the beginning of the criminal justice process, i.e. immediately following the crime, during the investigation and arrest. The methods you might use to educate law enforcement officers about victims' rights can include training programs, protocols, or publications. If the target audience is the "general public," both the educational message and the means by which it is communicated may be very different. Public education would likely focus on basic facts and principles about victims' rights that are communicated across conduits more geared for mass consumption, such as the Internet or the news media.

Finally, if the educational challenge lies with policy-makers, the educational approach may lend itself more to a politically pragmatic approach, such as the development of model laws or promising practices that have proven to enhance implementation of victims' rights.

Determining the Target Audience for States and Local Jurisdictions

The target audiences for the NVCAN Toolkit, as defined above, are broad and comprehensive. In specific states and jurisdictions, the target audiences may be further refined based upon:

- *The scope and types of violent crime that are most prevalent.*
Current crime data and statistics can be reviewed to determine the types of criminal victimization that affect individuals and communities.
- *Specific populations that would benefit from increased knowledge about victims' rights.*
While literally *everybody* would benefit from knowing more about victims' rights, there may be some people for whom such knowledge is critical to their work and lives. For example, specific justice officials who lack consistency in implementing victims' rights, public policy makers who make decisions about new laws, and/or the news media could be targeted as key audiences for the Strategy.
- *Existing victim and public education initiatives.*
The Strategy should avoid "reinventing the wheel" and build upon existing foundations for victim and public education. Such efforts might include campaigns sponsored by state-level organizations (such as domestic violence coalitions or Mothers Against Drunk Driving); activities sponsored during annual commemorative weeks and months (such as National Crime Victims' Rights Week and Domestic Violence Awareness Month); and/or campaigns sponsored by state- or county-level elected officials (such as the Attorney General or County Board of Supervisors).
- *The needs of specific types of victims.*
Local victim assistance organizations can help identify crime victims for whom basic information about their rights, and how to exercise them, may be most helpful. For example, some jurisdictions may already have excellent resources for victims of sexual assault, but lack information for parents whose children have been sexually abused. The scope of the overall Strategy and adaptation of the NVCAN Tools can address such specific needs.
- *Specific victim populations that are traditionally underserved or unserved.*
There may be some victims who lack access to services and thus, information about victims' rights, due to a number of factors, including age, gender, culture, disability, geography and/or type of crime. It is critical to identify crime victims who are *underserved* or *unserved*, and adapt the NVCAN Tools to address their needs in measures that *also* address the reasons they have lacked services and information (such as language or access barriers).

Tools for Determining Your Target Audience

The first step in audience determination is to gather existing data about victims' rights education initiatives:

- How do state and local organizations currently educate the victims, public and others about victims' rights – in general, during commemorative observances, and/or through structured educational initiatives?
- What are the strategies and tools utilized that have been the most effective?
- What gaps (if any) exist in educating crime victims, the public and others about victims' rights?

The next step is to conduct a basic needs assessment of victim assistance organizations in your state or jurisdiction. Generally, contact information for local programs can be obtained through the state's VOCA administrator, state- and county-level coalitions, and organizations such as the United Way.

The needs assessment can utilize both "Likert scale" questions (which ask respondents to "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" with a statement, using a numerical scale) and open-ended questions that allow for more detailed responses. The needs assessment survey can be easily conducted using e-mail, either attaching the survey instrument or directing respondents to a web site where the survey can be completed on-line.

Key issues to address include the following:

- The existing level of awareness about victims' rights among possible target audiences, i.e. victims and survivors, general public, justice officials, public policy makers, etc.
- Any existing programs or initiatives that provide education about victims' rights.
- Specific populations for whom victims' rights educational resources would be most beneficial.
- Specific victim populations that have been traditionally underserved or unserved.
- Specific needs related to victims' rights education for populations that are diverse by culture, geography, age, and/or disability.
- Perceptions of potential barriers that prevent access to victims' rights information among crime victims and survivors, and the general public.
- The type(s) and format of victims' rights educational resources that would be most effective and helpful.

- The most effective dissemination strategies for victims' rights educational materials, i.e. paper-based resources, web sites, media campaigns, etc.

The data from this two-step needs assessment process will instruct the overall strategy, including its goals and objectives, target audiences, and dissemination approaches.

General Considerations for the Development of Education Strategies

Victims' rights across the nation vary considerably in their language, scope and application. While it is impossible to develop educational resources that adequately address the specifics and nuances of each state's laws and rights, NVCAN sought to provide a *foundation of victims' rights education and information* that is generic and easily adaptable.

Adapting the NVCAN Tools to a Specific State or Jurisdiction

It is important to note that five of the eight Tools of the Victims' Rights Education Project are written as a "prototype" – that is, each is designed to be *adapted* to specific states, jurisdictions and agencies. Each component provides clear guidelines for the issues contained within that require further consideration or actions for adaptation. Please carefully review the "Introduction" to each Tool prior to reviewing it in its entirety, as this will provide you with guidelines for adaptation.

In adapting specific resources, it is helpful to consider:

- State laws, constitutional amendments, and case law that affect the implementation of victims' rights.
- Criminal justice agency policies and inter-agency policies that often more clearly define *who is responsible* for the implementation of victims' rights, as well as the inter-agency relationships that can enhance a streamlined approach to victims' rights implementation.
- Criminal justice agency directives and job descriptions that clearly describe the types of responsibilities its personnel have in regards to the implementation of victims' rights.
- Rights that are relevant to a *specific type of victimization*, i.e. domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, drunk driving, homicide, etc.
- The implementation of rights that is relevant to a *specific juncture* within the criminal justice process, i.e., law enforcement, prosecution, courts, community and institutional corrections, and/or those that cross agency jurisdictions and require collaboration.

Framing the Content of Each Tool

The language and context of the materials must be simple, clear and easy-to-understand. In general, most public education materials are written at a sixth-to-eighth grade reading level. In cases where a Tool's text contains words that entail "justice jargon" or that are difficult to understand, a definition of such words should be provided (the sample "Glossary of Terms" contained in the "Victims' Rights Handbook" Tool provides a good starting point for defining specific criminal justice and victim assistance terminology).

To the degree possible, each Tool should be cross-referenced to other Tools that contain relevant information. For example, information about victim impact statements is included in each Tool, so cross-references may guide the reader to additional resources that can enhance his or her knowledge about this victims' right.

Each adapted Tool can contain information and referral resources at the national, state and local levels:

- Information about national victim assistance resources – including an extensive list of criminal and juvenile justice and victim assistance web sites, and national toll-free telephone numbers – is available at www.nvcn.org.
- For victims whose crimes occur in another state or jurisdiction, the Office for Victims of Crime offers a user-friendly database of victim assistance programs that can be accessed by geography, type of crime, and/or type of services. The OVC On-line Directory of Victim Services can be accessed at: <http://ovc.ncjrs.org/findvictimservices/>.
- Many states and jurisdictions offer centralized toll-free telephone numbers and/or web sites for victim assistance and victim compensation, which can be included in the various Tools.
- If a Tool is adapted to a local jurisdiction, efforts should be made to include contact information – such as telephone numbers, web site URLs and e-mail addresses – for community- and system-based victim services within the community.

The Format of NVCAN Tools

Your Public Education Strategy Team will likely produce educational resources that are available in both paper-based and Internet (web page) formats. Since all victims/survivors and many members of the general public do *not* have access to the Internet, consideration should be given to developing victims' rights educational materials in both paper-based and electronic formats.

Regardless of the specific dissemination venue, it is helpful to consider the following recommendations regarding the *format* of each Tool:

- If more than one Tool is being adapted and disseminated, consider creating a standardized format (i.e., headers, use of color, fonts, etc.) that generates a “family look” so that resources can be readily recognized as part of an overall educational campaign or strategy. This can be easily accomplished with standard Word or Word Perfect software, and/or software packages, such as Open Office that runs on Linux.
- The tendency to squeeze a great deal of copy into a small space – usually to conserve paper – should be avoided at all costs. The use of plenty of white space enhances a reader’s capacity to easily read and view the information being offered.
- The font of the text should be *no smaller than 12 point* for the general population.
- If a Tool is being disseminated for use by a variety of victim assistance and criminal justice agencies and programs, adequate space must be provided for such programs to include their contact information, i.e. agency title, mailing and street addresses, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, and web site URLs.
- The use of numbered series and/or checklists – as modeled throughout the various Tools – should be replicated whenever possible in the format chosen for adapting each Tool. Such approaches are visually clear; provide a crisp, linear overview of the information offered; and are usually easier to comprehend and understand.
- Information that is determined to be the *most critical* in each Tool can be highlighted graphically through the use of boxes, screens, **bold** or *italic* fonts, and larger fonts (“pull quotes”).

Enhancing Outreach and Education for Diverse Populations

Often, the most underserved (and unserved) victim populations – and members of the public who could benefit from information about victims’ rights -- are those who face access barriers due to:

- *Culture*, including immigrant populations who often lack understanding of America’s justice and victim assistance systems, and who may have fears about reporting crimes to law enforcement or participating in justice processes; and populations who do not speak or understand English, or who are Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in reading skills.
- *Race*, including populations that are isolated by geography and lack of victim assistance services, or that have concerns about trust and possible biases relevant to reporting crimes and participating in justice processes.

- *Geography*, including people who live in highly urban areas, or jurisdictions that are rural, remote or frontier; and American citizens who are victimized abroad.
- *Disability*, including populations that have physical, mental, emotional and/or cognitive disabilities that create significant barriers to accessing information about victims' rights.
- *Gender*, including female victims of domestic violence who ensure isolation and threats of (or actual) harm in reporting crimes; and victims of sexual assault who fear that they will be blamed, shamed and not believed if they report crimes.
- *Age*, including elderly populations who may be isolated, infirm, or have physical, mental or cognitive disabilities that prevent access to appropriate services and information about their rights as victims of crime; and children who must rely on adult parents, guardians or caretakers to represent their interests and needs.
- *Literacy*, including populations who can neither read nor write in any language.

Your Strategy should incorporate measures to reduce and/or eliminate potential barriers to access, and enhance approaches that not only increase *access* to information about victims' rights, but also *understanding* of the information that is being provided.

One of the best approaches is to identify "gatekeepers" that represent communities that are traditionally underserved or unserved. These include organizations, professionals and volunteers who live among and/or provide services and assistance to such populations, as well as victim assistance organizations that have programs already established to meet these important, diverse needs. Examples of such "gatekeepers" include the following:

- *Culture*: Many states have Councils and organizations that identify and address the needs of immigrant populations, and some communities with high-density populations of immigrants from specific nations have non-profit and government-sponsored organizations that provide programs and services.
- *Race*: There are often state- and local-level Committees appointed by governmental entities that address issues relevant to race, as well as Committees within state and local justice- and victim-related organizations that address issues of cultural diversity and competency.
- *Geography*: In highly urban areas, elected officials that represent neighborhoods at the county and city levels can be important allies in victim and public outreach. In rural, remote and frontier jurisdictions. For American citizens who are victimized abroad, the U.S. Department of State has a Victim Assistance Program that can be accessed through the

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/intdir/html.

- *Disability*: Many states and jurisdictions have both non-profit and government-sponsored organizations that address the needs of people with physical, mental and cognitive disabilities. In addition, the OVC On-line Victim Assistance Directory can provide access to organizations that provide services to victims with disabilities. The OVC On-line Directory of Victim Services can be accessed at: <http://ovc.ncjrs.org/findvictimservices/>.
- *Gender*: State and local coalitions and organizations that address the needs and rights of sexual assault and domestic violence victims are important partners in any public education strategy.
- *Age*: National and state agencies that address the needs of elderly populations (such as state Area Agencies on Aging, the American Association of Retired Persons, and TRIAD programs sponsored by the National Sheriffs Association) are good resources.
- *Literacy*: Literacy Volunteers of America has chapters across America, with over 50,000 volunteers that provide education and support to illiterate clients. Information about LVA resources is available at: <http://literacyvolunteers.org>.

By establishing strong relationships with gatekeepers, victim and public education efforts can be enhanced in outreach strategies, content, format, and the most effective modes of dissemination.

Tips for Developing Resources for Diverse Populations

In addition to building and sustaining relationships with gatekeepers, the following tips can help you identify and effectively reach diverse populations:

- Identify and confront the potential barriers to access about victims' rights information in your Strategy. This can be an overall goal of the Strategy.
- Information about victims' rights should be made available through the "gatekeeper" organizations and individuals identified in your Strategy development.
- In all written materials about victims' rights that are written in English – both paper-based and electronic-based – a sentence should be included that indicates that "this information is available in (other languages)", that is *written in the other language(s)* by contacting (telephone number/e-mail address/web site). A prominent display of this important information will increase the likelihood that people who do not speak or read English will still be able to access information and assistance.
- If your jurisdiction includes large population segments that do *not* speak English, consider making your brochures available in multiple languages.

Translation assistance must be sensitive to different dialects within different languages. Language departments at colleges and universities are a good resource for translation services. An on-line resource specializing in translation for legal issues is available at: <http://btgonline.org>.

- Information about victims' rights should be available to deaf populations by providing TTY and TDD telephone lines for information, referrals and assistance.
- Basic information about victims' rights should be translated into Braille for people who are blind or seeing-impaired; and/or provided in an audiotape format.
- For elderly and/or visually-impaired populations, victims' rights information can be published in larger fonts, i.e. 16 point or larger.
- Criminal justice agencies and victim assistance programs should be in full compliance with the *Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)* to eliminate potential barriers for people with physical disabilities.
- When possible, information about victims' rights should be provided in audiotape, videotape and DVD formats for people who cannot read (as well as for people who can benefit from the reinforcement offered by the opportunity to aurally or visually review information about their rights).

Using the Toolkit for Public Policy Development

The eight Tools include information about the broad range of victims' rights, and were developed through exhaustive research of victims' rights laws, informational resources, and promising practices, along with 24 Group Field Interviews of victims/survivors and victim assistance and justice professionals. As such, they represent the "ideal approach" to victims' rights implementation and victim education, and include many innovative approaches that may not be readily available in all states and jurisdictions. In reviewing the Tools, new ideas may emerge that can contribute to a public policy agenda that enhances victims' rights and compliance.

Using the Toolkit to Develop Agency Policies and Procedures

A number of the Tools can help criminal justice agencies develop or enhance their agency's policies and procedures, duty statements, job descriptions, and performance measures to guide their staff's roles in victims' rights implementation in accordance with the law, and how to best help victims understand and implement their rights. In particular, the "Victims' Rights Handbook" Kit and the "Promising Practices in Compliance and the Enforcement of Victims' Rights" Tool offer specific, concrete and detailed information about roles and responsibilities for victims' rights implementation. The Toolkit can also

be utilized between and among justice and allied professional agencies and service providers to create inter-agency policies, agreements, and memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that seek to fill gaps in victims' rights implementation, and enhance their collective ability to help victims understand and navigate the often-complex criminal justice system.

Dissemination Strategies: *Paper-based Resources*

Brochures

This Toolkit contains seven model brochures about basic victims' rights that are designed to educate crime victims and survivors, as well as the general public. In addition, other Tools (such as the *Frequently Asked Questions* and *Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims' Rights* Tools) can be easily adapted to a brochure format that targets specific victims' rights, and/or specific victim populations.

Newsletters

The availability of new information about victims' rights can be publicized in agency and organization newsletters (in both paper-based and electronic formats). Articles can also describe the overall goals and objectives of the NVCAN and the partnership created between state/local programs and NVCAN to promote greater education and awareness among crime victims and the public about victims' rights. In addition, a series of articles can be written about:

- Each of the eight core rights.
- Tips for victims about how to most effectively exercise their rights.
- The roles and responsibilities of different justice agencies and officials specific to victims' core rights.
- How to utilize the "Talking Points" Kit to enhance speeches and public presentations.

Fact Sheets

A one-to-two page fact sheet that addresses each of the eight core victims' rights can offer an "at-a-glance" summary of each right, and whom to contact for further information and assistance. In addition, the many useful tips for victims to help them actively exert their rights, which are included in the *Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims' Rights Kit*, can be easily adapted to a fact sheet format.

Boards and Committees

There are numerous boards, committees and other leadership venues at the national, state and local levels that generate public policy and education about victims' rights and services. Your Strategy can include seeking an "endorsement" of the various Tools by such entities; offering each Tool for possible adaptation to the entity's primary area of focus (i.e., law enforcement, mental health, cultural competence, etc.); and/or including the content of specific Tools into the entity's development of policies and recommendations to enhance victims' rights.

Commemorative Weeks and Months

There are over a dozen commemorative observances of general victims' rights (National Crime Victims' Rights Week), and specific victims' rights (such as drunk driving, homicide, domestic violence, etc.). Information from all the Tools that highlight victims' rights, roles and responsibilities of justice agencies and officials, and tips for compliance, can be utilized to enhance victim and public outreach efforts in conjunction with such observances.

Videotapes, DVDs and Audiotapes

The content of the NVCAN Tools offers a strong foundation upon which to build victim and public education resources in both video and audio formats. When adapted to a specific state or jurisdiction, they offer a "linear look" at victims' rights throughout criminal justice processes. Video and audio formats are also relevant to populations who cannot read written informational materials. For videotape formats, it is essential to include closed captions for the hearing impaired.

Promotional Materials

Often, victim service organizations and justice agencies sponsor promotional resources – such as calendars, victim poetry books, and bookmarks – that promote victims' rights and services. Virtually all of the Tools can be utilized as sources for developing or enhancing promotional materials to educate victims and the public about victims' rights, and efforts to help victims exercise their rights.

Dissemination Strategies: *Electronic Resources*

When developing electronic resources, it is important to remember that not all victims, nor members of the public, have access to the World Wide Web. It is essential to also produce and disseminate critical information about victims' rights in *paper-based formats*.

Web Sites

The creation of user-friendly web sites with specific pages dedicated to victims' rights is one of the most cost-effective and reliable methods to disseminate information about victims' rights. By developing a "Victims' Rights and Resources" web page, organizations can offer "one-stop shopping" for crime victims and others interested in this range of topics.

When designing a victim's rights web page, it is helpful to consider the following suggestions:

- Prominently display the link to the page within a web site where it can be easily viewed and accessed.
- The information can be organized in several ways:
 - By each individual victims' right.
 - By the juncture within the criminal justice system, i.e., law enforcement, corrections, etc.
 - By type of victimization.
- A good web page can include:
 - An overview of victims' rights.
 - Simplified explanations of statutes.
 - A "glossary of criminal justice terms" (a sample is included in the "Victims' Rights Handbook" Tool).
 - Tips for how to exercise victims' rights (see "Victims' Rights Handbook" and "Compliance and Enforcement" Tools).
 - "Frequently Asked Questions and Answers" adapted from this Tool.
 - Written resources that provide more in-depth explanations of victims' rights and how to exercise them, i.e., suggestions for completing a victim impact statement, or how to document restitution losses.
 - Forms that relate to victims' rights implementation, i.e., an application for victim compensation, or a link to registration for victim notification.
 - How to join a listserve to receive ongoing information about victims' rights.
 - How to participate in regularly scheduled chat rooms.
 - Bulletin boards with key victims' rights information.
 - Links to local, state and national victim assistance programs.

It is also essential that a victims' rights web page include *contact information* – including agency, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address – that users can readily access for additional information or assistance. If this information is not readily available, crime victims who need further assistance may not seek it.

Electronic Bulletin Boards

The availability of new victims' rights resources and information can be easily posted on the bulletin boards of web sites, with electronic links to actual documents or resources for further information and assistance.

Chat Rooms

Electronic chat rooms allow for excellent group discussions about victims' rights, regardless of the chatter's geographic location. The degree of anonymity offered by chat rooms is helpful, in particular, to crime victims who may not want to be identified as such.

Chat rooms should be facilitated by somebody with extensive knowledge of victims' rights, and the capacity to respond to any chatter who is in crisis. "Guest speakers" are helpful to generate interest on a specific victims' rights topic.

Listserve

Electronic listserve provide an inexpensive and highly effective dissemination venue for information about victims' rights. Listserve membership can reach a general population, or be specific to different types of crime victims, justice professionals, and victim assistance providers.

In addition to using listserve to disseminate information, members can also be encouraged to solicit input and information from other members. With this approach, it's always advisable to ask members to *include their personal e-mail address* so that other listserve members are not inundated with rounds of responses; and to summarize responses received and provide it to the listserve manager for dissemination to the entire group.

It is helpful to maintain listserve communications on a regularly scheduled basis, so that members can "expect" to receive important information. It is also useful to avoid attaching documents to listserve communications, as the potential for spreading viruses electronically is significant. Instead, include electronic links to web sites where victims' rights information can be easily accessed.

Dissemination Strategies: *Training and Public Education*

Training and Cross-training

The Victims' Rights Education Project contains a wealth of information that can enhance any type of training effort. Orientation and ongoing training about victims' rights, roles and responsibilities for implementation, and collaboration among justice agencies and victim assistance professionals to help victims understand and exercise their rights is essential to the professional development and growth of the justice and victim services fields.

Training programs can be planned and implemented in a variety of formats, from 10-minute roll call training for law enforcement, to the standard 90-minute conference workshop, to day-long and multiple-day training programs that provide more in-depth information about victims' rights. There are three key types of training that can be enhanced by the Victims' Rights Education Project Tools:

Internal Agency Training

Orientation training for new staff, and regularly scheduled "refresher training programs" for all staff, can help victim assistance and justice professionals understand their roles and responsibilities in victims' rights implementation.

External Training of Allied Professionals

A wide range of professionals – including those in criminal justice, public safety, mental health, public health, public policy development, and other areas – can benefit from training about victims' rights. It is helpful to coordinate such training efforts, and even co-train, with a representative of the allied profession that you seek to educate.

Cross-training

One of the best ways to "fill gaps" in victims' rights implementation is to conduct cross-training programs that include at least two, and often multiple, professions that assist victims of crime. The structured exchange of information between multiple professions is one of the best approaches to promote mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities for victims' rights implementation, and to identify and fill possible gaps.

When planning training programs, the process of actual presentation can take many forms utilizing the Kits, and focus on:

- *One core right* and why it is helpful to victims; the roles and responsibilities of justice agencies and victim service providers to help victims exercise

their rights; and providing tips for victims that can empower them to most effectively exercise their rights.

- *All eight core rights*, describing each right and why it is helpful to victims; roles and responsibilities; and the type of information and assistance that is most helpful to victims in understanding and exercising their rights.
- *A specific justice system agency* (such as law enforcement, prosecutors, the judiciary and courts, community and institutional corrections, and Attorneys General), and its role and responsibility for victims' rights implementation.
- *Victims' rights across the criminal justice continuum*, addressing all the issues mentioned above, with attention paid to identifying and filling gaps in victims' rights implementation to provide a seamless delivery of services and victim-related information.
- *Victims' rights compliance*, utilizing the "Promising Practices in the Compliance and Enforcement of Victims' Rights" to address collective measures to improve the justice system's compliance with victims' rights as mandated by law.

Once each of the Kits has been adapted to be jurisdiction-specific, they can be easily incorporated into a variety of training resources, including:

- PowerPoint presentations that combine facts about victims' rights and implementation, and inspirational quotations from the "Talking Points" Kit.
- Participant resource materials that can be easily adapted from any of the Kits.
- Individual and group learning activities for participants that actively engage them through the use of case studies, questions for discussion, quizzes and/or games.
- Visual posters to display on the walls of training rooms that include inspirational quotations from the "Talking Points" Kit.

It is also helpful to augment training programs with presentations from actual crime victims and survivors, and the use of audio/visual tapes and DVDs that address specific victims' rights, and the criminal justice system's response to victims.

Web-based Education and Training Programs

Increasingly, many professional organizations and institutions of higher education are sponsoring web-based training programs, which offer the advantages of a low-cost approach that can engage a wide range of students without restrictions based upon geography or ability to travel. The training approaches described above can be easily adapted to a web-based initiative, with additional emphasis

on scheduling classes, providing reading materials in advance, securing guest presenters and, in some cases, testing and evaluation.

Public Speaking and Presentations

Many people in America are still not aware of the wide range of rights afforded to victims in the aftermath of crime. Increasing public awareness about victims' rights can help people understand their rights in the event that they are victimized; provide information and support to family members and friends who have been victimized; and become informed so they can support public policy initiatives that enhance victims' rights and services.

Professionals who serve victims can seek speaking opportunities from civic organizations, professional organizations and coalitions, community-based groups, neighborhood associations, schools and institutions of higher education, and other venues whose members need to be informed about victims' rights.

While all of the Tools are useful for developing public presentations, the "Talking Points" Kit is specifically designed to enhance public presentations. Its many references help describe the importance of each victim's right, and personalize that right with inspirational quotations from victims and survivors, and those who serve them.

Dissemination Strategies: News Media Outreach

The news media can have a significant role in generating public awareness about victims' rights, and educating crime victims about their rights, as well as programs and services to assist them.

There are three types of news media that should be considered in developing a media outreach strategy for victims' rights:

Print Media:

- Daily newspapers.
- Weekly newspapers.
- News services (such as Associated Press, Reuters, etc.).
- Special interest publications that target specific topics or populations.
- Magazines (national and local).
- Journals.

Electronic Media

- Network television.

- Public television.
- Independent television.
- Cable television.
- Radio (including news stations and “all talk” format stations).

Web-based Media

- Web sites of print and electronic news media.
- Listserves of journalists (including crime reporters).
- On-line news media.

The media can be tapped to promote general awareness about a new victims’ rights education campaign (utilizing the Tools in the NVCAN Toolkit); to focus on a specific victims’ right; and/or to address the roles and responsibilities of criminal justice and victim assistance professionals in victims’ rights implementation. The news media are also an excellent source to educate the public about victims’ rights and needs, and to seek its support through voluntarism and donations.

A good idea when promoting *any aspect of victims’ rights* is to personalize the topic with the experiences of actual victims and survivors. The news media often seek “the human angle” of a story, and interviews with crime victims can help emphasize the financial, emotional, physical and spiritual impact of crime on victims and communities, as well as the reasons why victims’ rights are so critical. Similarly, interviews with criminal justice professionals who have effectively promoted victims’ rights offer a positive perspective for victims and the public.

All of the Tools can be utilized as foundation resources to develop and implement a media strategy, using some of the most common strategies that include:

- *Press conferences* that involve justice officials, crime victims, service providers, public policy makers, and others who join together to present new, important information about victims’ rights and how to exercise them.
- *Press releases* that introduce or “kick off” a victims’ rights education campaign; focus on public policy development; or address the implementation of a specific victims’ rights.
- *Letters-to-the-editor* that respond to published stories about victims’ rights and criminal justice, or that proactively provide information about victims’ rights and services.
- *Opinion/editorial columns and radio/television actualities*, which provide an opportunity to educate the public about victims’ rights, and humanize these media by including the actual experiences of crime victims.

- *Public service announcements* for radio, television and print venues that inform victims and the public about rights and services.

For More Information

For additional information about the NVCAN Victims' Rights Education Project, please visit the NVCAN web site at: www.nvcan.org.

ENDNOTES

¹ OVC Strategic Planning Toolkit. (2004). Section III. Washington, D.C.: Office for Victims of Crime, U.S. Department of Justice.