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Enhancing Response to Victims: A Formative Evaluation of OVC's Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV) Program

Final Report

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Glossary

Clients: victims of crime who have received assistance from LE-VS specialists.

CMOC: context-mechanism-outcome configuration, a concept used in realist evaluation to describe how a program is supposed to work and under what conditions.

External partner: term used to describe any agencies, organizations, or groups that are not part of the LEA that collaborate with the VS program (e.g., receive client referrals from the VS program).

Grantees: term used to describe LEV-funded agencies, used interchangeably with *sites*.

IACP: International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Internal partner: used to describe any LEA staff (e.g., detectives, patrol officers, leadership) outside the VS program who would potentially interact or collaborate with the VS program (e.g., refer victims to VS program).

LEA: law enforcement agency.

LEV: Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services Program funded by the Office for Victims of Crime.

LE-VS specialist: law enforcement-based victim services specialist, sometimes referred to as victim advocates.

New vs. enhanced program: terms used to distinguish between grantees that used LEV funding to create a new VS program or enhance an existing VS program.

NIJ: National Institute of Justice, which funded the LEV formative evaluation.

OVC: Office for Victims of Crime, which funds the LEV program.

Phase 2 sites: a subset of 10 LEV sites that were invited to participate in virtual interviews and site visits.

PMT: Performance Measurement Tool, OVC's system to collect performance measure data from grantees.

Professional personnel: non-sworn LEA personnel, sometimes referred to as civilian personnel.

Sites: term used to describe LEV-funded agencies, used interchangeably with *grantees*.

System vs. community-based advocacy: terms used to distinguish between VS programs that are based in an LEA (system) and those that are based in the community (community).

TTA: Training and technical assistance, which is provided by IACP to LEV grantees.

VS program: victim services program, which encompasses the LE-VS personnel and the services and assistance they provide to victims of crime; some may be formalized programs or units with many staff, while others consist of one LE-VS specialist.

Victim: we use the term “victim” as the LEV grant and activities are intended to assist victims of crime, or people who have recently experienced victimization and are engaged with the criminal legal system; we recognize that people who have experienced victimization are not defined by this experience, and it is the goal of programs like LEV to support them on a path to healing.

1. Introduction

The role of law enforcement-based victim services (LE-VS) specialists is unique among advocates, social workers, and other helping professionals in the criminal legal system. LE-VS specialists have access to law enforcement agency (LEA) personnel, crime reports and associated agency processes, and victims during crucial criminal legal system intersection points. These personnel often connect with and support victims immediately after reports are made and help them exercise their statutory rights. LE-VS specialists are the only LEA personnel whose primary responsibility is to focus on the rights and needs of victims. Ensuring victims have access to LE-VS specialists who provide robust and ethical services can mitigate the significant and long-term physical, psychological, and financial consequences of victimization (IACP, 2009; Laxminarayan, 2012; National Sheriffs' Association, 2010). This support can also mitigate the harm felt by many victims who interact with the criminal legal system when criminal investigations remain unsolved or never progress to prosecution.

In recognition of the need to expand and enhance law enforcement responses to crime victims, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) developed the Law Enforcement-Based Victim Services (LEV) program to develop new or enhance existing VS programs. The LEV program seeks to build and sustain LEAs' internal capacity to address the rights and needs of crime victims by funding LE-VS specialists to provide trauma-informed direct services and coordinate additional assistance with community-based service providers. The LEV program has the potential to transform both the victims receiving assistance and the agencies receiving these funds. However, there is a need for baseline research to inform the development of effective law enforcement-based VS programs.

Between 2018 and 2023, 80^a LEV programs have been funded across the United States. The programs are located within urban, rural, and tribal areas and are situated within state, county, and local law enforcement agencies and sheriff's offices.

^aNote: since the evaluation started, one LEV program has ended their grant participation.

In response to this need, in 2021, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) funded RTI International, in partnership with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), to conduct a formative evaluation of the LEV program. This final research report provides a summary of the project, including goals and objectives, research questions, research design and methods, study findings, and recommendations.

1.1 Overview of the LEV Program

The purpose of the LEV program is to help LEAs develop or enhance and sustain their internal capacity to address the needs of crime victims, their families, and the community through trauma-informed direct services and coordinated efforts with community-based service providers. Agencies use the funds to hire LE-VS specialists, establish VS programs, or enhance existing VS programs to fill identified gaps and needs. Another key objective is to form collaborative partnerships with community-based organizations to expand the resource network available to provide victims with the services they need. OVC also established an LEV Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) program that provides training on a range of topics, including

victims' rights, victim services documentation standards, effective partnership development, and agency incorporation of victim services.

Agencies have considerable latitude to implement their grants to fit the needs of their jurisdictions, resulting in a wide range of implementation approaches. However, the LEV program is guided by two resources. First, sites are encouraged to adhere to OVC's *Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime*, which offer general program, competency, and ethical standards and guidelines to help programs improve victim services by building individual and organization capacity. Second, the LEV TTA Team developed a set of key considerations to provide general guidance on a range of topics that apply across sites, regardless of model (see sidebar). The key considerations provided a framework through which to provide TTA and are a useful foundation, in addition to OVC's model standards, to inform our understanding of the LEV program and build on it through a formative evaluation.

2. Summary of the LEV Formative Evaluation

NIJ funded the LEV formative evaluation to help us understand if victims' needs are being met and how LEV programs can help law enforcement agencies best serve victims. Learning more about LE-VS specialists will broaden our collective understanding of this unique role and how agencies can ensure victims' access to their rights and choices in the criminal legal system. This evidence base will enhance efforts to advance LE-VS specialist capacities, law enforcement agencies' response efforts, and the overarching field.

Formative evaluation occurs when a program is in the early stages of implementation and focuses on understanding the individual components and activities of the program, implementation strategies, and intended outcomes. Through formative evaluation, where the priority is learning and reflecting, implementation strengths and challenges are identified. This leads to better understanding of which LEV program elements are essential. Before the LEV program can be assessed for impact or effectiveness, it is critical to clearly understand the program (components and activities) and what it is intended to do (outcomes).

2.1 Major Goals and Objectives

Through the formative evaluation, we sought to provide foundational knowledge of the LE-based VS programs funded through LEV and move the victim services field closer to being able to evaluate the effectiveness of LE-based victim services and identify best practices for service provision. Our specific objectives were to (1) develop a comprehensive inventory and typology

LEV Key Considerations Topic Areas

- » Victims' Rights
- » Advocacy Parameters
 - Personnel Hiring and Selection
 - Reporting Structure and Supervision Practices
 - Span of Responsibility
 - Ethical Approaches
- » Documentation Practices
 - Location
 - Content
 - Access
 - Legal Intersections
 - Subpoena Concerns
 - Complex Documentation
- » Partnerships (Internal and External)
- » Agency Incorporation of Victim Services
 - Budget Process
 - Victim Intersection Points
 - Crisis Response Plans
 - Culture Change

of all LEV programs, (2) develop logic models and identify core components of a subset of sites, (3) conduct an evaluability assessment in the subset of sites, (4) develop recommendations for future outcome evaluation, and (5) develop an implementation guide and fidelity measures. We sought to achieve these objectives through a mixed-methods research design that included input from OVC and the TTA Team, a web survey of all LEV sites, telephone and in-person interviews with LE-VS specialists and other LEV-associated personnel in a subset of sites, and interviews with victims who have received assistance.

2.2 Research Questions

Exhibit 1 presents key research questions and the data that we collected and analyzed to address them.

Exhibit 1. Research Questions Mapped to Data Sources

Formative Evaluation Questions	Data Source				
	Web Survey	OVC/TTA Input	LEV Virtual Interviews	LEV Site Visit Interviews	Victim Interviews
Inventory					
1. What are the characteristics of LEV programs and how can they be categorized?	•	•	•		
1.1 What are the characteristics of LEV grantee agencies and staff?	•	•	•		
1.2 What are the characteristics of victims who receive services?	•	•	•		
1.3 What types of and through which modalities are victim services provided?	•	•	•		
Logic Model Development					
2. What is the LEV program design?		•	•	•	
2.1 What are the inputs (the resources for implementing and operating the program)?		•	•	•	
2.2 What are the current activities? What are the individual components, and how are they implemented?		•	•	•	
2.3 What are the measurable outputs after implementing the program?		•	•	•	
2.4 What are the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes?		•	•	•	
Evaluability Assessment					
3. To what extent are LEV programs evaluable?		•		•	
3.1 Does the program have clear and measurable goals and objectives?				•	
3.2 Are the program components well-defined?				•	
3.3 Is the target population accessible and sufficient in size?				•	
3.4 Is the site at a state of implementation that can be meaningfully evaluated?		•		•	
3.5 Does the site have the capacity for information collection, data management, and analysis?		•		•	

(continued)

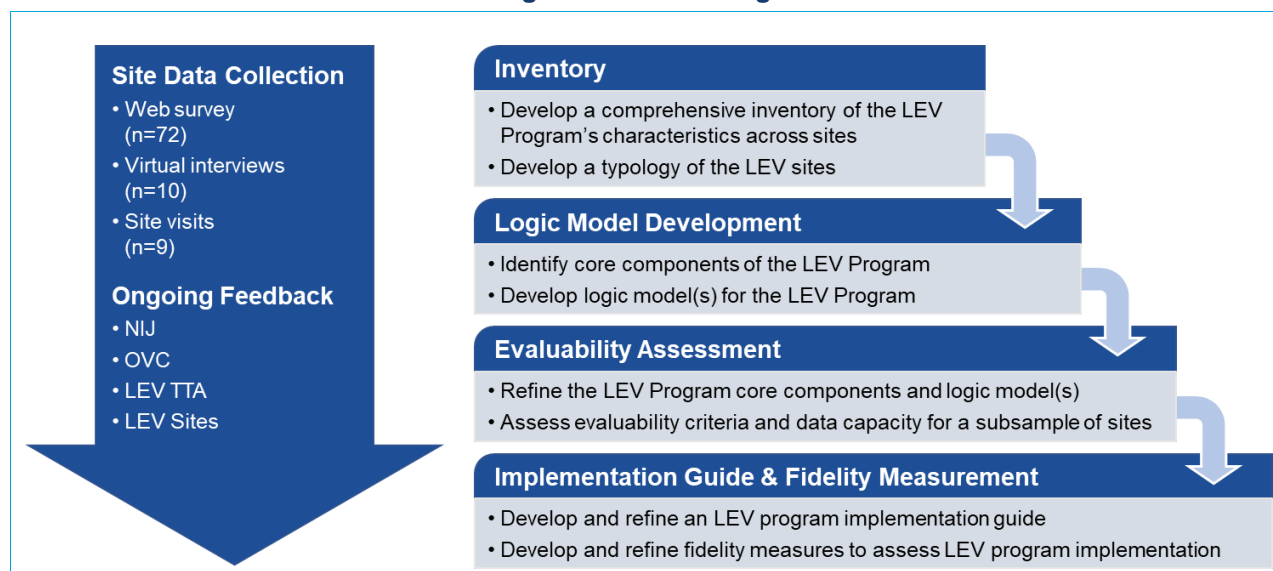
Exhibit 1. Research Questions Mapped to Data Sources (continued)

Formative Evaluation Questions	Data Source				
	Web Survey	OVC/TTA Input	LEV Virtual Interviews	LEV Site Visit Interviews	Victim Interviews
Implementation and Fidelity					
4. What are the core components of LEV programs? What are the guidelines for successful implementation? What are appropriate adaptations?		•	•	•	•
4.1 What measures can be used to assess the fidelity of LEV programs?			•	•	•

2.3 Research Design and Methods

Exhibit 2 illustrates our formative evaluation design, which included first building an inventory of LEV site characteristics and identifying core components of the LEV sites to inform the development of program logic models, followed by conducting an evaluability assessment to refine the core components and logic models and examine the extent to which a selected subsample of sites is ready for process and outcome evaluations. These activities were intended to culminate in the development of an implementation guide and fidelity measures for the LEV program.

Exhibit 2. Formative Evaluation Design for the LEV Program



The LEV evaluation was designed to occur in two phases. Because the LEV programs vary widely in their structure and implementation approaches, Phase 1 focused on understanding the LEV landscape. To meet this aim, the LEV programs were invited to complete a web-based survey to collect data across several topic areas (e.g., staffing, collaboration, services). At least one person from each LEV program was asked to complete the survey, although a site could

request that multiple people participate. Respondents included direct supervisors, technical leads, and LE-VS specialists. To supplement the survey, the TTA Team provided administrative program information (e.g., agency size, supervisor type) for each LEV program, and data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey provided contextual information about the programs' jurisdictions. Data from Phase 1 was used to inform Phase 2 data collection.

In Phase 2, 10 LEV programs were invited to participate in virtual interviews with key LEV program staff and site visits. The site visits included in-person interviews with LE-VS specialists and other personnel, internal law enforcement partners, external partners, and victims who have received LEV program assistance. In total, 10 sites participated in virtual interviews, and 9 participated in a site visit; 1 site declined to participate in the site visit after the virtual interview due to higher priority needs within their community and scheduling difficulties. In total, 153 interviews were conducted during the 9 site visits. The study protocols were reviewed by RTI's Institutional Review Board in April 2021. The activity was determined to not be research with human subjects as defined by 28 CFR 46.102(f).

2.3.1 Phase 1

As noted, better understanding the landscape of LEV was an essential first step for the evaluation. To document the range of LEV programs, we initially sought to create an inventory of all LEV programs and then develop a typology of the programs. We initially identified broad domains of information (see sidebar) that would be needed for the inventory of all LEV sites and identified the primary sources of data for this information:

- Administrative information from the TTA Team
- Web-based survey with LEV program staff
- U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2015–2019 estimates

We then reviewed victim service provider surveys used in prior research (e.g., Lugo-Graulich et al., 2021; Oudekerk et al., 2018) and adapted existing questions, as possible. To reduce burden on sites, we worked with the TTA Team to identify the fields they could complete, based on grant applications and other administrative data they maintain. We then developed a data collection spreadsheet and the TTA Team entered the data for each of their grantees.

The remaining information, including any subjective questions (e.g., challenges and successes), were included in a web-based survey of all LEV grantees. The web-based survey was developed to be self-administered by LEV program staff. The survey was programmed and monitored using REDCap, a survey programming and

LEV Inventory Domains

- » Community characteristics (e.g., population, poverty)
- » LEA characteristics (e.g., agency type and size)
- » Program type (new or enhanced)
- » Program goals
- » Program implementation status
- » Focal population (e.g., crime types or victim groups)
- » Program structure and personnel (e.g., supervisor type, number of personnel)
- » Internal collaboration and external partnerships
- » Types of services or assistance referred or provided
- » Training
- » Documentation practices
- » Data collection
- » Successes/challenges
- » Sustainability

management web application. Primary contacts from all 73 sites, who had already been informed about the study, were sent an invitation email from the TTA Team introducing them to the survey and encouraging them to participate. The research team sent a follow-up invitation with a unique survey link to facilitate tracking and follow-up. Of the 73 sites, 68 (93%) completed the survey, 4 (5%) partially completed the survey, and 1 (1%) did not respond. The non-responding site also stopped participating as an LEV program, dropping the total number of sites to 72.

Phase 1 Data Sources

- » Web-based survey with LEV programs
- » Administrative information from the TTA Team
- » U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2015–2019 estimates

To gather more contextual information about the communities served by LEV programs, we also extracted and analyzed data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2015–2019 estimates. This included information such as total population, median age, racial and ethnic composition, primary language spoken at home, poverty rate, and unemployment rate.

2.3.2 Phase 2

We proposed selecting 10 of the 72 remaining LEV grantees to continue with Phase 2 data collection activities. To increase the likelihood of meeting the criteria for evaluability, we only considered sites that had reached the full operation stage of implementation. This was determined through the sites' self-reported implementation status on the web survey; our examination of the open-ended responses on the web survey (e.g., challenges, sustainability); and input from the TTA Team, including their perception of implementation status. We then identified a group of 20 sites that represented diversity across many agency and programmatic characteristics, such as geographic region, agency size, agency type, urbanicity, program type (new or enhanced), program structure (supervisor type), and program size. The TTA Team provided additional input on that selection (e.g., knowledge about major staff changes or sustainability concerns).

We then began inviting selected sites to continue their participation in the evaluation. Nearly all sites agreed to participate. The evaluation team recognizes the value of including tribal populations in studies, as they are often underrepresented. Unfortunately, of the few tribal jurisdictions that received an LEV grant, none were able to participate in the LEV evaluation for varying reasons (e.g., one was already participating in other research and did not have capacity for more). **Exhibit 3** presents the characteristics of the 10 sites that participated in Phase 2 of the evaluation.

Exhibit 3. Characteristics of Phase 2 Sites

Characteristic	Frequency	%
Cohort		
2018	2	20
2019	6	60
2020	2	20
Region		
Northeast	2	20
Midwest	2	20
South	3	30
West	3	30
Agency Size		
Small	3	30
Medium	3	30
Large	4	40
Urbanicity		
Mostly urban	6	60
Mostly rural	3	30
All rural	1	10
Jurisdiction Type		
City	6	60
County	2	20
State	1	10
Other	1	10
Program Type		
New	5	50
Enhanced	5	50

2.3.2.1 Virtual Interviews

We conducted virtual interviews with key LE-VS specialists from the 10 selected sites. The primary purpose of the virtual interview was to gain a better understanding of the programs and refine site-specific logic models. We developed a semi-structured interview guide and notetaking template to ensure that information was captured consistently yet could be tailored for sites. We strategically used the information learned from the web survey to inform our interviews and avoid duplicating information that was already

Virtual Interview Topics

- » Community context
- » Program structure
- » LEV personnel
- » Victim assistance and services
- » Partnerships
- » Documentation and performance monitoring
- » Program sustainability

provided. The goal of the interview was to gather more detail and context around responses provided in a closed-response manner. Although a general interview protocol was used for all sites, the guide was prefilled with information (e.g., goals, program structure, partners) that we had already gathered from the web survey or TTA Team. Prior to the interview, we also drafted a site-specific logic model based on their survey responses. Interviews were conducted by one interviewer and one notetaker via Zoom video conference, which provided an immediately accessible recording that was transcribed for qualitative coding.

2.3.2.2 Site Visits

After the virtual interviews, site visits were scheduled with each site. Building on the information gathered in the virtual interview, the site visits were conducted over 2–4 days and included interviews with the LEV program staff as well as other advocates working in their agency, internal partners, community partners, and clients who had received services from LE-VS specialists. We developed a semi-structured interview guide for each participant type tailored to their interactions with the LEV program staff. The goal of the site visit interviews was to gather a holistic view of the LEV program, including the perspectives of sworn law enforcement staff who refer victims to the LE-VS specialists, community partners to whom LE-VS specialists may refer clients for longer-term services and support, and LEV clients.

Site Visit Interview Participants

- » LEV supervisor
- » LEV-funded victim advocates
- » Other system-based victim advocates
- » Internal law enforcement partners (e.g., detectives, patrol, records)
- » External community-based partners
- » LEV clients

2.3.2.3 Performance Measuring Tool Data

We also requested access to the OVC Transforming Victim Services (TVS) Performance Measures Tool (PMT), which LEV grantees are required to submit quarterly to fulfill their grant requirements. The PMT data capture programmatic outputs and outcomes related to activities such as training, technical assistance, partnerships, and victim services, among others. Although the purpose of this formative evaluation was not to assess or evaluate program outputs or outcomes, we requested PMT data to better understand programmatic activities and existing data collection activities. These metrics were used only for descriptive purposes.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

2.3.3.1 Phase 1

The LEV Inventory displays characteristics across all 73 LEV programs. Site-specific data were populated into the inventory template. Information that may identify an LEV program was removed from the inventory to retain anonymity of the jurisdiction. To provide detailed information across programs, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize LEV program characteristics within the key domains. We used the open-ended responses to describe the sites' goals and objectives, implementation challenges faced and resulting project modifications (if any), successes achieved and factors that facilitated them, and sustainability.

Next, we sought to develop a typology of LEV programs and categorize sites by common features (e.g., structure, victim or crime type, primary services). We first calculated descriptive statistics, such as crosstabs and means comparisons, to explore similarities and differences across common LEV features and assist in categorization. We also ran factor analysis and latent class analysis models but did not find any evidence of clustering. The results reported in **Section 3.1** are based solely on the descriptive statistics.

2.3.3.2 Phase 2

Interviews conducted virtually and on site were audio-recorded and transcribed via an automated transcription service. A team member reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and cleaned and edited any inaccuracies. The transcripts were then uploaded to QSR NVivo 12, a qualitative software for coding and analysis. Our qualitative data analysis approach followed the flexible, in-depth coding method described by Deterding & Waters (2018). First, we linked *attribute codes* to each transcript; for example, site ID, program type (new or enhanced), and respondent type (e.g., LE-VS specialist, LEA internal partner). This allows for coded excerpts to later be queried by attribute. Flexible coding consists first of index coding and then analytic coding. *Index codes* comprised broad content areas (e.g., victim identification, victim services, internal partnerships, external partnerships) that were developed from the interview protocol questions or identified by site visit team members following the visits. Index coding applies these broad codes to large sections of text, which is a more efficient process than detailed line-by-line coding as the first step. The team initially coded a common set of transcripts to ensure consistent coding practices, and team meetings were used to resolve any coding questions or issues. In the next stage, analysts reread the excerpts captured within an index code (e.g., internal partnerships) and applied more detailed *analytic codes* (e.g., collaboration methods, collaboration facilitators, partnership benefits, partnership challenges). Reports were generated for each code, and analysts then developed detailed coding summaries, identifying common themes that inform this final report and other dissemination products.

3. Findings

The study aimed to address broad topic areas that align with the study research areas: (1) program characteristics and inventory, (2) program design and logic model development, (3) evaluability, and (4) implementation and fidelity. This section presents the project findings, organized by these four areas.

3.1 LEV Program Characteristics and Inventory

Information collected in Phase 1 addressed Research Question 1 (see sidebar), providing a comprehensive view of the LEV program and helping identify similarities and differences in approaches and documenting key characteristics across all LEV programs. The LEV Inventory was intended to help LEAs implement VS programs. The inventory displays characteristics across all 73 LEV

What are the characteristics of LEV programs and how can they be categorized?

- » What are the characteristics of LEV grantee agencies and staff?
- » What are the characteristics of victims who receive services?
- » What types of and through which modalities are victim services provided?

programs and subsets of LEV programs filtered by specific characteristics. For example, someone interested in LEV program implementation in medium-sized law enforcement agencies could filter by agency size.

The LEV Inventory is organized by the following categories: Community Characteristics, LEV Program Characteristics, and Types of Services/Assistance Referred or Provided. The variables included in each category are listed in **Exhibit 4** and are fully described in a previous report (Tibaduiza, Barrick, Durall, & Presler-Jur, 2022).









Exhibit 4. Variables Included in the LEV Inventory

<p>Community Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Population • Percent that Speak Language Other than English at Home • Percent in Poverty • Percent Unemployed 	<p>LEV Program Characteristics (<i>continued</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Internal Collaborators • Formalized Partnerships with External Agencies, Organizations, or Entities • Number of Formal Partnerships
<p>LEV Program Characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law Enforcement Agency Size • New or Enhanced Program • Direct Supervisory Responsibility for the LEV Program • Number of LE-VS Specialists • Estimated Number of Total Victim Services Personnel • Hours Available to Respond to Victims • Routine Collaboration with Other Internal Units/Personnel 	<p>Types of Services/Assistance Referred or Provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Services Referred and Number of Services Provided for the Following Service Types: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information and Referrals – Legal and Victim’s Rights Assistance – Financial and Material Assistance Services – Emotional Support and Safety – Health Advocacy – Other – All Services

3.1.1 Typology of LEV Programs

Three key programmatic characteristics appear to differentiate programs: **agency size**, **program type**, and **supervisor type**. Profiles for each of these key characteristics are described in the following sections, and **Exhibit 5** provides an overview of the variables highlighted in the profiles.

Exhibit 5. Variables Included in the LEV Typology Profiles

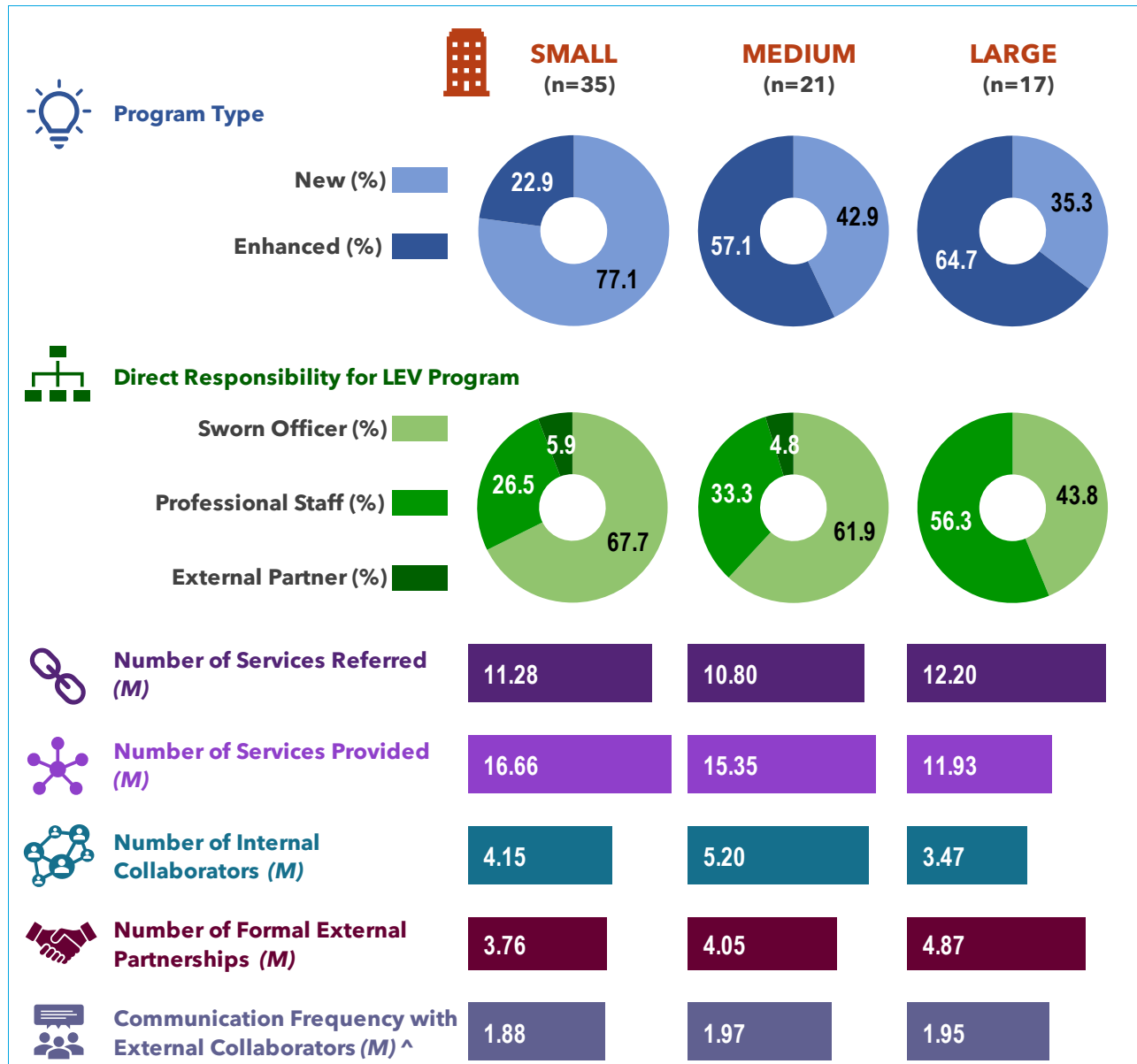
Variable	Description	Source
 Agency Size	Size of the LEV law enforcement agency	TTA Team
 Program Type	LEV funding was used to start a new program or enhance an existing program	TTA Team
 Supervisor Type	Type of personnel who have direct supervisory responsibility over the LEV program	TTA Team
 Services Referred	Number of services and types of assistance (based on a list of 36) provided via referral by LE-VS specialists to crime victims	Site
 Services Provided	Number of services and types of assistance (based on a list of 36) provided directly by LE-VS specialists to crime victims	Site
 Internal Collaborators	Number of internal units and personnel with which the LEV program routinely collaborates, of the following types: (1) records, (2) patrol, (3) investigative units, (4) crime prevention, (5) public information officer/media unit, (6) property evidence unit, (7) crime analysis unit, (8) finance/grant management unit, and (9) other	Site
 Formal Partnerships	Number of formalized external partnerships (e.g., contract, MOU, cooperative agreement) the LEV program has based on a list of 27 partner types	Site
 Communication with External Collaborators	Average frequency of communication with external partner types (0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Frequently)	Site

Note: MOU=Memorandum of Understanding; TTA=Training and Technical Assistance

3.1.1.1 Agency Size

LEV programs represent small agencies with fewer than 100 sworn officers (n=35), medium agencies with 100–999 sworn officers (n=21), and large agencies with 1,000 or more sworn officers (n=17) (**Exhibit 6**). Some characteristics of the LEV programs varied by agency size. Most small agencies used LEV funding to develop a new VS program, and most medium and large agencies enhanced an existing VS program. LEV supervisor type varied such that the percentage of programs that have a sworn officer with direct responsibility for LEV decreases with agency size, and the percentage of programs that have professional staff with direct responsibility increases with agency size. LEV programs in large agencies refer more services and directly provide fewer services than small and medium agencies. LEV programs in medium agencies routinely collaborate with the highest number of internal units and personnel, and programs in large agencies collaborate with the fewest. The number of formal external partnerships LEV programs have increases with agency size.

Exhibit 6. Profile of LEV Programs, by Agency Size

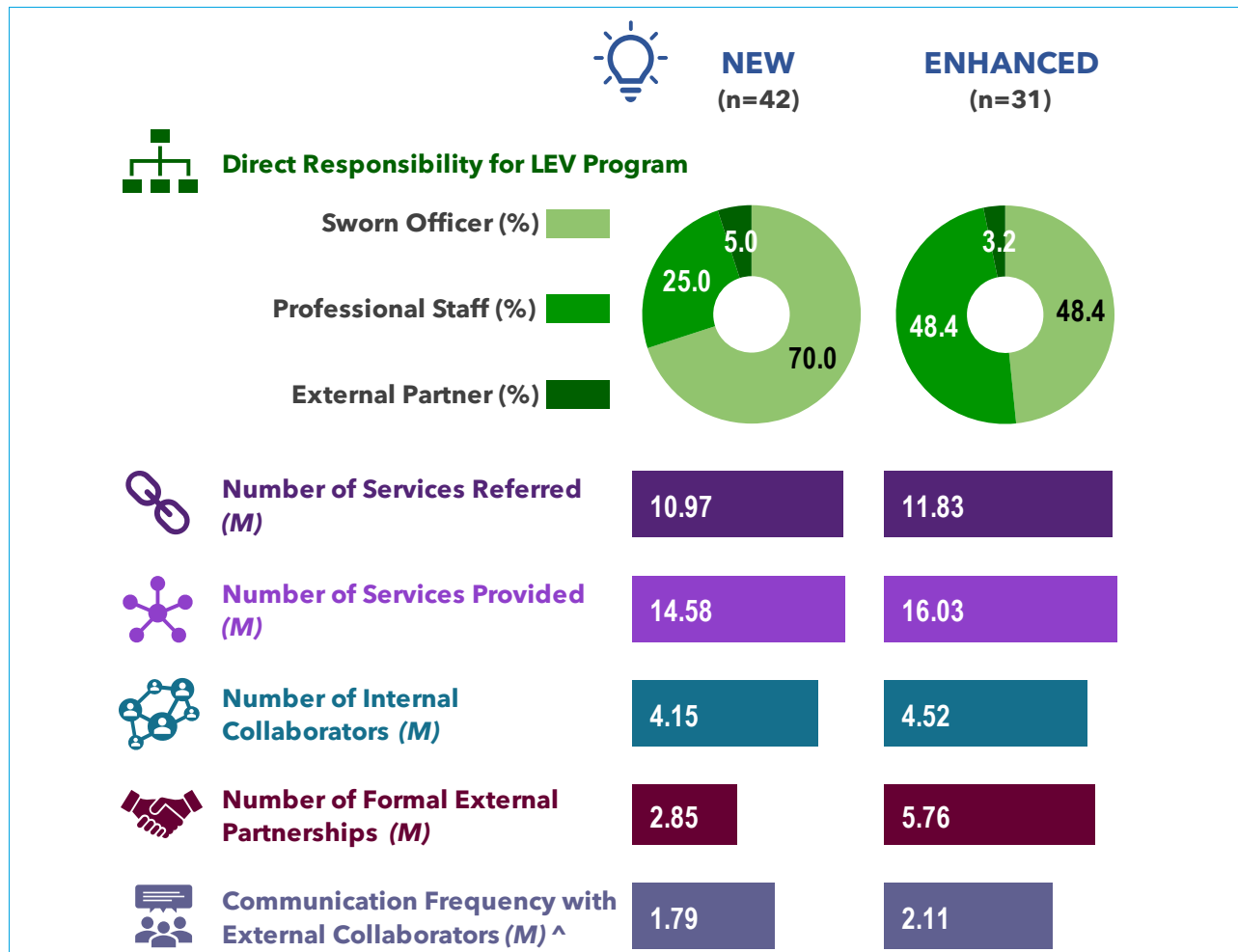


^Average across 27 collaborator types; 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Frequently

3.1.1.3 Program Type

LEV funding was available for agencies to start a new program (n=42) or enhance an existing program (n=31) (**Exhibit 7**). New programs were more likely to have a sworn officer with direct responsibility over LEV, while enhanced programs were evenly split between professional staff and sworn leadership. Unsurprisingly, enhanced programs were more developed than new programs in several respects, including both referring and directly providing more types of services, collaborating with more types of internal personnel, having more formal external partnerships, and communicating more frequently with many external collaborators.

Exhibit 7. Profile of LEV Programs, by Program Type

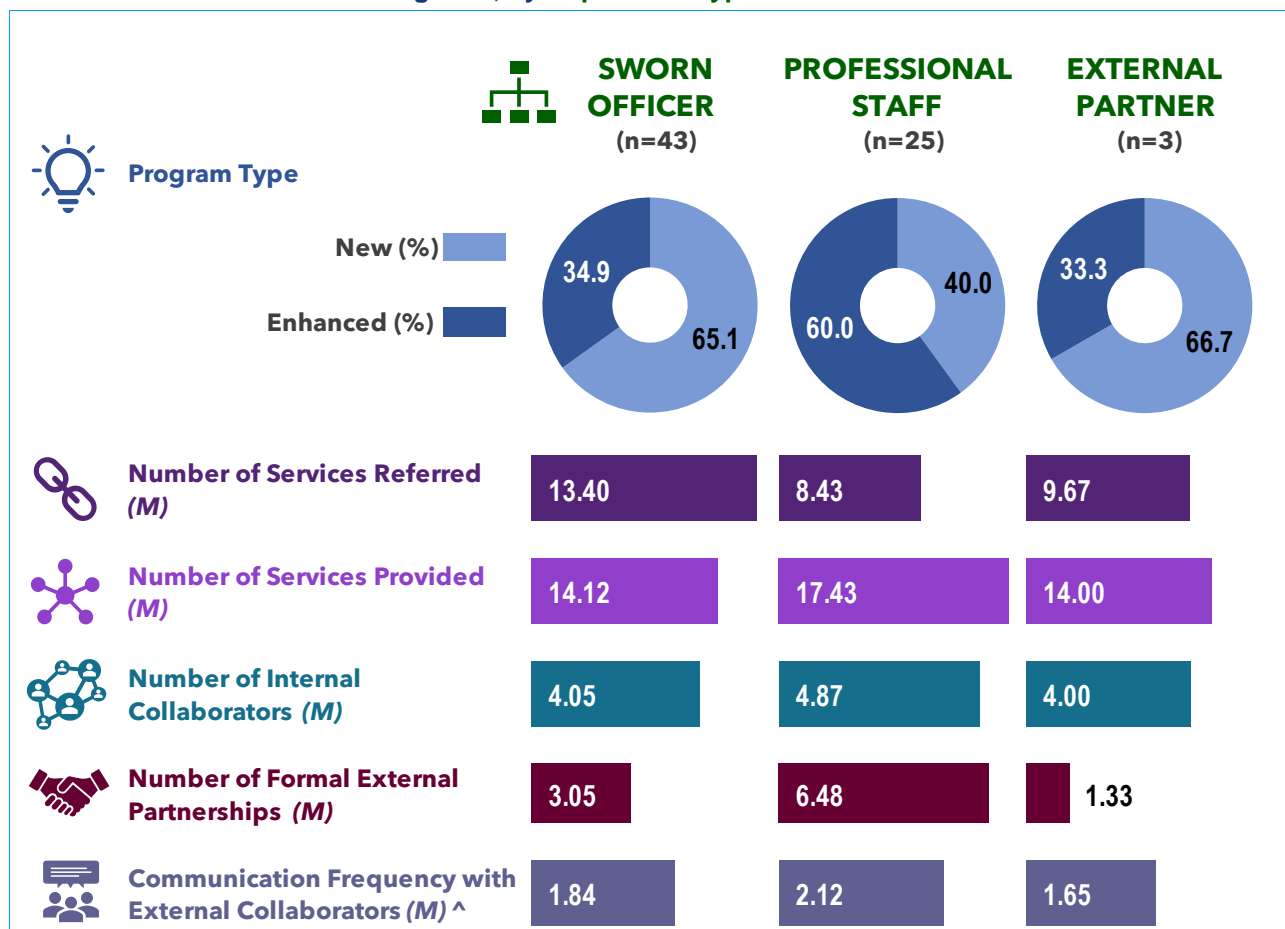


^Average across 27 collaborator types; 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Frequently

3.1.1.5 Supervisor Type

LEV programs are supervised by different types of staff, including sworn officers (n=43), professional staff (n=25), and external partners (n=3) (**Exhibit 8**). More than half of LEV programs supervised by professional staff were using LEV funding to enhance existing VS programs (60%), and about two-thirds of LEV programs supervised by sworn officers or external partners were developing new VS programs. In general, programs supervised by professional staff appear to have greater capacity than those supervised by sworn staff in some respects. Compared to programs supervised by sworn officers, programs with professional staff supervision referred fewer and directly provided more services, collaborated with more types of internal personnel, had more formal external partnerships, and communicated more frequently with many external collaborators.

Exhibit 8. Profile of LEV Programs, by Supervisor Type



^Average across 27 collaborator types; 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Sometimes, 3=Often, 4=Very Frequently

Although not perfectly aligned, there appears to be a clustering of program characteristics such that new programs tend to be supervised by sworn officers and have lower capacity (i.e., fewer services, fewer internal and external partners, less communication). Although this is not particularly surprising, it reinforces that VS programs need time to grow and evolve, and expectations around program capacity and staff responsibilities should be realistic. Developing

internal relationships, identifying and securing partners, creating meaningful collaborations, and developing capacity to directly provide services are time-intensive, continual efforts.

Exhibit 9 illustrates how these overarching aspects of the LEV program fit together to build overall capacity, thereby improving response to crime victims. It is important to note that the typology profiles and this illustration represent only a snapshot of the LEV programs and our initial understanding of them.

Although data collected in Phase 1 of the evaluation did not yield distinct program models, it provided a wealth of descriptive information to better understand LEV program structures and activities. Data tables in a previous report (Tibaduiza, Barrick, Durall, & Presler-Jur, 2022) provide a comprehensive overview of the evaluation survey results. These data informed Phase 2 of the evaluation, which focused on learning why LEV programs and activities are designed as they are, what is working well, what has been challenging, how implementation has or will be adjusted, and how programs are approaching sustainability.

Exhibit 9. LEV Program Evolution



3.2 Program Design and Logic Model Development

Information collected through the web survey, virtual interviews, and site visits was used to address Research Question 2 (see sidebar) and develop an LEV logic model.

A logic model template was developed using the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Logic Model Development Guide (2004), consisting of the following components: goals, inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Site-specific logic models were drafted using results from the initial web survey and refined through both the virtual interviews and the site visits. These logic models were reviewed for common themes that reflect the overall program design of LEV. In this section, we

What is the LEV program design?

- » What are the inputs (the resources for implementing and operating the program)?
- » What are the current activities? What are the individual components, and how are they implemented?
- » What are the measurable outputs after implementing the program?
- » What are the short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes?

describe how the Phase 2 sites' LEV implementation connects to the overall LEV logic model. The LEV logic model is presented in **Exhibit 12** at the end of this section.

3.2.1 Goals

The overarching aim of LEV funding was to help LEAs either establish a new VS program or enhance an existing one. The grantees developed a range of goals tailored to their unique needs to achieve this aim. Despite some variation in the details of site-specific goals, we identified four common themes:

Goals reflect the site's motivation to apply for the LEV grant and what they set out to accomplish.

1. Increase capacity to provide trauma-informed services and resources to victims in the community
2. Increase awareness among internal partners about resources and services available
3. Build and enhance partnerships with community-based organizations
4. Sustain victim services activities post-program funding

Goal 1. All sites sought to increase their capacity to provide services and resources to victims in the community through a variety of means (e.g., referrals to other organization and/or the direct provision of services). For new programs, this included goals related to developing and implementing a VS program. Both new and enhanced programs sought to hire new advocates with their grant funding. Capacity goals also focused on expanding their service area, increasing the hours that advocates were available, increasing the number of victims an agency was able to serve, or increasing the number of services they were able to provide directly or through referral. As one advocate described:

"I would love to see us be able to extend our program out so that we can do more 911 calls. I can't even imagine how we would filter that information to the sheer number of 911 calls we get, but to really be able to see or to cross someone to process the information reports or injured persons reports because a lot of those are going to have domestic violence components. We just know we're missing them because we just can't track them. And so I would love to, I think we'd love to see that. We'd love to be able to do more intensive follow up with all of our clients, but particularly with our high-risk clients." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Goal 2. Sites' goals also focused on internal partnerships, including educating various LEA staff (e.g., patrol, front desk, volunteer staff, field personnel, field supervisors) on the role of the VS program and the services and support they can provide. This could also include developing policies for how LE-VS specialists interact with specific law enforcement teams or other system-based professionals (e.g., court advocates and prosecutors). One advocate described why internal awareness raising is critical:

"What we do with victim services, I know that in general, this department thinks that it is important. But what our mission is and what the mission is of the department aren't necessarily the same. They definitely coincide very well, they work together very well. But I feel like in general we are an afterthought... They will direct people to us, but it's

like they might not give them the right information about what we do or give victims the expectation of what they can get when they interact with us.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Goal 3. Most sites also had a goal related to partnerships with other organizations in the community. This included raising awareness of the VS program among community organizations and developing or enhancing partnerships for referral. Building external partnerships is related to goals around capacity: agencies can better serve victims if they have a large network of referral partners who can provide specific longer-term services beyond what LE-VS specialists are equipped to do and can actively encourage clients to contact law enforcement.

Goal 4. Finally, sites described sustaining their efforts after the LEV grant funding ends as a key goal. Sustainability goals focused both on retaining LE-VS personnel that were hired through the grant and, for some sites, hiring additional advocates. Sustainability planning included seeking other external funding opportunities as well as efforts to make some positions permanent through local governmental funding.

3.2.2 Inputs

All sites received funding for their LEV program and TTA from IACP. All sites used some of their grant funding to hire LE-VS specialists. For some sites, these hires may have been their first LE-VS specialists, whereas for others they were additional LE-VS specialists that worked alongside existing LE-VS specialist staff. Some of the sites also had interns and/or volunteers who supported their programs in various capacities. Other common inputs or resources included existing internal partners (i.e., other LEA staff) and external partners (e.g., community-based service providers). Each grantee also relied, to some extent, on existing agency policies, protocols, and materials.

Inputs are the available human, financial, organizational, and community resources the site has to direct toward doing the intended work.

3.2.3 Activities

Key LEV programmatic activities broadly fit into the following categories:

- Personnel, supervision, and policy
- Victim identification and outreach
- Service provision through direct assistance and referral
- Partnership and network development
- Case management and documentation
- Sustainability planning

Activities are what the site does with the resources, i.e., the processes, tools, events, technology, and actions that are an intentional part of LEV implementation. These activities are used to accomplish the project goals.

Although these were common activities, there was substantial variation in how they were accomplished across individual sites. In this section, we provide a high-level overview of primary

LEV activities. Detailed descriptions about how these activities were implemented are provided in **Section 3.3**.

3.2.3.1 Personnel, Supervision, and Policy

Key initial steps to implementation include deciding where the VS program belongs within the agency structure and who will supervise it, hiring qualified staff, and developing policies to support the program. Programs varied in organizational and supervisory structure, with some located in and assisting specific units (e.g., Crimes Against Persons) and others providing more widespread assistance across numerous units. In terms of supervisory structure, new VS programs tended to be directly supervised by sworn personnel, while enhanced programs more often were supervised by professional personnel.

Sites considered several factors when hiring for LE-VS positions, including experience with victim services and advocacy, knowledge about the criminal legal process, and personality. Many respondents noted the importance of finding a person that fits into an LEA environment and is proactive (e.g., connects with law enforcement personnel, reaches out to external service organizations). Sites encountered several challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, hiring freezes, and restrictions due to local bureaucratic government processes. These affected sites' ability to implement and expand their programs.

VS program policy development formalizes processes and helps to define LE-VS specialists' roles, responsibilities, and parameters. Several respondents cited the value of standardized policy and practice related to ethical considerations, such as victim confidentiality limitations, documentation practices, and addressing victim grievances. All sites had some policies in place, though enhanced programs had developed more. For new and sworn-supervised programs, LE-VS specialists were often responsible for policy development. This was challenging as some did not feel they had the necessary experience, or they lacked the time.

3.2.3.2 Victim Outreach and Service Provision

The most frequent approach used to identify a victim for outreach was through reviews of police reports. LE-VS specialists then proactively contacted these victims to offer assistance, ideally within 48–72 hours. Some LE-VS specialists also received referrals from officers or attended officer briefings to identify victims for assistance. Some sites had targeted eligibility criteria to consider when deciding who to contact: for example, victims of specific crime types or specific regions of the jurisdiction. Most of the initial outreach was completed over the phone, although there were some LE-VS specialists who met victims on scene or were connected through law enforcement at the LEA for initial contact.

There were varying processes around initial contact outside of work hours. LE-VS specialist respondents were empathetic to responding to crisis regardless of whether the site had formalized policies for the VS program's "off hours response." Some programs had 24/7 on-call response with formalized processes, while others had informal policies for contact outside of work hours to perform a quick assessment to determine if LE-VS specialist were needed right then.

During initial engagement with a victim, respondents reported that LE-VS specialists would explain their role, explain the victim's rights, and identify the victim's most critical needs. Respondents emphasized the importance of offering tailored, holistic, and coordinated services to make sure that victims have what they need at any moment. LE-VS specialists most often provided short-term services and education about the criminal legal system and would connect victims to external partners to address long-term needs. The most common types of service provision focused on safety planning, basic needs assistance, general support, criminal/civil legal system assistance, victim compensation assistance, and emergency housing assistance. Services that were most commonly provided via referral include basic needs, long-term housing assistance, behavioral health care, and civil legal aid (e.g., immigration services). VS programs faced some service provision challenges including inadequate staffing capacity, language accessibility issues, and lack of service availability in the community.

VS programs are well-versed in victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches and, overall, respondents spoke positively about the agencies' progress toward acceptance and use of these approaches when working with victims. A primary success of the programs was the supportive assistance provided to victims (e.g., access to services, knowledge about case processes) that helps them to recover and heal.

3.2.3.3 Developing Partnerships and Networks

Partnerships can be internal, which include other sworn and non-sworn LEA personnel (e.g., detectives, patrol, records), and external, which include other agencies and community organizations with whom they collaborate (e.g., refer victims to for long-term services, participate in task forces or multidisciplinary teams).

LEA internal partnerships. Developing and strengthening internal partnerships is critical to implementing LEV because buy-in within the agency is important to the success of the program. Overall, LEA internal partners reported positive experiences collaborating with LE-VS specialists, which happens in numerous ways (e.g., LE-VS specialists responding to officer referrals or providing training about victim advocacy). Communication between the LE-VS specialist and internal partners varies in frequency and may be formal or informal. Many respondents cited informal communication as a facilitator to relationship building and collaboration, in addition to strong messaging from leadership in support of the VS program, internal partners' continued exposure to or visibility of the VS program, and sharing examples of successful collaboration.

LEA internal partners cited some challenges developing relationships with LE-VS specialists, primarily the need to better understand what LE-VS specialists could do and how they fit within the agency. However, once LEA internal partners began working with LE-VS specialists, they quickly saw the benefits. LEA internal partners recounted many ways in which LE-VS specialists have benefitted victims and their community, but also how they had benefitted personally from having a person available to directly support victims—a task they recognize the importance of but typically do not have the expertise or time to do. For many LEA partners, LE-VS specialists were a bridge to improved communication with victims and a means to enhance their own response to victims. Embedding LE-VS specialists positively impacted the LEAs, as

attitudes and beliefs about victim services shifted and victim-centered and trauma-informed practices were better understood and increasingly incorporated.

External partnerships. VS programs employed a multitude of external partnerships to ensure continuity of care for victims receiving services. External partnerships included those that were informal and formal (e.g., Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] in place), and the extent to which they were formalized varied. Most VS programs regularly communicated with domestic violence and community-based organizations, child advocacy centers and child protective services, and fellow criminal legal system groups like other local law enforcement agencies and prosecutor's offices. Despite some commonalities in the types of collaborative partners, there was also substantial variability across sites.

Frequent and respectful communication facilitated strong external partnerships. The frequency of these communications, as well as the mode (e.g., email, in person), varied across sites. VS programs also expanded their partner networks by participating in coalitions, specialized task forces, and multidisciplinary teams. These formalized interactions provided additional opportunities to connect with outside agencies and communicate regularly about their roles and community services.

3.2.3.4 Case Management and Documentation

Sites use different systems and methods for documenting victim services activities and managing their caseloads. These include off-the-shelf software developed for victim services as well as spreadsheets that agencies or advocates created to meet their individual needs. Some sites described using multiple systems for documentation at the same time or switching between systems throughout the grant period. As spreadsheets are endlessly customizable, the sites used different approaches to tracking information.

As part of their grant funding, all LEV sites are required to submit the PMT, which includes a series of standardized performance metrics. Several sites also collected additional data, primarily through surveys of victims or internal law enforcement partners, to better understand client and agency perspectives of their services and assistance. Six sites reported administering victim surveys. The modes of administration and timing varied across sites. For example, one site mentioned administering a survey to their clients using multiple modes (e.g., in person, over the phone, online) and partnering with a local university to help analyze the data. Another described sending surveys to their clients as part of their closeout process. Others posted a link to the survey on their websites, allowing anyone to provide feedback. Although the content of the surveys varied, LE-VS specialists who used surveys thought it was important to receive feedback from those they served, even though it can be challenging to do so. Only two sites reported surveying their agency about their VS programs.

3.2.3.5 Sustainability Planning

Sustaining the new or enhanced VS program was a required goal of the LEV grant. VS programs described three primary goals that could be accomplished by securing other sources of funding: (1) maintain grant-funded staff positions, (2) increase the number of LE-VS specialist

positions to expand the VS program, and (3) change the staffing structure, such as moving staff from part-time to full-time. These changes may be easier to do outside of the grant structure, where there are dual grant and agency or government requirements for staffing. Sustainability planning activities primarily involved researching other available grant funding and requesting funding from the local or state government for full-time advocate positions. Some respondents conveyed the importance of agency leadership and county/city government leadership support in securing long-term funding. They also recognized the value of program data and documentation to support their arguments to sustain LEV programming and personnel. Staff wellness is closely tied to sustainability as burnout, vicarious trauma, and staff turnover can negatively affect a VS program’s ability to function effectively and achieve its objectives. LE-VS specialists described agency-level practices that promote and support staff wellness and self-care, in addition to their own practices, training, and social supports.

3.2.4 Outputs

Based on the LEV sites’ goals and activities, we developed outputs that logically would result and, we believed, could realistically be measured (which was verified during the site visits). Key LEV programmatic outputs focus on victim outreach, service provision, and partnerships. Victim-focused outputs are captured in the PMT data submitted to OVC quarterly, including the number of victims assisted by type of service, the number of times each type of service was provided, and the number of victims referred to external partners. For example, **Exhibit 10** shows data from the PMT on the number of individuals provided specific types of services over their period of performance or through Quarter 2 2023 (the last quarter for which we have data).

Outputs are the direct results of LEV activities and may include types, levels, and targets of services to be delivered by the program.

Exhibit 10. Number of Individuals Who Received Services in Each Category, by Site

Site	Information and Referral Services	Personal Advocacy and Accompaniment	Emotional Support and Safety Services	Shelter and Housing Services	Criminal/Civil Justice System Assistance
1	356	264	221	14	278
2	5,272	4,293	1,747	142	2,676
3	3391	366	1,214	26	1,366
4	650	1192	86	7	345
5	4,909	3,060	309	51	143
6	526	344	424	0	453
7	1,363	238	43	9	1,320
8	191	181	176	62	177
9	597	118	772	3	146

Data source: Performance Measures Tool data submitted by sites to OVC

The outputs focused on internal partnerships include the number of trainings that advocates provided and the number of internal partners who received training. These measures help capture progress toward the integration between the VS program and other law enforcement units. Because all the LEV grantees were either new or seeking to enhance their program, the

number of new external partnerships can serve as a measure of growth and development.

3.2.5 Outcomes

We identified a number of potential short- and long-term outcomes that could be used to assess the effectiveness of LEV programs. Short-term outcomes focus primarily on demonstrating an increase in the outputs reported in the previous section (e.g., increase in the number of victims assisted, increase in the size of the external partner network, or an increase in the number of internal partners trained) and on assessing steps toward sustainability (e.g., increased VS program capacity through additional LE-VS specialists or receiving additional funding). Other critical measures include victim satisfaction with services and victim outcomes; however, this information is more difficult to capture and is not a grant requirement. Fortunately, as described, several sites also collected victim-level data to supplement the PMT, including surveys to understand client perspectives of their services and assistance. Although the content of the surveys varied (see **Exhibit 11**) advocates using surveys thought it was important to receive feedback from those they served.

Outcomes are the specific changes in attitudes, behavior, knowledge, skills, or level of functioning expected as a result of LEV activities.

A key long-term outcome focuses on improving victim outcomes and the agency response to victims, which may include victims reporting positive experiences with and perceptions of sworn officers (i.e., not just the advocates who assisted them), enhanced agency awareness and knowledge of the VS program, increased collaboration or integration between the VS program and other units, increased agency support for the VS program, and ultimately the agency at large embracing victim-centered and trauma-informed practices. It is important to note that sites are not typically capturing this type of information. We identified only two sites that administered surveys to their internal law enforcement partners, primarily to capture the agency’s overall awareness of VS program services, which is critical to their success (see **Exhibit 11**). Other long-term outcomes include maintaining or expanding the funded positions and activities, increasing prosecution rates, and reducing victimization rates, which may include a reduction in repeated victimization when victims receive supports needed to leave a situation they otherwise would not and a more general deterrent effect that occurs when victims report crimes to police so that people who commit crimes can be charged and prosecuted.

Exhibit 11. Topics Included in Victim and Agency Surveys

Victim Survey Topics	Agency Survey Topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Satisfaction with and helpfulness of services ● Whether they were treated with respect by the advocate ● Experiences with sworn officers during the incident ● Perceptions of increased knowledge about the criminal legal system ● Likelihood of reporting crimes in the future ● Likelihood of participating in the criminal legal process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sworn officer awareness and knowledge of VS program resources and services ● Perceptions of the VS program services provided being useful to victims ● Perceptions of advocate responsiveness

Exhibit 12. LEV Logic Model

Goals:

1. Increase capacity to provide trauma-informed services and resources to victims in the community
2. Increase awareness among internal partners about resources and services available
3. Build and enhance partnerships with community-based organizations
4. Sustain victim services activities post-program funding

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ LEV funding and TTA ▪ <i>Existing LE-VS specialists*</i> ▪ LEV specialist(s) ▪ Internal partners ▪ External partners ▪ <i>Interns and/or volunteers*</i> ▪ Existing policies, protocols, and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff supervision, meetings and coordination[†] ▪ Identify victims for outreach[†] ▪ Provide services, assistance, and referrals to identified victims[†] ▪ <i>Train internal and/or external partners*</i> ▪ Receive training on a variety of topics[†] ▪ <i>Cross-training with other units in the LEA*</i> ▪ <i>Develop new and/or revise existing policies and protocols, as needed*</i> ▪ Partnership development, functioning, and network building[†] ▪ Case management / documentation[†] ▪ <i>Conduct victim follow-up surveys*</i> ▪ <i>Seek new funding*</i> ▪ Sustainability planning[†] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Victims contacted/screened (#) ▪ Victims assisted (# and type) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criminal/civil justice system assistance - Emotional support and safety services - Information and referral services - Personal advocacy and accompaniment - Shelter and housing services - Victim compensation ▪ Victim referred to external partners (#) ▪ Training provided to internal partners by VS program (#) ▪ Internal partners who receive training, by unit (#) ▪ Training received by VS program (# and type) ▪ New external partnerships (#) ▪ Documents, trainings and public education materials developed (# and type) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Victims assisted (increase) ▪ <i>Dissemination of VS program resources (increase)</i> ▪ <i>External partner network (increase)</i> ▪ Policies, procedures, and data collection systems are finalized/implemented ▪ Resource/service availability or provision (increase) ▪ <i>Trainings provided (increase)</i> ▪ <i>Personnel trained (increase)</i> ▪ VS program capacity (increase) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocates (#) - Services available (# and type) ▪ VS program receives additional funding ▪ Victim outcomes improved (self-report) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knowledge about available services / resources and the criminal legal system - Likelihood of reporting crimes in the future - Likelihood of participating in criminal legal process - Satisfaction with and helpfulness of services - Treated with respect by advocate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agency response to victims (improve) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Positive perceptions of / experience with officers - Agency awareness and knowledge of VS program - Extent of collaboration or integration between VS program and other units - Extent to which the agency at-large has embraced victim-centered and trauma-informed practices ▪ Successful victim outcomes (increase) ▪ Agency support for VS ▪ VS program sustained <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funded positions are maintained or expanded - Funded activities are maintained or expanded ▪ Prosecution rate (increase) ▪ Victimization rate (decrease)

*Italics denote attributes that are not universal across all sites

[†]Substantial variation in how this was accomplished across individual programs

3.3 Implementation and Fidelity

As described in **Section 3.2.3**, through our analysis of the Phase 2 sites' data, we identified six broad program components (see sidebar) that encompass the key LEV activities that were implemented. In this section, we provide detailed descriptions about the Phase 2 sites' implementation activities within each program component, including their barriers, strengths, and successes. We use quotes throughout to illustrate the sites' experiences through their own words.

Key LEV Program Components

- Personnel, supervision, and policy
- Victim identification and outreach
- Service provision through direct assistance and referral
- Partnership and network development
- Case management and documentation
- Sustainability planning

3.3.1 Personnel, Supervision, and Policy

A key first step to embedding a VS program into an LEA is deciding where it fits best in the agency and hiring qualified personnel. Six VS programs were located within divisions that oversee criminal investigations, such as Major Crimes, Investigative Services, and Crimes Against Persons. The remaining three sites embedded their VS programs in professional or administrative divisions, like Administrative Services, Community Services, or Professional Standards.

Exhibit 13 provides an overview of the Phase 2 sites' program type, supervisory structure, and agency size. Most enhanced programs were directly supervised by professional personnel, whereas there was a lot of variation across the new programs, which were directly supervised by professional personnel, sworn personnel, or both. We learned that this classification of professional or sworn personnel simplified the chain of command. Professional supervisors and their LE-VS staff often worked directly and closely with an in-unit sworn supervisor, making it more of an enmeshed supervisory structure. Additionally, several sites, particularly small and medium agencies, shared that top leadership (including police chiefs) were highly involved in planning and designing their VS programs.

Exhibit 13. VS Program Characteristics

Program Type	Direct Supervisor	Agency Size
Enhanced	Professional	Large
Enhanced	Professional	Large
Enhanced	Professional*	Medium
Enhanced	Sworn	Medium
New	Professional	Large
New	Professional & Sworn Support**	Small
New	Professional & Sworn	Small
New	Sworn	Medium
New	Sworn	Small

*This VS program was supervised by professional personnel. The LEV-funded advocate was embedded in a specialized team and therefore also had sworn supervision.

**This is a hybrid site, meaning the LE-VS specialist was officially employed by a community-based organization but was co-located in the LEA.

3.3.1.1 Reporting Structure Challenges and Facilitators

Organizational Placement. Where to house the VS program is a consequential decision, and there are tradeoffs regardless of placement. As noted, most of the Phase 2 sites' VS programs were organizationally located within an investigative unit or unit that supported investigation, which was highly valued by detectives and investigators. However, respondents acknowledged the need for patrol units to have more access to VS programs, which would be easier if VS programs were physically housed within the unit. This sentiment was shared by one respondent:

"I think it's good that [LE-VS specialist's] in investigations, but I think there would be benefits also to have her being based out of patrol, because they're the ones that are initially taking these reports and probably the ones that are, would be initially offering her services." (*Internal Partner*)

One site highlighted that their new VS program was embedded alongside an existing unit of professional personnel that provides cross-agency support to investigative units and patrol operations. They felt this experience of already working with professional personnel bolstered the LE-VS specialist's ability to integrate into the division and directly support investigators and victims.

LE internal partners overwhelmingly stated that regular access to and visibility of LE-VS specialists was critical to building relationships. Although, some LE-VS specialists felt at times that this led to pressure to "prove" themselves, as one person said, to gain acceptance. One supervisor explained how they encouraged an LE-VS specialist to build internal relationships: "We have done it a couple of times where you're like, 'Hey, don't forget,' I told her, 'Go down and go out there and be seen.' You know, spend some time out there with the officers, come in and out." (*Internal Partner*) The benefit of co-locating LE internal partners and LE-VS specialists became evident in one site where officers began working with the LE-VS specialist and then requested they be moved into their unit.

Physical separation between LE internal partners and LE-VS specialists, which was more common for professional-led VS programs, challenged relationship building. One LE internal partner commented that having their LE-VS specialist in a location "where nobody passes by... There's no benefit there." (*Internal Partner*) Additionally, a supervisor shared how the disconnect affected their VS program:

"One of the biggest challenges [is that] we're very detached from the rest of the police department and a lot of people, including my chain of command, still think I work for [external agency]. Even though they have signed off on me as a police department employee for budget things and all of that. So, out of sight, out of mind, you know." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists and supervisors agreed that face time at leadership meetings or patrol briefings facilitate VS program buy-in and utilization, though it is not a cure-all. Some respondents explained:

“We're finally at the table. But they don't know what to do with us. But they gave us the seat, right? So, we have to respect that and earn their trust, which we're all doing. But you then. And then for law enforcement to realize. Not only do we have that seat, but we help not just the victim, but we're helping their case in general. And we can take some of that off because our victims want to tell them the whole story.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

“We have a lot of newer officers. I don't know how well they utilize victim services, especially if you're on like an active domestic scene or an active scene where you have somebody that can use their services. I don't know if roll call trainings are the best way to go about that...That's something that's an easy fix, I think. But if it's not getting through to the people, even if they're sitting there right in front of them being explained, ‘Hey, this is what we do. I'm not sure what another alternative method to go about doing that it.’ (*Internal Partner*)

Further descriptions of internal partnership facilitators and challenges are detailed in **Section 3.3.4.1**.

Sworn leadership. Respondents whose VS program was directly supervised by a sworn officer felt that this structure was appropriate for the purpose and goals of the program in its current format. As one respondent explained:

“[LE-VS specialist] will basically run everything by me on a daily basis. That is to ease up the [leadership's] role. And then, of course, when there's an issue I can't tackle, we will go to [leadership]. It started like that primarily because [LEV] was a brand-new initiative. We hadn't had anything like that here, and it was really grant driven, so it made sense to do that.” (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists typically had regularly scheduled meetings with their sworn supervisor, which was beneficial, as one person conveyed:

“[We] try to meet monthly. I would like to continue that. And part of that was for the grant because I wanted to go over where I was, what was happening, and make game plans for what was coming up and just let them see everything that I am doing.... If I have a low month and I'm working with 20 victims, that doesn't really show everything I'm doing. So that was part of that. And guidance and it's just been really helpful... I may be the only person that gets to have that monthly sit-down face-to-face for at least 30 minutes with the command staff. And I love it. I love that they were open to it.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Although LE-VS specialists said they felt comfortable bringing their concerns and needs to their sworn leadership, their LE internal partners recognized that LE-VS specialists routinely had to do much of their own problem solving, as they had the best understanding of their role. One LE internal partner noted:

“I almost feel like [LE-VS specialist] had to figure out a lot of stuff as she was going along. And that's challenging and being a civilian employee and having to deal with

[sworn leadership] and stuff and trying to figure stuff out... Because if we're not advocating for her, she's not going to be well known." (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists noted that while this supervisory structure generally worked for their VS program, they sometimes needed more professional support. As one LE-VS specialist conveyed, "It was a little bit challenging in the beginning because they didn't know how to supervise me and just, you know, you're the expert. But I still need, I need assistance and understanding." (*LE-VS Specialist*) This was particularly true when the VS program was new or placed within a unit that previously had no victim services experience. Although sworn supervisors and other LE internal partners clearly understood the benefit of victim services, there were VS programs that did not feel as integrated or part of the unit. For example:

"But what tends to happen, I feel like in law enforcement, this is just my experience with this job. Victim services is like this unit that I think they know we're important. But at the same time, we're just kind of like the stepchild almost in a lot of ways. And so, I think that sometimes they don't know what to do with us." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

An additional challenge noted by LE-VS specialists was turnover within the sworn supervisor position, which some linked to an increase in retirements and promotions within leadership positions broadly.

Professional leadership. VS programs that were directly supervised by professional leadership were evenly split between new and enhanced. Largely, the positive aspects of having a professional supervisor mirrored the need for more support voiced by LE-VS specialists overseen by sworn supervisors. One advocate talked about the benefit of being able to talk to their supervisor on "a tough day" if they heard language toward victims they found harmful: "It was nice to have that outlet, to have that moment, to be like, 'I'm mad. I just need a moment.'... It's something that I can go back and talk to them about, but I need to just vent for a moment." (*LE-VS Specialist*) An LE internal partner acknowledged that getting "supervision from someone here who also is only focused on the victim's services side...could be refreshing to them and very helpful versus going to someone law enforcement-based," but also noted "I would feel a little isolated." (*Internal Partner*) Some respondents similarly conveyed that a sworn supervisor may be able to better facilitate relationship building and culture change within the agency. One advocate shared:

"I think from the leadership up or just going through the chain of command, just not forgetting about us. I think we, as victim services, being embedded or being present in the police department is such an importance because they don't forget that we're there... And so, I think being able to have that support from our leadership [above our professional supervisor], whether it's the captain or deputy chief, to influence whoever they supervised to understand that we're still here, I think would be very important to accept us as law enforcement advocates, not that we are like a nonprofit." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Program growth and modification. Respondents consistently voiced hopes that their VS programs would grow and acknowledged that accompanying changes to their organizational and supervisory structure would be helpful. Many agreed that LE-VS specialists having a

professional supervisor, or someone with victim services experience, is advantageous as they are often better equipped to provide professional support and advocate for things like pay equity or work boundaries. As one LE-VS specialist shared:

“[Sworn supervisor] is not a victim advocate and he's the first one to say it. Like, I go to him and I'm like, 'All right, so here's my case scenario. What do I do?' Like, when you just need to talk it through. And he's like, '[LE-VS specialist], I trust your decision.' I'm like, 'No, [sworn supervisor], I need somebody else's [opinion].' You know what I mean? Like, I need to talk it through. And he's never worked with the victim advocate until I started here.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

One LE-VS specialist had “mixed feelings” because they felt supported by their sworn supervisor and wanted to remain where they are but granted that “as we grow and get bigger, [we] will need [an LE-VS supervisor].” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE internal partners were in favor of increasing access to LE-VS specialists to more areas of the department (e.g., public information office) as their VS program grows. However, some expressed concerns about how best to provide supervision in this scenario. Some were unsure if LE-VS specialists would have enough support with only a professional supervisor. Others noted that a splintered approach, where LE-VS specialists report to different supervisors across the agency, may result in inconsistent support, particularly if buy-in to the VS program had not yet been achieved across the agency. Overall, respondents’ perspectives revealed little consensus about how best to structure a VS program within an agency. This is understandable as there are many variables to consider, including agency resources and needs that often must be prioritized in program design.

3.3.1.2 VS Program Hiring

Most of the VS programs are embedded in local- or state-level LEAs and must adhere to local or state government hiring processes. As such, hiring practices across the sites were fairly uniform. The approach that sites took to develop their hiring and selection process varied, depending on whether their program was new or enhanced. For enhanced programs, existing LE-VS specialists typically guided the hiring process, contributing valuable experience and access to professional networks to promote the position. Professional personnel and supervisors with experience running similar programs (i.e., providing services to victims or other vulnerable populations) also were an asset during the hiring process, as they understood the needed skills and qualifications for an advocate. For new programs that did not have someone with victim or other supportive services experience, sworn personnel led hiring. Although some acknowledged that it would have been helpful to have more knowledge about the position, no major challenges were reported.

A common hiring challenge across all sites was the need to go through the local (city, county, state) government process, which involved significant limitations. For example, salary ceilings and job titles driven by government-defined job classifications that do not adequately capture the work of LE-VS specialists. As one LE-VS supervisor explained:

“I’m trying to get a job classification and a proper pay scale in place for [LE-VS specialists] because right now, they’re titled Program Coordinators and they fall under this job classification that, I mean, they are way underpaid for what they do and everything that they’ve taken on.” (*Internal Partner*)

Additionally, job classifications in some locations prevented a hierarchal or multilayered program structure because a supervisory or senior-level position did not officially exist. This restricts important opportunities for promotion and professional growth. In one enhanced program, an experienced LE-VS specialist was performing leadership (e.g., program design) and supervisory (e.g., personnel oversight) duties. However, the local government job classifications did not allow for her to be classified or paid at a supervisory or even senior level.

Furthermore, some respondents reported a need for improved dissemination of job postings. One person explained how outreach became their responsibility:

“This is where we would have to be a little bit more creative in making sure that we’re doing outreach for applicants... That people are aware of it because a lot of people weren’t aware. I mean, our HR just posts it on the website and doesn’t do any outreach about it.” (*Internal Partner*)

Government processes also often include pre-screening, which filters out many applications that LE and LE-VS specialist never see and may include qualified candidates. Unfortunately, the people pre-screening applications are often far removed from the LEA and do not have the needed experience to identify the most qualified candidates. For example, one supervisor shared:

“The city’s hiring process trying to get through that, it’s a nightmare. In this last opening that we had the [local government] sent over four applicants. Two of them had no experience and two came from the inmate world. This has been a consistent pattern—they keep getting either unqualified folks or qualified folks who keep being called and saying “Oh, that’s not what I thought this was.” (*Internal Partner*)

One LE-VS supervisor mitigated this by providing training and guidance to the screeners to help them better identify qualified candidates. Importantly, this approach will only work if government personnel are receptive. Although most LE-VS specialists felt they had agency and leadership support and could attest to their advocacy for the VS program, for some this was not enough. Regrettably, these rigid processes and local government’s reluctance to prioritize needed changes or engage have negatively impacted VS program growth.

Other hiring challenges that the sites faced included extended hiring freezes and program implementation occurring during the COVID-19 pandemic, which delayed hiring for many and affected staff retention. Multiple sites experienced turnover in the LEV-funded advocate position. Respondents attributed this to a few factors, including COVID-19 challenges, salary restrictions, lack of promotion opportunities, unqualified candidates being selected during the screening process, or the individual not fitting the role or the agency. The latter two again highlighted the need for VS programs to do their own recruitment rather than rely on job postings. Respondents

emphasized the importance of getting the right person into the LE-VS specialist role. One external partner reflected:

“In a perfect world, we want people to come in with a broad base of knowledge and experience... How do you prepare people for [this work]? And if you don't come from an experience where you have some of that, it's going to take you years. Or you're going to go out and do something else.” (*External Partner*)

3.3.1.3 Knowledge, Skills, Experience Needs

When asked what knowledge, skills, and experience are important for an LE-VS specialist, respondents' descriptions overwhelmingly pointed to personality or personal skills as essential for a successful hire. The majority of respondents noted that both law enforcement and victims needed to trust the LE-VS specialist. Across respondent types, qualities like compassion, patience, and empathy (putting yourself in other people's shoes) were highlighted as vital to work successfully with victims and law enforcement. In one LE-VS specialist's description, we also see an emphasis on use of trauma-informed principles (e.g., meeting people where they are, understanding signs of trauma):

“Compassion is a huge thing if you don't have it in compassion that you're looking at the wrong field. You know, you're dealing with people crying on a daily basis. You need to understand how to listen to what they're saying and try and meet them where they are, because not everyone's going to like. Not everyone takes trauma the same way and is going to respond to you the same way. So you have to be flexible. You have to be able to work with a lot of different types of people, both coworkers and victims. So you have to adapt to that” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Several respondents also cited something similar to “being able to work in step with law enforcement and understand the dynamics,” as one LE internal partner said. Another said “tough skin” is important to develop relationships with law enforcement, and further characterized this as “being able to take everything with a little bit of a grain of salt” and navigating different viewpoints and “the kind of personalities that [officers] have.” (*Internal Partner*) Another LE internal partner and an LE-VS specialist, respectively, further illuminated:

“I would say, in our organization, an ability to deal with, you know, the nature of police work. And some of the unique circumstances. And I'll be frank with you, some of the dark humor that we employ here, someone who's not going to get offended and recognizes that, you know, sometimes some of the dark humor is just a coping mechanism... Somebody you can joke with and it's just, you know, you see them in the break room and you can interact with that person. They understand our culture here in the organization and our sense of humor. And that's that goes a long way.” (*Internal Partner*)

“Especially in a law enforcement-based victim services, you know, you're dealing with police officers. So that's a different type of people that you're dealing with. It might be kind of what you're looking for as an advocate, but you're kind of looking at different things when you're applying to be an officer. So, I think mainly, you know, being able to

connect with different types of people, maybe people who share different perspectives from yourself.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Other related qualities and skills that were highlighted included being resolute in your advocacy, being determined, and being proactive. For example, LE internal partners described the importance of being “a self-starter, very motivated and willing just to think outside the box.” These qualities help LE-VS specialists when they need to advocate for their role and to achieve their program’s goals. One LE supervisor noted that this does not necessarily mean being extroverted as an LE-VS specialist that they described as introverted “was very effective... She could walk into a place and...there was this calm that you can’t teach to nobody. But also, I think if somebody was heated up, I mean, she could actually ask questions and...it would just change the mood.” (*Internal Partner*)

Experience providing advocacy and the practices and skills that embody it are critical for LE-VS specialists, including knowledge about trauma and its effects. This helps LE-VS specialists “work both directly with the detectives, with law enforcement and the victims.” (*External Partner*) Another key skill for LE-VS specialists is having a deep understanding about the criminal legal process, particularly from initial contact (e.g., call for service, arrest) through court resolution. Better understanding of the case process is an often-cited need by victims. However, it was noted that a lack of knowledge about the criminal legal system was not an insurmountable issue, as this could be learned on the job.

3.3.1.4 VS Program Policy Development

Documenting VS program policies or protocols helps to formalize and standardize processes. New and established programs benefit from policy and protocol development whether that entails starting from the beginning to create new policy or reviewing and refining current policies. Unsurprisingly, enhanced VS programs were more likely to have formal policies or operations manuals. LE-VS specialists in these programs noted that their policies required amending regularly due to the nature of their evolving field. For new programs, LE-VS specialists were often tasked with policy development, and not all felt equipped to do so. Additionally, development was often slow and would occur in an ad hoc manner because advocates had little time for a planned, deliberate process. One LE-VS specialist described their experience and explained how the internal approval process became a barrier:

“I started and there was no policy or procedure for victim services. And then I literally started, and my [supervisor] said, ‘Hey, you know what? Your first day, you just do what you do. I’m going to get with you on Wednesday.’... And then about a year and a half in, I was like, ‘Hey, we have no policy or procedure on what I do. This is what I’ve done. Do any of you like and.’ And so, then we wrote policy and...it had to go up the chain. It went to [personnel 1] and then he retired...So then [personnel 2] came in and I said,...‘Look at that. It’s been kind of stagnant.’...And then he was quickly promoted. And so, then you just keep starting over.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Even so, advocates recognized the importance of formalized policies as exemplified by one LE-VS specialist’s experience managing after-hours calls. Initially, officers would contact her directly for assistance; however, the volume became unwieldy, and they developed a protocol

for officers to contact the on-call supervisor who would decide if it was necessary to engage the victim advocate. Another new LE-VS specialist, who had developed some policies, reflected on the need for documented protocols:

“I mean, thank goodness these [protocols] were done, but I keep a lot of it up here [in my mind]. I'm not as good as getting it down here [on paper]. And [LE internal partner's] amazing with getting it down here. And so, she would always come back to me like, 'Is it written? Because if it's not written, it doesn't exist.' So, I think just, I could do better and making sure every single thing is written down.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

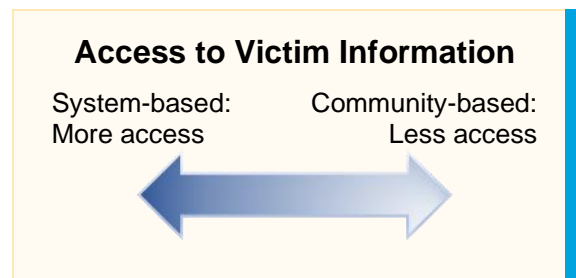
LE internal partners often expressed uncertainty about the existence of VS program policies, although some were able to confirm policies, for example, “as to when [LE-VS specialists] would come out and how they would come out and those type of things.” Many believed they likely had policies but did not necessarily see the need for them, especially if they were co-located or if LE-VS specialists were automatically assigned to cases. However, LE-VS specialists believe that formal policies are beneficial because they clearly define their role and parameters for LE internal partners and encourage and likely increase VS program utilization.

3.3.1.5 Ethical Considerations

Victim Confidentiality Considerations

Victim confidentiality, or the degree to which victims could expect information they disclosed to their advocates to stay between them and the advocate, is a common consideration for system-based victim advocacy. LEV sites varied in how they approached victim confidentiality between internal units within their LEA and between their VS program and external agencies and organizations.

Confidentiality between VSPs and internal agency units. Agency practices around confidentiality of victim-disclosed information exists on a spectrum of more to less access by sworn personnel, with most agencies on the “more access” end. Most LE-VS specialists acknowledged that working in a police department meant their victims did not have true confidentiality. One LE-VS specialist explained, “Well, in the police department, we don't have any confidentiality... So, we let [the victim] know that, like, right away that, like, whatever victim tells us, the police can know.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) A supervisor further illustrated, “We have to tell, you know, [law enforcement] anything that's going to affect their case... What the [law enforcement] does or does not do with that information is on them. But, you know, we would have to pass that information along.” (*Internal Partner*)



Victim confidentiality is more complex when LE-VS specialists are officially employed by a community-based organization. Community-based advocacy employs different standards around confidentiality, falling on the “less access” end of the spectrum. One community-based LE-VS supervisor described how she and the LEA developed a norm over time around protecting disclosure of victims' information:

“And it could be just that we've all been doing this together for so long in victim services, like they're fully aware of our feelings and our responses to subpoenas or anything when it comes to victims. It's like, if a victim doesn't want their information shared, we would just about go to jail to not share it. And that's just the, that's the standard that's been set for years and years here by me and [the LEA unit].” (*External Partner*)

Differences in confidentiality practices between LE-VS and community-based advocates. As noted, community-based advocacy has much stricter confidentiality practices. Community-based advocates rarely—with few exceptions such as mandatory reporting—share with law enforcement what victims disclose to them.

“We have no responsibility to report anything to anybody, unless it's involving a child obviously. We make that report to CPS. And so, one of the challenges has come up that sometimes [LEA] officers get involved in cases in which victims have not asked them to be involved. And I know that [LEA], we've had some discussions around this because they don't agree that they shouldn't be involved in all those cases. There's reasons, again, why victims don't involve [LEA], especially in domestic violence. Again, our philosophy here is that victims know best what they need. And sometimes if LEA or an LEA representative gets involved, it can heighten the risk of homicide.” (*External Partner*)

Several LE-VS personnel who previously worked in community-based organizations also explained this distinction firsthand. One person described how she had to adjust her practices once she began working in the LEA:

“I think that coming from victim services background, I was really private and really tight with all victim information. Like, was coming from nonprofit and not *able* to legally share any information. I came in with that. And it's a very different world here and we're held to a different standard. And by me being so super protective, it made it more difficult for me to build the rapport with the officers because they don't want to just give you information and not get anything back.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Methods of information sharing. Agencies varied in the degree to which information about or disclosed by victims is shared between VS programs and other investigative units, and the methods by which this information is shared. Information sharing could occur through file sharing, proactive informing, documentation, and organizational norms and expectations around information sharing. File sharing includes whether other agency personnel have access to victim advocacy files and notes or if access to that information is accessible only by VS program staff. Often, LE internal partners were unsure if they could access VS program notes but indicated they did not see a need for access. Again, LE-VS personnel employed by a community agency had different practices. One advocate respondent described how victim advocacy files were locked in her office and sworn staff did not have access to them:

“And the actual files, the paper files were in my office at [LEA] and they were locked. So that was something we made clear to law enforcement that like my files are not your files. If a victim wants to work with me and not talk to you, that's allowed... [LEA] was very receptive to that.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Respondents also mentioned how victim information was shared via proactive informing, where the advocate proactively informs LE internal partners about new case information that is disclosed by a victim during services or advocacy. One advocate described the steps she would take if a victim gave her information relevant to a case:

“I would immediately let the officers know because I don't want to keep any secrets. I don't want any of that. I want to give it over to the officers. So, if [victims] have new information and they haven't told me, I will say, ‘Hey, let me give you the officer's number. You can speak with them directly.’ If they just kind of spill it out, I'm like, ‘Hey, I will relay this information to the officer. Here's their contact information. You can also contact them.’” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

An advocate in a different agency described a similar process, including notifying the case investigator as soon as possible about relevant case information provided by a victim.

Some LE-VS specialists would limit or encourage information sharing via their documentation practices, including what information is included in which case notes (VS vs. investigation case notes) and the degree of detail included in those notes. An LE-VS specialist and an LE internal partner described how they kept certain information separate between case files:

LE internal partner: And as far as confidentiality, that follows the same protocol that anything we do here, we don't release anything even through Right-to-Know laws. All that has to do with an ongoing criminal investigation or mental health or any kind of HIPAA violation, date of birth, Social Security numbers. Any of that stuff is closely restricted.

LE-VS specialist: As a matter of fact, we document it separately. So, their involvement in the actual incident is the officer stating, ‘we've referred victim to the services.’ That's it. And then [LE-VS specialists] have a separate report with all their contact, and that goes nowhere.

LE internal partner: Yeah, it doesn't get co-mingled into the regular case.”

Confidentiality practices were not necessarily uniform across all dimensions: In any given agency, there could be file sharing but not information sharing or vice versa. In one site, for example, an LE-VS specialist shared that although “no one outside of the victim assistance unit” could access her victim advocacy notes, she would inform an officer of relevant case information shared by a victim:

“I'm only ever going to share something with the detective if I think it's really important to the case, and I'm going to tell my client that. I'm going to say like, ‘Hey, I actually think that's really relevant, and I really want to let the detective know. Are you cool with me telling him or would you like to email them or call them?’ And they're always fine with it... I may, if I'm very concerned for safety, go to the detective. But I'm also going to be saying to the client, ‘I'm very concerned for your safety.’” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

A few respondents discussed information sharing between an LE-VS specialist and external community-based advocate when both were supporting the same victim. The practice included securing written releases from the victim to allow this information sharing.

Victim Confidentiality Policies and Practices

Informing victims about confidentiality. Advocates discussed how they inform victims of their LEA's confidentiality practices, particularly that they may not have confidentiality over information they disclose to the advocate. They also may ask for written notice that the victim understands this information. A common theme illuminated by respondents was transparency and wanting to ensure that victims understand what is or is not shared. As one supervisor summarized:

"We start out at the very first like introduction, talking about kind of the role of victim services and that because we work for the law enforcement agency, anything that they tell us, we have to disclose to the [officer]. And there's been multiple times where—and they reiterate that like during the relationship just because sometimes people forget—where I know for a fact that [other advocate]'s hung up on people and then called them back and said, "I want to remind you, anything that you are about to tell me, I have to pass along. So just keep this in mind." Because sometimes you can tell when somebody is kind of gearing up to drop a bomb... So, it's just kind of that continual reminder of what our role is and what our rules are." (*Internal Partner*)

This advocate noted how, despite not being a confidential source, she explained her documentation practices so that the victim could make decisions about what information to share:

"I'm just upfront with them, that I'm not really a confidential source, that I tried to document as minimally as I can. For instance, I offered these resources to explain that to them. Like I have to document that I offered these resources to you, but they don't have to document whether you chose to use them or not. And they don't even need to know that information. So I just try to be really upfront with them because, again, I think that they need to know so that they can make the choice also on how much to share and how much to utilize me if they're not as comfortable. And then just let them know that I work for a police department. I'm not a police officer." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists also explained to victims the confidentiality differences between their advocacy versus a community-based provider's. One LE-VS specialist described a situation where the victim still disclosed information relevant for a case despite the advocate repeatedly informing her that the information was not confidential:

"We make sure that they understand the difference between [LE-VS specialist's] confidentiality level and [community-based provider's]. They have privilege. We don't. And there's a consent form that they sign. So, they sign away basically knowing that anything you tell me can be used in this DA case. We had a situation that we had told her multiple, multiple, multiple times and she came in and she ended up telling [LE-VS specialist] where her abuser was, like his address, like, "Oh, he's staying over here." Well, he had multiple warrants for [aggravated] assault and all of that. And she said,

"But don't tell anybody, I don't want to get him caught." But [LE-VS specialist] had to remind her, 'Remember, remember what you signed. I work for law enforcement, and he has active warrants for very dangerous offenses. So, the information you just gave me is going to have to be turned over.' So sometimes we have to remind them of that."
(LE-VS Specialist)

LE-VS specialists also described how they may inform victims of other options for advocacy, such as community-based advocacy, for those who may not be comfortable with the lack of full confidentiality. One person explained:

"It's just a balancing act because we don't want to shut them down, but we just want to make sure that they know, hey, you know, if you want to have a completely, like, confidential private discussion with an advocate, then maybe like a community-based advocate would be better. And we could get we can help connect you with somebody."
(LE-VS Specialist)

Protecting against subpoenas. Another key topic around confidentiality practices was how to protect victim information and advocates from subpoenas and discovery during criminal cases. This information, if subpoenaed, could harm the criminal case in various ways. Respondents discussed their documentation and notetaking practices to prevent disclosure of harmful information if subpoenaed. "Harmful" information meant information provided by the victim that could be portrayed as contradictory, harm their credibility, or bias an adjudicator against them. Respondents described how these considerations informed how LE-VS specialists document victim-provided information:

"So, we were always taught...to not put anything harmful in [case documentation]. So, I wouldn't put a lot of information, like, '[Name 1] said [Name 2] sexually assaulted her this night, this time.' I would say like, '[Name 1] and I discussed an incident that happened over the weekend with her boyfriend, [Name 2]. He was ultimately arrested. These were his charges'... So, I would not do so specific just because I know that they're in court cases and that the abuser could always ask for those files as part of the court process. And I didn't want anything harmful being in those... They would have to subpoena it. But because they're on the court process, the lawyer could say, 'I want to see what those records are because that could be pertinent to our case'... Just like they use counseling files, any of those sort of things. I just, I wanted to err on the side of caution because I would never want to be the reason why something went down."
(LE-VS Specialist)

"So, I mean, the biggest thing I think was getting across don't over document, but document enough that you are protecting the victim and yourself because if these records were subpoenaed...we don't want to out them on something that has nothing to do with this, that they had an affair and it had nothing to do with the case. So that's what I mean by don't over document. Because the victims will tend to just share, instead of just about the case, and those kind of things cannot be documented. So, there's that kind of nuance."
(Internal Partner)

There were also safety considerations when it came to keeping notes about victim advocacy and case management, such as information about the victim's location and other facets of safety planning:

“But if she says that she has moved to Florida to be with family, I'm not going to write, 'she's in Florida. This is where she's at, this is the organization I gave her in Florida.' I'll say, 'victim plans to move out of state, gave information for local agencies,' that type of thing so that that's protected as well. And then I try to just really talk in generals, I'll put 'did some safety planning.' I won't put on there specifically the services.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Challenges Between LE-VS Advocacy and Community-Based Advocacy

LE-VS and community-based advocacy addresses different niches and victims' needs, including providing different levels of confidentiality or serving specific populations, such as victims who do not want to report to law enforcement. Both LE-VS and community-based advocate respondents discussed how the two types of advocacy could simultaneously complement each other while also potentially stepping on each other's toes. This was particularly true as many community-based providers had existed longer than the often-new LEV-funded VS programs:

“For many years, I mean, our agency has, we're coming up on our 50th anniversary. So, like, we were doing it without having it so. I think that's why when it first got introduced, it was like “whoa, wait a minute, we're like the victims services in the county.” Well, let's hold off. Let's see what they're going to do. I mean, I don't see them coming in and be like, “Oh, we're taking over your territory,” you know? It's not that. But I think that's where it is, you know, as this is working through, making sure that, you know, we know each other's roles. And obviously the main goal at the end is to support the victims. It's not about battle, tit for tat, you know, or whatnot, but it's about the victims.” (*External Partner*)

There were also tensions between the two types of advocates, particularly when they duplicated efforts and had overlapping roles that could be confusing to victims. Both LE-VS and community-based advocates shared this sentiment. For example:

“I still think there needs to be some clarity of roles and boundaries on where do they stop and start, where do we stop and start? We are mandated by the state to provide certain services, and if victim services is overlapping that, at their—Because they feel like they need to be. Not, again, not—if the victim has requested that, that's a whole new ballgame. Absolutely. Victims know best what they need. And so, if they have requested that [LEA] be involved, then great, they should be involved. But if they have not requested that and [LEA] detectives or victim services get involved, then that's an overlap of services that doesn't need to happen. One, because it gets very overwhelming and confusing for the victims.” (*External Partner*)

There were also tensions in the direction of information sharing. Because community-based providers had stricter confidentiality practices, one LE-VS specialist expressed frustration that while community-based providers expected LE-VS specialists to share information with them,

community-based providers did not automatically share information back but rather asked the victim for permission to do so first.

Ability to speak up. One LE-VS specialist compared how community-based advocates versus LE-based advocates speak up and critique their organizations:

“I think in community-based, when you see something that you don't agree with, you tend to really speak up for it. I think in law enforcement, you have to find your openings to have a conversation about it... For the most part, you have to be more gentle in the conversation to make the change, instead of ordering, because it's all type As. Type As don't like to be told what to do, especially by someone who's not their command staff. And you have to get the buy-in... But if they sense that they're being judged or that you think they're doing something wrong or anything, then it...builds those walls more.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Victim Grievances and Complaints

Respondents in both LEV sites and external organizations described the processes by which a victim could complain about law enforcement officers and LE-VS specialists. Complaints about law enforcement officers could be made by the victim directly through a formal process within the agency, such as contacting a supervisor to make a complaint or making a complaint to an internal affairs unit. Several respondents across agencies referenced these types of formal complaint processes. For example:

“So internal affairs would be the place that we would always refer them. And we do do that sometimes... Internal affairs is kind of the last resort. But that's where the formal documentation. What we usually do is we try to get the sergeant to call the victim back first to explain if they're wanting to complain on a detective. So, the sergeant first calls, okay, and tries to handle that. Then if the victim calls us back and says 'that didn't work, that was horrible. He wasn't responsive,' all of that, we can certainly offer the lieutenant. But 9 times out of 10 we're gonna just say, "You have a right to make a complaint with internal affairs." We're not saying one way or the other whether or not we agree with it or not, but they have a right to do it. So internal affairs. And then they'll circle back around to the chain of command that a complaint was filed.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Victim advocates themselves played a role in relaying complaints, informing the victim of their reporting options, finding out more information about the situation, or relaying complaints directly to a supervisor to seek advice on how to move forward.

External advocates or other practitioners commonly reported reaching out to LE-VS specialists or supervisors if a client had a complaint about any system-based actors:

“We'd have to, you know, take the information from the person who had this experience. And we can always let them know, like, what would you like us to do with this? Is this something that you would like us to address? Do you feel like it's not something that you want brought up, but it's more of a way for you to really share this discomfort that this interaction caused? And if it happens that, you know, it's something

that we feel needs to be kind of looked into, then we'll connect with either the, if it was an officer, the officer or detective, or we can go to their supervisor...depending on when it happened and the nature or how quickly we need to address it. So, we can do it via email, by meeting with them, by giving them a phone call. But I think that depending on the situation that happened, if it needs to be addressed, needs to be addressed. Because if it doesn't, then chances are it's going to continue to happen.”
(External Partner)

They also referred victims to formal complaint structures within the agency:

“Sometimes if they say, ‘Hey, I don’t appreciate how the officer talked to me” or “I don’t appreciate the officer said X, Y, Z,’ we say, you know, ‘Unfortunately we’re a different department. I do welcome you to call their supervisor, their sergeant, and express to them sort of your interaction with this particular officer.’ Because it’s really an internal department thing. So, we just send them back and ask them to speak to their supervisor. But we do assure them that we’re going to do the best we can to help them moving forward.” *(External Partner)*

The kinds of complaints or grievances that victims may have include treatment they received from system actors, service they received, and outcomes of engaging with system actors or processes. Complaints over treatment from officers and advocates included behaviors ranging from rudeness to disrespect to not being believed and a lack of trauma-informed practices. At the extreme end, this could also mean violations of civil rights. One system-based respondent described various types of misconduct that could result in a victim’s complaint, noting they existed on a spectrum of severity:

“So, if a victim alleged some sort of misconduct in a—It’s a broad spectrum, right? So is it that they simply, they called the officer, and they felt the officer cut them short or wasn’t really engaged in the conversation, you know, that’s a professional conversation. You know like, what was going on. Maybe they were busy, maybe they were distracted, having a bad day. You know, call them back. Reengage. Make sure that they’re heard. Up to, you know, an officer did something truly inappropriate or potentially criminal, whatever that could be. If someone calls one of the supervisors or myself and alleges that they were unhappy with the conduct of one of my officers, usually the first thing I request is that they put it in writing.” *(External Partner)*

Sometimes victims have complaints about the service they received, such as responsiveness and communication from an officer. Advocates reported this being a common complaint victims had in general, and one they sought to fix in their roles as LE-VS specialists:

“But there does come a time where you’re working with the victim and you’re like, hey, this detective is not getting back to them. This detective said that they were going to write a warrant two months ago, and that’s the last information in the system and it’s still not there. This person is still bothering them. They’re not getting the care and attention that they need for themselves.” *(LE-VS Specialist)*

Victims also may be unsatisfied with their case outcome, such as a suspect not being arrested or a case not being prosecuted. However, LE-VS specialists may not be able to

address this type of complaint outright. One advocate explained how they try to help victims achieve justice in other ways if they are disappointed about the prosecution dropping charges:

“The time does come where there's—sometimes there's just differences in opinion. So, the range and scope of what we do, it just makes sense for us to just believe the victims. It doesn't matter to us. I'm not doing the investigation. If he or she tells me this happened, I act as if this has happened. But that's not the same when it comes to a detective. Their job is to investigate and get to the truth. And so, you can imagine sometimes when you have different priorities, there's going to be conflict. Most of the time we just defer to the detective because that's just kind of how it works, and we try to make sure that that victim is getting taken care of with resources outside of the police department. We always tell them, especially when it comes to things like sexual assault, it is so hard to get a sexual assault case from here to a conviction. And so, we let them know like, ‘Hey, your healing does not have to be contingent upon this person being arrested and serving time.’” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Immigration Status Concerns

Noncitizens may have concerns over reporting crimes to law enforcement due to fears over legal status. LE-VS specialists may advise people that anyone can call the police or file a report but be transparent that there is no guarantee there will be no consequences, e.g., if a deportation order exists. LE-VS specialists would also reinforce that there are community-based advocates to particularly serve noncitizens.

“I'm saying when Trump came into office and there was a lot of immigration concerns and deportation concerns, it really did enhance a lot of the fears that victims had. And the police department had to come out with a statement saying that you will not be investigated or reported for just calling and making a police report. So, we had to assure our victims that that was not going to happen.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

One community-based advocate differentiated her organization's work from that of an LE-VS specialist based on the risk to victims without legal status:

“One of the issues that came up in some of these meetings was, okay, so you go into a room with an individual. They're being treated for their assault. And you just happened to find out through conversation or something that you overhear that they're here illegally. What do you do with that? And we were told [by LE-VS specialists], as well as other people who are on the Zoom call, ‘Well, we have to report that.’ You do understand the ramifications of reporting that, right?” (*External Partner*)

3.3.2 Victim Identification and Outreach

The sites took varied approaches to identify people to whom to reach out to offer their assistance. The most frequent way reported by LE-VS specialists was through review of police reports, which would be followed with an attempt to contact identified victims, ideally within 48–72 hours. Most LE-VS specialists completed a daily scan of police reports—sometimes with a customized flag for the LE-VS specialists—or received a referral directly from officers: “We may come in and we'll have an email from patrol, from the sergeant or from the deputy saying, Hey, can you follow up with this lady? She was really upset last night.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) Some LE-

VS specialists occasionally attended officers' briefings or roll calls as another avenue to potentially identify victims.

That advocates proactively reach out to victims first was described as particularly helpful by several sworn interviewees. Police often complete their response to a call and immediately move on to the next, and they may not recognize when someone may benefit from victim services or think about connecting them to an LE-VS specialist. More than reaching out to victims on police referral, the self-direction of LE-VS specialists regarding clients was particularly appreciated. Officers in LEV sites knew about the advocates and frequently referred victims to them, but LE-VS specialists also found clients on their own via daily reports and often reached back out to command staff with questions. In the words of one commander: "That [attention] is super valuable." (*Internal Partner*) Multiple LE internal partners had high praise for their LE-VS specialists and their scope of influence. One site in particular had several internal partners describe their advocate as "always available, always helpful" and stated that "it became pretty clear that this is not a burden for us. This is a resource for us internally and a great resource for people outside the organization." (*Internal Partner*)

This proactive outreach to potential victims was especially helpful in sites where past victim services had been deemed inadequate, whether because of responding officers or other official policy. In one site, an officer informed a victim who did not want her partner arrested that this would happen anyway if she called again. Despite the lack of an official victim in police paperwork, the LE-VS specialist contacted the victim and provided resources. The ability to safety plan with the victim regardless of continued law enforcement involvement is extremely valuable. Likewise, an LE-VS supervisor made sure that a particular type of victim outreach was codified in the LEA for the first time:

"I had a domestic violence incident, [aggravated] assault, and I called the victim multiple times, no answer. And finally, the phone just went busy. So later on, I found out that she had been killed by her abuser that morning... When I go back and look in the database, I saw that within a month's time period there were four reports and four letters, the same damn letters, being sent to that victim. Do you think that that was helping?... Not one attempt to get with the detectives to try to kind of circle the wagons and figure out what's going on here. So, that really affected me because I'm like, I'm sitting here calling this girl and she's dead. You know? And so, I vowed that when I became supervisor, that would be one of the first things that I changed, is the phone outreach is mandatory now for a majority of these domestic violence victims." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists were not often called directly to the scene of a crime. However, when that did happen, the on-site activity was focused on crisis management. Once the immediate issue had been resolved to the extent possible, the LE-VS specialist served these victims as they would any other: with long-term direction to resources and communications between the victim and sworn officers. This is in part because an individual experiencing acute trauma often is not able to process the amount of information necessary to help them. In addition, advocates responding to a call for service had the same amount of information as a responding officer from an initial 911 call, which was frequently not enough to gauge the safety or severity of the event.

Police reports written after the fact and reviewed during the following days usually had more information for the advocates to assess before an outreach call.

In one site, when LE-VS specialists were requested after their normal work hours, commanding officers evaluated the request to ensure that the necessary resources could not instead come from an officer already on the scene. Only after it became clear that the advocate was needed immediately did the command staff call them, and even then the advocate was not required to come. They could decline and would contact the victim the next day instead.

However, when their physical presence was necessary, the LE-VS specialists were universally willing to come on scene. One LE-VS specialist fought for more in-person calls, especially for human trafficking victims, where the immediacy of resources provided can make a big difference: “We just had a big conversation about really making a push for [immediate response] on human trafficking cases... I think that’s the highest need right now because we’re losing these individuals because [officers are] talking to them and then they’re gone. So, trying to get them more resources faster.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) Another was comfortable going to meet victims wherever they were, including in jail or in their houses, as long as she felt physically safe.

It was a particular advantage to officers that the LE-VS specialists are not police and are not collecting police evidence or otherwise directly helping with an investigation. Indeed, sworn respondents considered this highly valuable, as sometimes victims would ask an LE-VS specialist to move a case along in a way those victims would not feel comfortable asking of an officer.

“[The LE-VS specialists] may come over and say, ‘Hey, where is this case?’ They’ll be an advocate for the victim. My detectives, we have 8,000 cases a year... So, sometimes you’re caught up in the case you just were assigned. And the [LE-VS specialists] remind you, ‘Hey, there’s a next step to this and the victim is asking about it.’ Maybe the victim’s scared to reach out to law enforcement. So, they can be an advocate for that.” (*Internal Partner*)

Front desk staff at one LEA also praised the way their LE-VS specialists supported victims during their initial contact after walking in, helping victims reach officers comfortably. This person explained that after entering the building: “It’s really the advocates that take care of [victims] after that. That build that trust with them, build that foundation, and then take care of them throughout the rest of the process.” (*Internal Partner*)

Victims of crime who were not contacted immediately after a crisis were often still introduced to LE-VS specialists during a follow-up interview with officers, who valued this accompaniment. One internal partner said he would have the LE-VS specialist present with him “at the beginning of an interview, or I’ll have her meet with a victim prior to the interview... [I say], before I speak to you, I would like you to speak to our on-site victim advocate.” (*Internal Partner*) This interview accompaniment was common across sites, especially for victims of sexual trauma, and was lauded by the sworn partners. In the words of one internal partner:

“When you put two guys in a room with a 15-year-old girl, it's overly intimidating. So, our solution at the time [before LEV] was we called [an external advocacy organization]... And now, well, the benefit to us now is that [our LE-VS specialists] can do that role... They're literally here in the building.” (*Internal Partner*)

Many respondents valued the way that LEV integrated LE-VS specialists into the police department, rather than having to refer victims to an external agency. Having LE-VS specialists within the LEA was helpful: when anyone, victim or not, called these advocates, they were not “funneled through” the police department before they reached the LE-VS specialists. As a part of the LEA, they could be reached directly and without interruption by a victim or third-party reporter of a crime.

In addition, having an advocate, especially a female advocate, physically present when a crime victim arrives at the LEA was frequently cited as an enormous advantage. One internal partner said:

“[I] had [the female LE-VS specialist] reach out to victim[s]...who are unwilling to participate, whom I know have been victimized. Everything points to it. They just won't say they are... Because sometimes me being a male, it can help me and sometimes it can...work against me... I think that she plays a very, very integral role because she can help bridge that gap. And even female officers or detectives, it's not the same as a victim advocate, a civilian employee.” (*Internal Partner*)

Some respondents talked about wanting LE-VS specialists available in more locations to assist people who walk into stations. One respondent said, “We can have one in each area station, right? So, if a victim walks in, we have somebody there to meet with them...my goal would be to have an advocate per crime type.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) Another site stationed LE-VS specialists variably between several LEAs; even though they were not permanently assigned to any one location, this allowed walk-ins across the regional area. In another site, trauma-informed front desk staff are the first point of contact for victims who walk in to report an incident. The staff supervisor described how they are an important “steppingstone” before victims are provided a warm handoff to LE-VS specialists and LE officers:

“[We are] specially trained on how to interview victims...how to do victim-centered interviewing...how to stay sort of objective but also appear compassionate, you know, to the victim and try to get as much information [as we can]... And we're kind of a steppingstone like, here, you're going to sit with us. You made it to the police department. We're going to go through this nasty stuff that you have to tell us, but we're kind of prepping you for the next step.” (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists occasionally provided minimal assistance and referred victims to other organizations or programs for capacity reasons. At the time of the interview, one site had recently seen an influx of cases beyond the advocates' capacity, and although they still provided short-term resources for everyone, they could not take on all referred individuals as clients. That LE-VS supervisor stated:

“I look at how many advocates do I have and how many people are in the community... How many people in community can we actually serve with the capacity we currently have?... This is the first time we [turned victims down] and it was really hard... All of our collaborative partners have become so dependent on us that they were referring people to us [beyond our capacity].” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Regional cultures and ethnicities varied within the LEV sites, which can affect identification and outreach strategies. One interviewee described her county as mostly white and English-speaking; that county had a few Spanish-speaking employees and an interpretation service for other language needs, but otherwise operated fully in English and was not focused on cultural influences. In contrast, several LEV communities were ethnically and culturally diverse, and their staff were attuned to these cultures. One site recognized the need for a Spanish-speaking LE-VS specialist to improve their outreach efforts to their largely Hispanic community. Officers in another jurisdiction reported a heavy stigma against talking about domestic violence and intimate partner violence among its target population. This frequently co-occurred with general distrust of police and fears of immigration enforcement. Officers struggled to promote cultural trust in law enforcement for these reasons, and although their LE-VS specialist received positive feedback from clients, the cultural taboo on speaking about this type of victimization kept word of her services from spreading within the community. Another site worked with local tribal authorities when a child victim was involved in a case, which required consideration for tribal and local law.

LEV sites worked with a diverse set of victims, each presenting their own set of challenges. In one site, low police trust meant advocates often only connected with victims after they had experienced a medical emergency, which meant they saw a lot of people in crisis. For example, one site’s external partner frequently assisted LGBTQ+ men and pregnant women with acute medical needs. Human trafficking victims are also frequently leery of trusting law enforcement or LE-VS specialists and tend to be very distressed. Only after several interactions with an LE-VS specialist did these individuals tend to accept help. Funding-related requirements could also influence the type of victims assisted (e.g., a grant focused on gun-related violence) and add complexity to victim outreach. One site with differently funded advocates “had to really kind of figure out how we do things clean and proper [between the two grants]... It’s kind of been tricky because we do a lot of work together... But we just, we’ve kept it separate.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) The majority of LE-VS specialists did not work with minors; in several jurisdictions, cases involving minors are automatically assigned to an external organization (e.g., child advocacy center). Another issue that can occur is someone not identifying as a victim of crime. One LE-VS specialist described an attempt to engage someone in services:

“I’m not going to say [this woman is] a sex trafficking victim because even though I asked her several times, she would not identify with me. So, I couldn’t provide her those resources because she wasn’t identifying as a sex trafficking victim.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

At the time of these interviews, word of mouth had not yet spread among the LEV communities to the extent that LE-VS specialists would have liked: multiple victims interviewed stated that they wished there was more information publicized about the program. One stated,

“I’m so clueless about any of these benefits: I could have services, I have no idea...I’m confused and amazed at the same time [by the services offered].” (*Victim*) Another victim said of the help provided, “This is something I’ve never really heard of as far as like, you know, hey, we help the victims. We do all this great stuff... It made everything so much easier.” (*Victim*)

3.3.3 Service Provision through Direct Assistance and Referral

A primary LEV goal is to improve LEAs’ response to victims through the provision of needed assistance and resources. This section describes how the LEV sites approached victims’ rights, including informing victims of them and helping them to exercise them. It also details how LE-VS specialists provided services to victims directly and through referral.

3.3.3.1 Victims’ Rights

Distribution of victims’ rights materials. All agencies distributed victims’ rights materials via physical copies. These materials typically included references to Marsy’s Law, other victims’ rights resources (e.g., Bill of Rights), and the LEV program, although some agencies also included information on local resources (e.g., domestic violence agencies, sexual assault resource centers).

Some agencies or individuals within an agency reported distributing additional, specialized material for specific crime types (e.g., sexual assault) or scenarios (e.g., anonymous reporting, next of kin to homicide victims):

“So, we have victims bill of rights. We actually, we are part of the entity that hands that out to our clients, right. So, we have a blue brochure that goes through all of the rights, who the next of kin is with homicide victims. The special rights for sexual assault victims. It’s really important for us to make sure our victims know about the policies surrounding, allowing them to... Like they have a right to be informed as long as it doesn’t hinder the case investigation, and that’s probably the one that is most useful for us. I mean, obviously, the protections for sexual assault victims we use a lot. “Use” meaning...they’re most useful for our clients.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

At most agencies, distribution of victims’ rights material was described as a communal responsibility with most individuals partaking in some capacity. For example, patrol officers would provide a victims’ rights pamphlet at the time of the initial report, and then both investigators and LE-VS specialists would offer it again during their subsequent interactions. However, select officers suggested that LE-VS specialists were the sole party responsible for ensuring victims knew their rights: “No, we don’t do that... [the LE-VS specialists] take care of all that. And then once the charges get issued, the prosecutor’s office will take care of that with their victim advocates.” (*Internal Partner*)

Regardless of who was responsible for distributing victims’ rights information, most agencies described how they documented that victims’ rights materials were provided. This was typically a checkbox on their standard paperwork.

Follow-up on victims' rights. Although all agencies described providing physical material on victims' rights, many agencies provided additional support or follow-up throughout victims' engagement with the criminal legal process. More specifically, all agencies described how select individuals (primarily LE-VS specialists) would discuss victims' rights with the victim. Typically, LE-VS specialists were primarily responsible for discussing rights with victims. At some agencies, law enforcement noted that they can or sometimes will initiate these conversations but that LE-VS specialists are the appropriate outlet for follow-up questions. At other agencies, sworn personnel seemed unfamiliar with victims' rights, with some believing they applied only to specific types of crime. For example, "I don't do a lot of domestic stuff, and I feel like [victims' rights are] really important when it comes to folks in domestic situations." (*Internal Partner*) These same agencies noted that LE-VS specialists were the individuals responsible for distributing physical material on victims' rights as well.

External partners also described how they follow-up on victims' rights, including providing written material and information about available services. As one external partner described, "On my fliers, I have victims' rights just so they understand what they're entitled to. Who's allowed to be at meetings, what information they're allowed to have, allowed to request things like that." (*External Partner*) The purpose of these follow-up conversations was to ensure victims understood the specific rights that applied to them.

When having conversations about victims' rights, interviewees underscored the need to communicate in a trauma-informed manner, including reiterating information in different ways because of the nature of trauma.

"I find a lot of times, too, that people who are in immediate crisis aren't hearing what you're saying. So, you know, I will hand them [their rights] and then we'll follow up, you know, when things have settled and I'll remind them of their rights, you know, what their options are and things like that." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Interviewed victims also underscored this point with one stating, "[LE-VS specialist was] actually very good. Went through it very slowly. I needed a lot of repeating. It was an emotional time, for sure." (*Victim*)

Interviewees noted also that it is particularly important to follow-up on victims' rights as it pertains to court proceedings (e.g., the right to be notified of hearings or a defendant's release, court dates, and handling depositions and evidential hearings). Victims' rights become more nuanced at this stage in the process and are typically implemented long after an initial report. Thus, respondents highlighted how they need to be revisited throughout the process.

Supporting victims in exercising their rights. Interviewees described the variety of ways LE-VS specialists supported victims in exercising their rights or connecting them with services. Examples included answering questions on victims' rights, supporting victim testimony, advocating on the victims' behalf with internal staff, supporting victims filling out paperwork, using pseudonyms, or connecting victims with community organizations. One LE-VS specialist shared an example:

“As one of their rights, they can have me as a support system with them when they are testifying... Especially like our younger kiddos that have had to testify, I'll go with them in court and be their support system, hold their hand, or whatever that they need during that time.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

At some agencies, other internal partners described supporting victims in exercising their rights by providing warm handoffs to the LE-VS specialists. For example:

“I give the packet to them and I say... I go right to the victim services unit and I give them their business card and I'm like, this is [LE-VS specialists]. Like we have this victim services unit and I straight up tell them, like, we're one of only very few departments that have it and they're fantastic. I talk them up all the time, which they deserve it, you know.” (*Internal Partner*)

Interviewees also noted how public information officers supported victims in exercising their rights, by connecting with LE-VS specialists before publishing information about the victim or the crime committed against them.

“We like to get clear to the family. And if we talk directly with the family that we'll do that. But if [the LE-VS specialist] is going to make contact with them, could you let them know, here's what we plan to do. We're going to wait. If they don't want the name released, we won't do it.” (*Internal Partner*)

Training related to victims' rights. Multiple respondents referenced how all law enforcement personnel are trained on victims' rights as new recruits. At some agencies, individuals from other practice areas are included in providing this training, including LE-VS specialists or the district attorney's office. One LE-VS supervisor described how the training they provide includes victims' rights (among other topics):

“We do three days of training for every recruit class and our training manual actually has our power points and stuff in there...but it's basic crime victims' rights. It's basic information about crime victims' compensation, which is a program that they have access to as long as they cooperate with the investigation.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

At least one sworn officer noted that it took him time to understand that victims' rights apply to all victims, not just those who have experienced domestic violence: “It wasn't until we integrated that training where I was like, oh, wow, all victims, you know, have rights and understanding of that aspect of it. I think it's more publicized with domestics and stuff like that.” (*Internal Partner*) Other law enforcement staff expressed similar confusion about victims' rights during our interview. This is critical as victims' understanding of their rights may be limited by their responding officers' personal knowledge.

Language access. All interviewed agencies acknowledged efforts related to language access, which is a critical component of victims' rights. More specifically, all agencies described access to a language line. These language lines could be used by advocates and law enforcement personnel.

“I have been using the language line so many times over the past month. So, we have a contract with the language line, which is an interpreter service. So, anybody who does not speak English, they will have an interpreter. I think they will cover most languages because I have had some that I have never heard of before and they have had a translator for me. So, it's a call in and so then you'll be on a three-way call with them. So, the interpreter will introduce the victim to you and say that I'm the interpreter. And then I tell them as like, you just call me—I have all my victim's numbers, I have 5000 contacts on my phone, so I have their numbers all saved—so I'm like, just call me, say your name, and I will call back with an interpreter.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Interviewees also described how some victims' rights materials were translated into relevant languages, although multiple agencies suggested additional languages would be helpful.

“If we could translate our brochures into multiple languages, because right now we have them in English and Spanish, and then we try to throw in a brochure that is in a different language if we've gotten it from another agency. But if we could translate our brochures into, I'm sure there's a place you can send them, into more languages. I think that that would just be super helpful because it does have their victims' rights information, and we're relying on them to have a connection that speaks English that can translate for them and that's not ideal.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some agencies discussed how they would rely on particular staff (e.g., bilingual officers) for language access. This was typically available only for select languages. One program noted that they had more than one bilingual LE-VS specialist, which supported their ability to effectively provide services. Others noted that they wished they had more bilingual staff to provide this kind of support. One LE-VS specialist recognized: “If I was bilingual or we had another victim services person who is bilingual, it would be extremely beneficial.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some individuals noted using less traditional methods, like Google Translate or working with a victim's child, to facilitate language access as needed. One LE-VS specialist noted a downside to using translation applications: “We'll use the Google translator on our phone quite a bit... But even in the Google translator, it doesn't make sense half the time.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Multiple agencies noted their efforts to be victim-centered in their provision of language access, even if that meant adjusting their approach in real time.

“We had an incident that was, I think, pre-COVID, where someone who uses ASL [American Sign Language] walked into a division to make a report and demanded that she have an interpreter available to her. And at the time, our language access did not include ASL. And so, we worked with records to remedy that, so that moving forward, everyone in the department has access to that.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Strengths and areas for growth. For many of the agencies, partners shared positive feedback about the agency's efforts to support victims' rights. For example, internal and external partners stated that agencies do a good job providing and communicating rights to crime victims. One external partner said, “I couldn't think of a different way or a better way that we could do it, honestly.” (*External Partner*)

Victims also shared very positive feedback about LE-VS specialists' support in learning about and exercising their rights. For example, victims described how they felt their concerns around reporting and confidentiality were addressed, they were followed up with appropriately, and they were spoken to about complex legal topics in ways they could understand and without being patronized.

"She definitely made me feel like I had a voice. So just the resources and letting me know, like there's things that I don't have to talk about. There's things that can be anonymous when we're talking about it. What happens in one room doesn't get carried into another one." (*Victim*)

One victim noted that she felt as though she was taken more seriously because she understood her rights as a result of working with the LE-VS specialist:

"I'm very appreciative how now I'm actually being taken serious. Just, I mean it took months to build evidence, but I think, you know, now I don't feel alone. I feel like I got a support team with me...they're helping me, they're listening to me." (*Victim*)

Another victim shared how they believed they received better services and support because of the support of their LE-VS specialist:

"Without her, I don't think that I would have had half the services...from victim witness. I kept getting pushed around from victim witness. They said, oh they didn't have my case, they couldn't do it. And so, with her, I think she helped me get those services that were needed." (*Victim*)

Although respondents provided no specific complaints about the ways agencies implement victims' rights, some individuals from within and outside the organization offered suggestions for how agencies can better support victims in exercising their rights. For example, one individual shared that they wished victims knew their rights even before getting connected with an LE-VS specialist (i.e., it impacted their interest in reporting). They suggested that this could be encouraged by community education or victims automatically receiving their rights upon contacting 911. One victim noted, "I wish I would have actually known these things way before." (*Victim*) Another individual noted that LE-VS specialists could provide even further support on understanding court proceedings earlier in and throughout the process:

"I still think it's helpful to know the court process as well. People really don't understand it and I think that's the biggest hurdle when trying to provide victims their rights, that they don't understand the court process." (*External Partner*)

Finally, one respondent suggested that consistent documentation of the distribution and discussion of victims' rights material would be helpful:

"We write our notes or we'll write like a short snippet and then we click on a bunch of services. And so, one of the services is victims' rights... So, you can pull it. It's not going to be 100% accurate because sometimes you forget to click the button. But we try and at least do it to the best of our ability." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

3.3.3.2 Victim Services and Assistance

Following victim identification, LE-VS specialists would assess a victim's needs to determine how best to assist them. This individualized focus and tailored assistance is beneficial to victims because it centers their needs, and to LE-VS specialists because, as one said, "I can give you a thousand resources, but I need to know what's most important to you right now. Right here and right now." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Initial assessment typically focused on immediate needs and supports to maintain the victim's engagement. LE-VS specialists would also explain their role and inform the victim of their rights. One LE-VS supervisor described their assessment process, which was informed by a review of the case police report:

"When we first read the police report, we kind of make some assessments, right? We like see, okay, it looks like maybe they have a housing need, maybe they need food or there's things that maybe the police report. So, we start with that. But we have that just there. We start a conversation just asking the victim what they need. So, tell me more about like what you need. How could I support you? We don't actually start a conversation talking about criminal justice. We talk about what our role is, and we talk about their rights and we talk about the lack of confidentiality. But we don't start talking about like the crime itself. We don't start talking about the arrest. None of that. We actually start just saying, I'm here to support you. Like, tell me about what you might need next." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists proceeded in helping the victim address their identified needs, whether directly or through referral to an external organization. Primarily, crisis response and immediate needs were addressed first, and plans were made for longer-term supports. Just as victims' needs vary significantly, so do the services they are provided. This highlights the importance of using a tailored approach to assess for and provide victim services, to ensure victims are getting what they need as opposed to a pre-determined set of services that may not be helpful. The following sampling of quotes exemplifies the breadth of assistance that victims may need in the aftermath of a crime:

"It's really rewarding to be able to...if you get carjacked and you don't have your keys, but you don't have \$350 to buy a new key fob, like we have [local program] and we can go with you and get you that key." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

"[External partner] provides branding tattoo removals. So, I've had survivors where their face is completely branded on the side with the traffickers' name and [external partner] is able to remove that for our survivor. So, it's a different unique service that I know no one else here locally in [City] can offer." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

"What really meant the most me is doing a follow up. So, I ended up getting like a lease violation, even though the incident did not happen at my complex. They heard about it, and they issued me a lease violation, which was—I don't want to call it illegal, but they shouldn't have done that. So, [LE-VS specialist] was trying to follow up with my apartment complex and let them know, like confirm this is not where it happened,

that this is where it happened, that if you guys need any information to call me back.”
(Victim)

LE-VS specialists generally described their victim assistance role as helping victims understand and navigate the criminal legal system process, providing short-term services, and connecting them to community organizations and resources for any needed long-term supports. One LE-VS specialist summarized:

“As the crime victim advocate, I provide advocacy services to victims of domestic violence and criminal sexual conduct. I connect them with resources both in the community as well as other individuals within our organization so that they can get the information that they need to make decisions and feel supported throughout the criminal justice system.” *(LE-VS Specialist)*

The reliance on external resources to address long-term needs highlights the importance of building out a robust resource network (described further in **Section 3.3.4.2**). Our interviews with LE-VS specialists and external partners revealed that in many sites, system-based and community-based advocates and other service providers coordinate closely to ensure a holistic offering of services. This holistic, coordinated approach to victim assistance is critical to ensuring victims have what they need at any point on their path to healing.

Direct service provision. As noted, the services provided directly by LE-VS specialists tend to meet immediate needs and are short in duration. **Exhibit 14** lists the service types that were most commonly provided by LE-VS specialists directly, as reported across LEV sites in the web survey.

Exhibit 14. Top 10 Services Provided Directly by LE-VS Specialists Across LEV Sites

Service Type	N	Frequency	%
General information about crime and victimization, prevention, or risk reduction	66	61	92.4
Notification of legal rights	67	61	91.0
Case status update (not tied to court proceedings)	67	59	88.1
Immediate/emergency or long-term safety planning	67	57	85.1
Notification of case events or proceedings	67	54	80.6
Law enforcement interview accompaniment/advocacy	66	53	80.3
Assistance in filing for victim compensation, including filing and appealing claims	65	52	80.0
On-scene coordinated response	67	51	76.1
Case management	67	49	73.1
Assistance in filing for a restraining, protection, or no contact order	66	48	72.7

Data source: LEV Evaluation Web Survey (N=68)

Exhibit 15 lists the services that Phase 2 site respondents reported most often as being provided directly by LE-VS specialists. As shown, these align closely with the direct services that were reported across LEV sites in the web survey. Importantly, this list is not exhaustive, but captures a comprehensive picture of the services that victims often receive from LE-VS specialists. The range of services each VS program could provide depended on funding and resource availability. One LE-VS supervisor emphasized the importance of having access to these resources:

“The financial resources that we've been able to secure through our operations budget has been huge because we're able to meet, like, basic, tangible needs... It's one thing to be able to provide a compassionate response. It's another thing to be able to meet someone's need that have been readily identified.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Exhibit 15. Direct Services Commonly Provided by LE-VS Specialists

Services Commonly Provided per Respondents	Example Quotes Illustrating Service Provision
Crisis response (e.g., on scene, at the hospital)	--
Safety planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “She let me know, like you can call up there and let them know to put your name down to notify you when he's released... That's important information. That can really save somebody's life. So that was nice to know.” (<i>Victim</i>)
Basic needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency financial assistance (e.g., gift cards) • Food • Transportation • Clothing, jackets, blankets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In my mind, we are the crash course of the right now emergency, like, let's get you that hotel room, let's get you a tank of gas. We can get you to your mom's house... So, we're kind of doing that, starting those services.” (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>)
General support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I think feeling that I could call someone non-judgmental that could empathize with me, who made me feel that I wasn't alone in this process.” (<i>Victim</i>) • “[She was] very concerned about, you know, my well-being, if I was okay. And so, she checked on me periodically... [She] made herself available if I needed to talk or seek any type of...assistance for my well-being.” (<i>Victim</i>)

(continued)

Exhibit 15. Direct Services Commonly Provided by LE-VS Specialists (continued)

Services Commonly Provided per Respondents	Example Quotes Illustrating Service Provision
<p>Assistance during the criminal legal process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Navigating the system ● Informing and implementing victims' rights ● Liaising between system actors (e.g., detectives, district attorney's office) ● Obtaining case records and property return ● Being present for victim interviews, line ups, injury photographs ● Preparing for court ● Attending court hearings ● Preparing victim impact statements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "A lot of the clients or the individuals that she speaks with aren't from here or have no familiarity with how the criminal justice process works, and so she's able to explain from beginning to end what they can expect." (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>) ● "Sometimes they, like victims on cases, will call me to see if there's any updates on the case because they haven't heard from the detective. So, I will get in touch with the detective because I tell the victim upfront, like sometimes the detectives are hard to get a hold of." (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>) ● "Victims have said, I prefer a female to be present. I'm not interested in, you know, some guy taking photos of my injuries. And so, we've been able to respond with a CSU tech and to be the sort of present person for that." (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>) ● "She sat with me during the process of the officer asking me questions, me replaying it. She was very supportive when she noticed that I was having a hard time speaking. She removed me from the room for a little bit to help me calm down, breathing exercises." (<i>Victim</i>) ● "I let her know I moved. Is there anything that I need to do after I move? And she said...go to the courthouse and update your address for the restraining order. I wouldn't have known that, you know." (<i>Victim</i>)
<p>Assistance filing for restraining, protection, or no contact orders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "She provided for an alternate mailbox for him not to find me because he was trying to find me. Even through social media... She helped me file the [protection order] violation... She's very valuable." (<i>Victim</i>)
<p>Assistance filing for victim compensation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "They do so much. But my understanding of victim advocates specific to the [LEA] is they help them fill out all the paperwork, especially victims of crime paperwork. They explain that to them." (<i>External Partner</i>)
<p>Housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emergency housing (e.g., motel/hotel placement, shelter referral) ● Relocation assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Housing's such a big issue. And so, having the hotel assistance program where, it's short term but it can at least...buy them some time to formulate a plan. And then the relocation assistance program we have where we are able to do up to \$1,000 for a flight, a debt to a landlord, first month's rent. Like per victim... Not everybody has those resources to give." (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>) ● "We may be offering shelter resources and, or sometimes I even called shelters on their behalf to find space. Knowing when to call the police, prepare things that they may need to take with them in case they can't go back home. So, creating a list together of things that they may need to take with them before they leave." (<i>LE-VS Specialist</i>)
<p>Family support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "They listen in between the lines to see if there's any other resources the family might need and do their best to accommodate them. I know that there's a lot of times they might need travel or food or just, you know, those daily things that might be barriers... They can't come to terms with the assault of what happened because their daily needs aren't being met." (<i>External Partner</i>)

Most communication between LE-VS specialists and victims occurs via phone or text. However, in-person meetings do take place, as needed, in locations like the LEA, the victim’s residence, or a neutral location like a restaurant or coffee shop. When determining where to meet, an LE-VS specialist considers the following: the victim’s access to transportation or technology (e.g., a phone), the victim’s willingness to go to the LEA or have LE personnel come to their home, and the LE-VS specialist’s own safety. As one LE-VS specialist explained:

“We really stress safety is a priority for the people within our unit because we're not sworn, we don't carry. And so, we generally will assess a home visit request. [LE-VS specialists] will not go to someone's home without telling someone that they're going. And we will say, you know, what are the circumstances? Is the suspect in custody? Are there safety concerns? Is there a detective who can go with you if the safety risk is very low, we require another specialist to go with them.” (LE-VS Specialist)

Linkage to services. Many services that victims need can best be addressed by external partners: for example, long-term housing or behavioral health supports. As such, the LE-VS specialists have built and expanded their resource networks to increase the availability of and accessibility to services in the community. **Exhibit 16** lists the service types that victims most commonly received through an external partner via linkage from LE-VS specialists as reported in the web survey. Again, these closely mirror the referral services that were most often reported by Phase 2 site respondents, including basic needs; housing assistance; behavioral health, mental health, and substance use services; and civil legal aid (e.g., immigration services, restraining orders).

Exhibit 16. Top 10 Services Provided Through External Partners Across LEV Sites

Service Type	N	Frequency	%
Mental health services	66	52	78.8
Substance abuse services	67	51	76.1
Civil legal services	65	39	60.0
Assistance applying for public benefits assistance	65	36	55.4
Culturally or ethnically specific services	65	35	53.8
Services for deaf and hard of hearing	65	33	50.8
Health advocacy services	67	33	49.3
Restitution claim and/or collection assistance	64	32	50.0
Forensic interviews	66	32	48.5
Language services	67	30	44.8

Data source: LEV Evaluation Web Survey (N=68)

Referrals most often originate from LE-VS specialists to external partners, although there are times when the reverse occurs: for example, if a victim working with an external organization decides to report an incident, needs assistance with the victim compensation process, or needs support filing a protection order or violation.

Service duration and closeout. The duration for victim engagement varied considerably depending on victims' needs, crime type experienced, and victim communication. These factors also influenced how often LE-VS specialists engaged with victims. Most indicated that they were always available to victims or families if they reached out for support.

"Oh, [service duration is] led by them. Some people say after one call, 'I'm good. I got your number. I'll call you if I need you.' Some victims I work with for years... It just really depends. And it also depends on the crime... Like our homicides, those are not closing out after one phone call." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Victims appreciated knowing this support was there, as conveyed by one respondent:

"It's been over a year, almost two years...and I'm afraid to do stuff. And I, I share this with [LE-VS specialist]. You know, he took a lot away from me, and I know she's trying to help me, show that I can get that back... This one thing, [this] incident happened to me, and now I don't even want to go anywhere, you know, do anything. And so much of me has been taken away from my self-esteem, from everything. And she's kind of, trying to tell me that I can do so much more with my life, not let him control it and have faith in the system that, you know, that they're doing everything they can for me."
(*Victim*)

Predominately, VS programs did not have a formal closeout process unless a case had moved to court and was assigned to a victim advocate in the prosecutor's office. Otherwise, an approach used by several VS programs is to remove a victim from their contact list if they are unable to reach them (e.g., after 3 months or 4 unreturned calls). However, their case is not considered closed, and the victim can reengage at any time.

"There's no hard and fast rule of closing a case like, let's say you have consistent communication and then you attempt to contact that person a few times and they are not responsive or receptive any longer, like it is appropriate to close that case. If the case goes to court, it's appropriate to close that case. That doesn't mean you can't reopen it if they call, and that happens. But like you don't need to leave it open and keep trying if someone's not in a position to be receptive right now." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Most VS programs had a close-out process for documentation purposes, but as noted, they kept the option open for victims to reach out and access services. As one LE-VS specialist explained, "Of course, we can close the case, but they can come back around. It's not a 'closed' case. It's really just administrative in the system so that my reports don't show it as open." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Victim-centered and Trauma-informed Response

Responding to and supporting victims using victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches was recognized by most respondents as critical to successful victim outcomes. LE-VS specialists emphasized the importance of training and understanding victimology to be trauma-informed. Many respondents, including external partners, noted that agencies were improving and believed this was supported by trainings (e.g., on trauma effects, victim services) provided by LE-VS specialists and external partners. These respondents indicated that the

trainings and integration of the LE-VS specialists were important catalysts to agency change. One LE-VS supervisor noted “that it is a kinder, gentler police department than it used to be 15 years ago,” and linked the general decrease in stigma related to mental health needs to their agency’s growing acceptance of trauma-informed principles: “[It’s] a different world now where mental health is definitely a concern for everybody, including police officers.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE internal partners highlighted the LE-VS specialists’ impact on improving processes and the agencies’ ability to meet victims’ needs. Several LE internal partners identified a change happening within their profession with regards to understanding that victims are experiencing trauma and, as an extension, are more willing to accept that victims need support. One LE internal partner shared:

“We are more aware [of] the trauma that [victims are] experiencing. We don't want to add to it. We want to get them out of it and help them move through it. That's a change, I think, in law enforcement across the board, de-escalating. The words we use matter. The tone we use matters. Not being derogatory to people, not using vulgar language to tell someone to cooperate when you could just give them a little bit of information and instruct them.” (*Internal Partner*)

Although there have been improvements, respondents also described the need to continue improving agency and officer trauma-informed and victim-centered practices, as noted by one respondent:

“[LE-VS specialist] will do some education with the whole dynamics of [victimization] or if they're saying they can't remember if they've been strangled, but yet maybe their timeline is off, [LE-VS specialist] will remind detectives that if you're strangled, sometimes you can have memory issues so that your timeline may not be in order or you might remember things later on. So, more education, I would say on understanding everything that goes into being a victim.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Service Challenges

One of the primary service provision challenges cited by respondents is the need for more LE-VS specialists. A lack of LE-VS specialists resulted in some service gaps like not being able to provide services on scene or after normal business hours. Although many respondents aspire to have their VS program provide this level of service, they understand that current staff cannot take on the additional workload.

Language accessibility was also highlighted as a challenge in providing victim services and maintaining engagement. Respondents identified addressing language barriers as an essential opportunity to increase equity in access to resources. VS programs that were able to provide language assistance realized the benefit of reaching victims and their communities and enhancing trust. One respondent reflected on the need for language assistance to ensure their community is served optimally:

“I know that in our community, too, it is, there is a great range of Spanish or monolingual Spanish speaking victim-survivors that live here. So, I don't know how that gap is bridged too. And especially when you add to that the cultural context of being

afraid of having anything to do with police. And that's something that is a really scary situation for a lot of people.” (*External Partner*)

Another central challenge is the lack of service availability in the community. This is largely driven by contextual factors and systemic issues that are outside of VS programs’ or external partners’ control. For example, homelessness rates and housing affordability have worsened across the U.S. (Bahney, 2023; Boschma, et al., 2023; Schaeffer, 2022), directly impacting victims’ ability to access affordable, long-term housing. Additionally, funding resources for victim services have decreased in recent years, leaving VS programs of all types with notably reduced capacity (National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, 2023; National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2021; OVC, 2023). Although many service areas have been impacted and are difficult to access, the most commonly cited were housing and behavioral health services. For example:

“It’s just ridiculously expensive to live here. And just seems like there’s more and more homeless[ness]... But just housing in general and like with domestic violence survivors, it’s hard like we have a couple of shelters but outside of that what is their next move to have another safe location to live? I mean, I’ve talked with the housing authority for a couple people who’ve worked with, and it’s just hard, long waitlist, waitlist so long that they’ve closed them.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

“Something that I really see that I think is a challenge [for providing services] is counseling support for lower socioeconomic status... It’s really lacking. I deal a lot with people with mental illness and some of them have had resources and some of them have not had any resources... And I mean, I really find that that’s pretty consistent, honestly, in the populations that we encounter a lot, like in missing persons, in homicide, and [with] violent crime victims and perpetrators of violent crime. Both sides of the fence.” (*Internal Partner*)

Sometimes, this results in “empty referrals,” which then requires the victim to reengage with the LE-VS specialist, as explained by one respondent:

“[If] we transition to a nonprofit, some of those are coming back... Because sometimes what happens is it seems like it’s an empty referral. Like we think a service is existing because this program had this before and then somehow, it’s no longer available, whether it’s funding or they don’t meet the requirements that we didn’t really understand, that sort of thing. So, we always tell people, like, if this doesn’t work, please come back to us.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some VS programs faced difficulties managing duplication of services, which created confusion for victims and frustrated LE-VS specialists and external partners, negatively affecting their relationships. Some respondents posited that the duplication could be linked to what one person called “turf wars,” but respondents largely believed it was due to siloed processes and lack of awareness of what each program or organization was doing.

Boundary setting is another challenge faced by LE-VS specialists. Some shared this explicitly, while others noted feeling an expectation to respond to victims in crisis outside of their work hours. Some of this is self-driven by their commitment to help victims, but others also felt they had to respond to calls to gain acceptance within the agency. This is difficult even when

compensation is provided for the additional hours, as that does not mitigate the impact on their work-life balance. This and other aspects of personnel wellness are described further in **Section 3.3.6.5**.

Service Strengths and Successes

Respondents highlighted that victims have better access to services and improved continuity of care with the support of LE-VS specialists. This is facilitated by the strength of LE-VS specialists' relationships with external partners and their ability to provide warm handoffs for referrals. Respondents also noted that helping victims to understand and navigate the criminal legal system is essential and that a strong relationship between LE-VS specialists and victim advocates at the prosecutor's office further supports continuity of care.

"I'd say the strengths are that we're able to provide better wraparound services. I mean, knowing what everyone else in the community does and having that good partnership, you're able to give them a call and say, 'I'm going to send this person to you, they need X, Y, and Z.' Or they can call me and do the same thing. And so that way, if we can't help, someone else can. So that way, they're getting all of the things they need from the beginning to the end." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

"I actually thought it was a really a seamless process, honestly. And [LE-VS specialist] always made sure, like, if you ever were confused or anything, you could always come back to me, and she could get me in contact with who I needed to be or where we were at. I always felt like I had an open door to go back or it was seamless. It was nice. [The prosecutor's victim advocate] did a really good job of sending out letters explaining like, this is the court hearing. This is the date, you've been subpoenaed." (*Victim*)

Respondents overwhelmingly felt that they were meeting victims' needs successfully and highlighted how service provision ultimately allows the victim to focus on themselves, healing, and their case, and therefore stay engaged in the process. Below, we highlight quotes across a variety of areas that illustrate some of the strengths and successes of the VS programs.

On proactive outreach:

"Nine times out of ten when we contact the victim on the phone...victims are always saying, thank you so much for following up. Thank you so much for reaching out and connecting." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

On directly connecting victims and families to services:

"We have heard positive response, definitely. And also, I think one of the things that makes [LE-VS specialist's] position special, too, is that she's able to kind of figure out the needs of the family and make that direct connection rather than having families or, you know, victims go out and look for things on their own." (*External Partner*)

On improved understanding of the criminal legal system:

“She kind of told me what to expect, you know, going forth, and the different dates of court hearings that would be scheduled. And she introduced me to [the prosecutor]. And so, she kind of corresponded between us, too, as far as the dates and the times... She corresponded with me constantly, either by text, phone and, or both, which was good... She stayed in contact to let me know what to expect.” (*Victim*)

On basic needs being met:

“An example is being on scene... Being out there with the family for hours and we were able to utilize gift cards to go get lunch for them because they weren't going to leave to do that. And so, we thought it was important that we give them some sustenance and, you know, that went really far for them. That made them feel like they mattered beyond the crime itself. And so, I think we do a really good job of just meeting basic needs.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some victim respondents believed that the VS program and LE-VS specialists had the potential to improve the community's view of the LEA. As one respondent shared:

“I think the more helpful and the more positive interactions that [people with negative views of police] can have—the public, the community—can have with the police department when they're at their most vulnerable, that really helps the victims see truly like what the police departments are there for is to serve and protect. So yeah, it's like a win-win.” (*Victim*)

3.3.4 Partnership and Network Development

For VS programs to be successful, partnerships and relationships must be fostered internally within the LEA and externally with other agencies and organizations in the community. These partnerships help to build awareness about the VS programs, ensure that victims have access to the internal and external resources that will support their healing and engagement in their case, and facilitate program sustainability.

3.3.4.1 LEV Partnerships within the Law Enforcement Agency

Collaboration with internal partners is an essential component to building and sustaining victim services within an LEA. In this section, we will describe how LE-VS specialists collaborated with internal partners and the challenges, facilitators, and benefits to internal collaboration.

Collaboration Between LE-VS Specialists and LEA Internal Partners

LE-VS specialists collaborate with a variety of internal partners within their LEAs. As shown in **Exhibit 17**, more than 50% of sites reported that their LE-VS specialists routinely work or collaborate with patrol, investigative, records, finance/grant management, and public information/media units.

Exhibit 17. Types of Internal Partners Collaborating with LE-VS Specialists

Internal Partner Type	Frequency	%
Patrol	54	79.4
Investigative	44	64.7
Records	43	63.2
Finance/grant management	39	57.4
Public information office/media	36	52.9
Crime prevention	30	44.1
Crime analysis	20	29.4
Property/evidence	19	27.9
Other	8	11.8

Data source: LEV Evaluation Web Survey (N=68)

How LE-VS specialists work with internal partners varies across and within sites. Many of the quotes presented in this section highlight how LE-VS specialists and LEA partners are working together. Some examples of more formalized collaboration include LE-VS specialists—

- Accompanying officers or responding to requests for on-scene assistance.
- Conducting home visits with officers.
- Responding to officer referrals for or offering to provide victim follow-up.
- Attending victim interviews.
- Providing training or education related to victim advocacy (e.g., dynamics of victimization, rights, services, trauma-informed principles).

One internal partner described how training provided by an LE-VS specialist supported widespread learning about victim services and trauma-informed policing:

“There's been training that [LE-VS specialist] has given that we've exposed our guys to, trauma-informed policing. We're getting ready to do another trauma-informed policing seminar where we're able to show them what these resources are and how they can truly take a different mindset to the victim with a trauma-informed thought process. Versus just walking in and being stoic and, 'Here's the information, ma'am, and here's the stuff, here's what you got to do, and here's who you have to call,' and then walk out the door. Nothing wrong with it, but it's very curt. It's very cold, it's factual, it's legal, right? But now we can go in, and...listen to what these people are saying. Take the time. Nobody—there's this misconception within law enforcement that an officer thinks when they go on a job, they have to get the job done quick so they're available for the next job. In all my years of doing this, in all the curriculums I've seen through all the years...there's no time limit. So, take the time to deal with this person. And mostly, people just want to be heard. You know, go with the 21st century policing model, you know, show the respect and listen. Just listen to what they say, and they're going to tell you what the problem is.” (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists may also work with internal partners in more informal ways or on specific projects. For example, one respondent described collaborating with an LE-VS specialist to develop a trauma-informed process to communicate with family members of homicide victims:

“I reached out to [LE-VS specialist] a few months ago because I had a project in mind. I have a lot of currency in custody from older homicides, and I don't want to keep it. Why should I keep it?... So, I told her, I have very little time to dedicate to this. I am totally open to revamping like a letter to the family. Like, I kind of gave her free reign and said, you know, these are the case numbers that I've identified. Work with investigations because, of course, the detective has to sign off on it, and then just loop me in for when we need to do the appointment and if you would like to be there.”
(Internal Partner)

The frequency with which collaboration occurs also varies, ranging from daily communication—“I speak with them literally every day about my cases. We're constantly bouncing stuff off of each other” *(Internal Partner)*—to communication that is less frequent or occurs on an as-needed basis.

Collaboration experiences. Overall, internal partners positively described their collaboration experiences with LE-VS specialists, using terms like “helpful,” “valued,” “great,” “a benefit,” “amazing,” and “excellent.” One respondent summed it up nicely: “I can't verbalize enough how important [LE-VS specialists] are to us. They do a wonderful job and yeah, it's definitely a huge plus for any police department, if they don't have it, to get it.” *(Internal Partner)* Other internal partners shared similar praise:

“[LE-VS specialist] works like that with everybody. I mean, like, that's why this department adores her, because she works that hard for everybody. And I think that's what makes the victim advocate world better. I think the vast majority of detectives who have worked with our victim advocates will see that benefit play out. I haven't heard otherwise. I get compliments constantly.” *(Internal Partner)*

“A lot of times I would just say, hey, can you work your magic? Like, I didn't know exactly how [LE-VS specialist] did what she did, but I trusted her a lot and she did a fantastic job...I had a lot of confidence in her after, you know, seeing some [victims] come down off the fence of being indecisive, and she would kind of do whatever she did. And I trusted [her].” *(Internal Partner)*

“I think [having LE-VS specialist is] a great benefit, again, with the amount of resources that she has and it's with us. It takes maybe an extra, what, minute or two out of my day? Just shoot her an email and let her know what's going on... It's send her an email, let her know the situation, and she's got it from here. It's super easy.” *(Internal Partner)*

Facilitators to Relationship Building

Respondents described several ways in which relationship building between LE-VS specialists and internal partners is supported.

Initial communication and leadership support. First, initial messaging about LE-VS specialists and victim services is critical, particularly coming from people in leadership positions. A message of unequivocal support demonstrates to personnel throughout the agency that victim services are valued. The following advice from a command staff exemplifies this and also highlights the importance of encouraging and supporting LE-VS specialists to connect with people throughout the agency, particularly at start-up:

“Really standing [your] ground to defend them when you first introduce them to law enforcement to understand, and getting your officers involved and having that open dialog and communication with them. Like, we had roll call meetings with [LE-VS specialist], she met with every single squad and every single officer when we first brought [LE-VS specialist] in...[I was] with her and I'm like, 'Hey guys, this is what it is, this is what the system is, this is the collaboration, this is how it's gonna work, this is what we're doing. Here's some paperwork, and I want to introduce [LE-VS specialist], and she's going to tell you what we're going to do.' But that's how it was, just kind of helping [LE-VS specialist] acclimate into law enforcement. I think that really helped us get that to where it is today, to now...You walk into her office any point in time of day, there's an officer in there talking to her about something. About a case or about a person—'Hey, what do you think about this? Hey, I just talked to this person, what are you thinking?' The detectives are in there and always communicating. So, it's been great to see.” (*Internal Partner*)

Another respondent explained how word of mouth and sharing positive experiences increases “exposure” to LE-VS specialists and interest in what they can do:

“Not everybody's been exposed to [LE-VS specialist or victim services]. So, I think those that have been directly exposed to it see the value. But once again, anytime something new happens, we need to get buy-in, right? And a lot of that comes from positivity—I think humans in general, we tend to lean towards the negative—but being positive, showing the value, and that's really done through action. You can shoot a video, you can say...all the right things. But until people actually see it work or you hear a victim say, you know, at court that this person was really helpful or impactful, you're not going to get the buy-in. So, it's got to be roll up your sleeves, hands-on engagement.” (*Internal Partner*)

Proximity of LE-VS specialists and LEA internal partners. One factor that was emphasized frequently as a facilitator was LE-VS specialists being co-located or in close proximity to internal partners. This allowed for “organic” collaboration and, as one person said, “ear hustling... She can listen to the conversations that are taking place and she can interject herself like, 'Oh yeah, I can do this,' or 'I heard this,' or 'Somebody called about this.' So that's helped out tremendously.” (*Internal Partner*) Other respondents further described the benefit of having LE-VS specialists co-located with internal partners:

“As far as having [LE-VS specialist] physically in this building, they have access to all the officers to build the relationships with them, so they get the referrals with the detectives they work with. They'll bounce cases off, right up and down this hall. All the expertise is here. So, that really helps serve the victim as well.” (*Internal Partner*)

“One of the successful components of what we got going on here is that they're actually embedded. They're just another team member in our group... The camaraderie between everybody just works. And that goes a long way... You guys are working together in tandem. I mean, it's, I think that's really been one of the most successful parts of this, is having them with the detectives day in and day out.” (*Internal Partner*)

Relatedly, many internal partners shared how frequent informal interaction, or “normal conversation” as one person put it, aids relationship and trust building and, ultimately, collaboration. As one internal partner stated:

“I sit next to her, so it's just casual conversation with everybody in the Detectives Bureau. So, I get to see her, you know, say hi...[we] just started talking, not about work stuff. And then, you know, obviously, that just makes it easier to contact her. ‘Hey, I got this victim. She wants to talk,’ or ‘Hey, I got this person, has a couple of questions, I'm not going to be in today. Would you mind?’ So, things like that. So, we just started, I guess, very organic... Even having her contact officers when she has questions about the victims, you know, ‘Hey, this isn't a good number’ or whatever. ‘Is this still a good address, because supposedly she doesn't live here?’ That's how I know she would follow up with other officers from what I've heard.” (*Internal Partner*)

Visibility and awareness of LE-VS specialists. Respondents strongly conveyed the need to maintain visibility and awareness of LE-VS specialists. Even if it is not feasible to co-locate LE-VS specialists with internal partners, respondents cited several methods to effectively raise awareness and visibility of LE-VS specialists, including consistent communications about victim services, initial and ongoing training or education, regular attendance by LE-VS specialists at briefings/roll call, and LE-VS specialists proactively reaching out to internal partners. As one internal partner shared:

“[The benefits of having a victim advocate here are] almost obvious. We have somebody on-site who, you know, not only we can refer cases to, that we interact with every day. Both the detectives who interact with our advocate all the time and our patrol and professional staff... Everybody knows [LE-VS specialist], and we're used to seeing her. She comes to our briefings. She's really involved. So, you get that personal connection... But having someone here in-house, who we know personally, who we can have hallway conversations with and say, ‘Hey, [LE-VS specialist], I'm dealing with this case where, you know, somebody was a victim of domestic violence. Can I send you that report?’ She says, ‘Absolutely.’ That's super valuable for us on a personal level.” (*Internal Partner*)

Interestingly, several of the people we spoke with who had good relationships with LE-VS specialists noted that *they* proactively reached out to the LE-VS specialists and asked about victim services. This demonstrates the need for and success of bidirectional efforts and

communication to form and strengthen relationships. When asked how they became familiar with an LE-VS specialist, one respondent explained:

"I'm a kind of different kind of person. So, I walked in [to LE-VS specialist's office] and said, 'What you do?' So, I just was like, 'Hey, how's it going? I'm [Name].' And so, I kind of went in and I was just kind of like, 'What do you do? What do you know about [services]... And [LE-VS specialist] told me about some sort of, oh, you know, there's counseling... And I was like, I didn't know about that one. That's not on my list. So, you know, it was great because I kind of was trying to figure out where do you fit?... So that's how I figured it out though, I just walked in and was like, 'Hey, what's going on?' Like, trying to get to know, you know, we have this new person working here, so, what do you do? Where are you from? What's your background?... I like to welcome people in because it's hard when you start a new job." (*Internal Partner*)

Communication is an asset. Many respondents noted that reliable communication and updates about assistance provided to victims was helpful. Several LE internal partners expressed disappointment that they often are unaware what happens with the victims they assist, as they are moving from one incident to the next. For many, LE-VS specialists became an avenue to be informed about victim updates, which they greatly appreciated.

"[LE-VS specialists are] are great at what they do. They're very thorough in their jobs. Like, I actually have a case today with [LE-VS specialist], and she's just done a phenomenal job at keeping me updated... So, it's nice to be able to go into the hearing with that background... They just both do a very, very good job. Like if I email them or call them or let them know like, 'Hey, I have a victim of this, can you follow up with them?' Like the response is right away. So, it's not like we go days without hearing from them, you know, like they're just, they're good at following up." (*Internal Partner*)

Driven by a common goal. Interest in collaborating was also facilitated by the recognition that LE-VS specialists and LE internal partners are "all working towards the same goal," as one respondent said. What one does is not at odds with the other, and in fact, they support each other. As one internal partner explained, "It's not an us-versus-them mentality. Everybody's on the same team and we can work collaboratively. As opposed to that, you fall over here, and I fall over here, and we try to make it work." (*Internal Partner*) When describing the strengths of their collaboration with LE-VS specialists, one respondent explained:

"I think the collaboration, and then the end goal, I think our focuses are the same, once the situation is resolved. Again, I'm going to go back to being able to sit down with them on the days that they come in and just bouncing stuff off the walls. There may be things that we didn't think of that they thought of, or things that they didn't think of that we thought of. But the end goal is, you know, we're both on the same page and we're moving forward in the same direction, which is huge." (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists also described relationship-building approaches they used that were successful. Several advocates acknowledged that having an extroverted personality is helpful—otherwise, pushing yourself out of your comfort zone is encouraged. The success of LE-based

victim services relies heavily on internal partnerships, so developing and strengthening them is crucial.

“I understand that in order to build a program, you got to do things that you don't always want to do. Naturally, I am not a social person...But I also know what it takes to grow a program. And I know sometimes I have to have these personal conversations that make me feel uncomfortable so people can understand what a new program is and the benefit. So yeah, I had conversations with 911 dispatchers. I had conversations with the lab, I've had conversations with [officers] and, you know, analysts who don't have a victim advocate yet. And a lot of them see the benefits. And, you know, just recently I had a conversation with someone who works in Crimes Against Children and it was, 'Oh my God, you would be so great in helping talk with these parents and these kids and wow, you would be a great resource.' And so just a lot of networking in order to, for those individuals who are not really touched...I've talked with records a lot about how frustrating it is for victims to submit FOIA requests and how long that takes and how that impacts, particularly a domestic violence victim who is trying to get out and get a personal protection order.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Benefits, Successes, and Facilitators

LEA internal partners shared their views on the benefits, successes, and facilitators of their relationship and collaboration with LE-VS specialists. Overwhelmingly, stakeholders view LE-based victim services as a benefit to their agency.

Benefits to victims. LEA internal partners described several ways in which LE-VS specialists and embedded victim services have benefitted their agency's victim response. Many pointed out the obvious benefit that victims are now getting resources and assistance that they otherwise would not:

“I would just say that we're here serving the community. We're trying to do our best to help keep the community safe. As detectives, we like solving crimes. We like finding people or catching people who don't think they're going to be caught, think they can get away with it. And so, we work hard to solve those crimes. And by having the victim services unit, it just further is another level of service and kind of takes it to another level, essentially, by just providing more resources and providing more attention and more care to all those things that need a little extra help and little, you know—victims need some extra time and some extra attention. And I think it just raises the level of service that people receive in the community.” (*Internal Partner*)

Internal partners also highlighted that their collaboration with LE-VS specialists has improved the way they respond to and assist victims. One partner described how working with LE-VS specialists was a reminder to expand their “tunnel vision” focused on the crime and consider victims' needs:

“[The victim] was discharged from the hospital, she came back that morning and I was still inside the house working the crime scene stuff. And then [LE-VS specialist] came out to me and said, 'Hey, [victim] would like her pair of shoes.' Because she didn't have any clothes. So, I found the pair of shoes she wants and gave it to her, and she

was so happy for that. It's just, such a small thing makes a world for her at that time. For the victim, talk to [LE-VS specialist], [LE-VS specialist] talk to me. Then make it all happen together. There's that missing link like I said earlier...I go back to the tunnel vision. We're back, we got to process the crime scene, we got to make sure that this guy goes away for a while, and not even thought about, hey, what does he or she need at this point?" (*Internal Partner*)

Some internal partners spoke about negative community perceptions of the LEA and how improving their response to victims can improve their relationship with their community. The trust and rapport that is built by consistently helping victims better understand the complex legal process, keeping them informed about their cases, and providing needed support can reverberate out to the wider community. An internal partner explained how their role at the front desk and the way they interact with victims is related to public perception:

"Most of the people that come to the station never meet an officer. They only meet us. That's it. Front desk and possibly an advocate depending on the crime. So, we're trying to put that perception out there to the public that when you come to the police station, you're heard, we take the time for you. It doesn't matter what you're reporting. We're here for you. And you may never actually meet a police officer, hopefully, if it's a crime against property for the most part, which is mostly what we deal with... We put that persona out there that we're caring, you know, we care about you at the police station. And it doesn't matter if we're civilian or sworn, you're going to get taken care of when you walk in. And a lot of that for the hardest victims, the ones that have been victims of a violent or intimate crime, the advocates are a huge part of that for us. The [front desk staff] I mean, we're the first ones that meet them, you know, we're the first ones that talk to them." (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists may also serve as a mechanism of accountability and improve victims' access to LE internal partners. One advocate stated:

"I think we provide a level of accountability that officers have not had. Not like we're their boss, but like, you can't just not answer the phone now if you don't want to deal with a difficult person. Because they're going to call us, and we are going to answer the phone and then we're going to get those answers. I mean, detectives are busy. I'm not trying to take anything away from them either. Like they're not just sitting at their desk. And they have a lot of cases that last a really long time and people calling. But I think we've kind of put them in a situation where they...people know now if you're not calling people back." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some respondents view LE-based victim services as a form of crime prevention, noting that it provides an opportunity to interrupt cyclical crime like intimate partner or family violence. By receiving education about violence and resources, victims may be better positioned and empowered to leave a violent environment.

"I actually want to prevent the crime. So, how do we prevent it? Long-term wise. And the education piece and the safety plan piece is pivotal to save the lives that we don't even know about—we can't count. You know, prevention you can't count. You don't know what you prevented because you prevent it. So, that's the piece that is actually

pivotal to us and helping us and our job, is someone going out and actually providing resources, whether that's education, job, knowledge of danger they're in, and so forth. Providing medical care. [Services] that we in law enforcement just can't really provide. We don't have the resources or time to do that." (*Internal Partner*)

Reducing barriers between victims and law enforcement. A primary benefit noted by many respondents is that LE-VS specialists help to build relationships with victims and can reduce barriers (e.g., lack of trust, communication barriers) between LE and victims. Internal partners explained that victims may be hesitant or refuse to speak with LE personnel but are willing to speak with LE-VS specialists, after which they may feel more comfortable speaking with LE personnel. One internal partner explained how LE-VS specialists are an essential bridge in communication to victims:

"I've seen the benefits of having a noncommissioned personnel reach out to the victims and say, 'Hey, listen, I don't really care about the investigative portion of it. I'm here for you. What do you need?' I've seen the benefits of it in my cases. So as a supervisor, I value it tremendously... It seemed to really keep the victim engaged in the investigation. It allotted a kind of a go-between for me to get information from [LE-VS specialist] who, you know, the victim may feel a little bit more comfortable to talk to [LE-VS specialist] at times. So, it kind of, from my perspective, gave the victim a sense of ownership over it. And it was an easy transition between me and [LE-VS specialist] to the victim. I guess I, kind of by proxy, got trusted because the victim trusted [LE-VS specialist]." (*Internal Partner*)

Benefits to the LEA and internal partners. LEA internal partners described many ways in which LE-VS specialists and victim services benefit internal partners and the LEA overall. Internal partners recognize that victim services and advocacy require expertise they do not have and that without LE-VS specialists there would be a significant gap or "void."

"I know the county has a victim service unit that we don't get to see at all really, once the cases get up to the county. So, to have something at this level that [LE-VS specialists] are a part of...Not having them as a resource or not having them around, I think would be a disservice to our department and a disservice to [City]. And I don't understand why other police departments don't participate or get involved or whatever they need to do to keep them. I think it would be a big loss for us...if they weren't around." (*Internal Partner*)

"When I heard we were getting [LE-VS specialists] I was like, 'Oh, great.' I had no idea what to expect. Is this another flavor of the month? I really wasn't sure. But after seeing her investment into these people, in the communications she's had with [officers]...I see the value in it. I see that there was actually probably a pretty big void in that realm of our system... So, yeah, there's a huge need for it. When they see the value—it helps the [officers], it helps the victims. Yeah, absolutely." (*Internal Partner*)

LE personnel appreciate that LE-VS specialists' focus on supporting victims allows them to focus on the investigations, not on trying to connect victims to resources, which they neither have the time nor are equipped to do. One LE-VS specialist noted, "I think a lot of police officers

and detectives are empathetic and want to help, but that's not really their primary role.” One internal partner shared:

“Before [LE-VS specialists] were around, it would be the responsibility, usually of the officer, to organize everything and get the, contact the victims, get the witnesses ready, you know, explain, you know, what other resources are out there for them, etc. Where [LE-VS specialists] are focused on this. They're in tune all the time and they can come in immediately and, you know, relieve that stress for us and attend to the victims, like, right away. So, whether it be housing or clothing or monetary needs or just a safe place to go—and nothing against our guys or us, we're usually focused on like what's going on. And it's good to have them thinking outside the box a little bit, 'Hey, let's take care of the victims.' You know, what do they need? What's going on here? And even after the arrest is made...just to have [LE-VS specialists] around, because we have multiple cases that we're working on. The guys are sometimes running from call to call to call. And it's just nice to have [LE-VS specialists] focused on what's the process after the arrest. Getting in touch with the victims, you know, seeing if they're okay, do they need anything? It's been a pleasure since they started working.” (*Internal Partner*)

Although victim services are not LE internal partners' responsibility, they did acknowledge and appreciate that they were learning about helpful supports and resources for victims. As one internal partner said:

“There's also the aspect of just them being a resource and having knowledge to connect us with other things... I had a case that I'm currently working on. I'm trying to figure out what might be the best route to try to get restitution back to a victim. And [LE-VS specialist] isn't directly involved with the case, but I went to her and bounced some information off of her and she was able to make a couple calls, contacts, whatever it would be. And she got back to me with some information that...I can then use to better direct, you know, figure out what direction I'm heading with, with an investigation... And yeah, just education makes you realize that there's more out there than what you may have known about...And all of it is just better ways to serve the community. Providing better resources that are already existing, but just connecting people with the resources that can benefit them.” (*Internal Partner*)

Many respondents spoke about how LE internal partners' focus is largely on “arrest the bad guys,” and LE-VS specialist are a “pivotal” piece to ensure there remains focus on and support for victims as well. This supports the larger mission of agencies to serve and protect their communities.

“I'm looking at it from 18 years in law enforcement, and then the knowledge that I've acquired and moving about the department. [LE-VS specialist's] role is just pivotal to us accomplishing our actual larger mission. For a patrol officer, they're thinking, call the call, let's arrest the bad guys. They don't think much further than that. For a detective, they think about combining the case, presenting it to the prosecutors, getting, hopefully, the case to prosecution, hopefully getting the bad guy somehow adjudicated whether it being in jail, etc.” (*Internal Partner*)

As noted, collaborating with LE-VS specialists improved the way LE internal partners work with victims and, for many, resulted in protocols and processes that are more victim-centered and trauma-informed. This was evident in the way internal partners described working with victims, even if the terms “trauma-informed” or “victim-centered” did not resonate with them at face value. For example, one internal partner empathized with what it can mean for a victim to come forward:

“You start to realize that victims come forward for different reasons, not just to make the case and then get the bad guy—which is all of our goal, is to get these guys off the street... One of the aspects that I realized very quickly was that by them coming forward, they're starting the healing process, and it's a healing. You're helping them heal to an extent, I believe, by talking to them about something that they've maybe kept covered for a long time. And it's not just them reporting it. That's why you get so many victims that they report but then they're not, they kind of distance themselves from the investigation, because they needed to do that. And I realized that...I think [LE-VS specialist's] nothing but a positive contributor.” (*Internal Partner*)

An LE-VS supervisor provided an example of how having the VS program led to trauma-informed policy related to information release:

“Having victim services professionals in the department has allowed us to have a bigger voice in different spaces and offer a different perspective, which has influenced policy. It's influenced our practices. One policy in particular is our public information policy... I was talking to the commander, and someone came in and said, ‘Okay, we plan to release this information related to this homicide.’... And I just asked a very simple question, ‘Has anybody notified his family?’ And they said, ‘Well, we assume the Homicide Unit did.’ And I said, ‘Well, can we confirm that they did prior to release of information?’... They were able to confirm that information, because I don't want families finding information out through the media. So that spawned bigger conversations of, hey, this can't just be our practice. This needs to be in policy. Because there needs to be some level of accountability if these things don't happen.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

One victim respondent praised the LE-VS specialists and detectives who worked with them, and noted their experience empowered them to then advocate for others:

“They really did empower me to be an advocate for myself and my safety, and they helped me get through that so much so that I'm able to help other people. And I do advocate a lot. And because I had that experience and seen this, I know how to explain to other people like, it's okay, go to police, trust you, trust yourself, you can ask all those questions there. I feel confident in doing that because I did have a good experience. And that's the first hurdle is knowing that you're going to be taken care of. And I think a lot of people are afraid they won't be. And I think a lot of people are scared that it's just someone that's not going to believe them. And the advocates, the detective, they were all very good at just listening and collecting the facts without judgment. And there was an empathy there. I could feel empathy. That is key.” (*Victim*)

Other benefits of collaboration that were reported by internal partners include improvement in internal processes, improvement in external partner relationships, and even an increase in resolved cases. One internal partner explained how their understanding of victimization and trauma was expanded through their collaboration with the LE-VS specialists. This allowed the internal partner to better communicate and empathize with victims, which, coupled with the LE-VS specialists' victim services, resulted in more successful case outcomes. The internal partner described this process, starting at initial engagement with a victim:

“He strangled you this time. And statistics show that if you get strangled, you're vastly more likely to be murdered by this individual. So, with all of that being said, there's this thing called gaslighting. And that's basically when this person has changed the narrative so dramatically that you think that you're crazy. You are not crazy. I can see the marks on your neck... So being able to expand that narrative for the individual to go, 'Oh my gosh, somebody actually believes me,' helped me be able to get the victim to be more cooperative with me. And then to be able to follow up with [LE-VS specialists] reaching out to the victim and going, okay, well, I've already signed you up for VINE [Victim Information and Notification Everyday], so you're going to get a notification when this person is out of custody. And I'm going to walk you through the entire TPO [temporary protection order] process so we can get that served to this person while they're in custody. You want to change the locks? Let's change them. You know, all of those things, these extra steps to get that individual to go, 'Oh, my gosh, somebody finally believes me, like, I'm not nuts here. I'm not the bad guy.' Because I feel like so frequently that narrative is shifted on these victims, that that is part of the reason why they're not cooperative. And I've had so much success with that conversation. And then the follow through that [LE-VS specialists] have been able to give me...it wouldn't have been successful without their help and their follow through.”
(Internal Partner)

An important goal of the LEV grant is to improve victim response throughout the awarded LEAs. Several respondents reported a positive shift in their agency's culture toward victim services, which is a critical step to full integration of victim-centered and trauma-informed practice within an agency:

“But honestly, the program has been effective and is so much a part of the organization that everybody knows it at this point. I like reviewing reports online and [officers have] already hit the tab making sure a copy is going to the victim advocate. That's awesome. That means they're already thinking ahead, way ahead. And as I mentioned, she's very proactive as well. So, we continue to [raise awareness about the VS program], especially when new people come on board. But it's truly become part of the organization and the culture here.”
(Internal Partner)

Challenges, Barriers, and Areas for Improvement

Respondents reported some challenges or barriers to or areas for improvement for effective and successful internal partnerships.

Need for expanded VS capacity. When asked if there are ways to improve their victim services, internal partners often replied with a request for expanded resources: for example,

additional LE-VS specialists, coverage for more shifts (e.g., night shifts), or added responsibilities (e.g., on-scene response). However, internal partners recognized lack of funding as a significant barrier to expansion of services:

“I guess my biggest gripe about victim services is that they're not 24/7. It's like, there's nothing worse than being on a scene and you're like, I need to get this person the hell out of this house. And there's nobody available on the victim services end to assist me. That's not an [LE-VS specialists] thing. That's like, that's, you know, a funding and enough positions and all of that type of you know, that's the issue.... So, their lack of availability in the nighttime hours makes it really tough, I think, for some people to buy into it wholeheartedly because, unfortunately, you know, crime doesn't stop. Crime isn't a 9-to-5 type of thing.” (*Internal Partner*)

One LEV sworn supervisor advocated strongly for several more victim advocates, describing the significant number of victims assisted by their LE-VS specialists—more than 5,000 in 1 year—as “an absurd amount for two people to do.” Internal partners seem to recognize that additional advocates would not only be a benefit to victims and the LEA but are necessary to balance the workload of their LE-VS specialists who often face burnout and vicarious trauma. As one person in LEA leadership noted:

“I think the biggest downside of our VSU is they want to be something to everybody. So, they are likely overworking themselves or are probably high risk for burnout. Of course, there are, all things considered, you can only staff so many people, you know, etc., etc., but that would be my biggest critical comment, my biggest need for improvement would be lower their caseload for their own well-being.” (*Internal Partner*)

Efforts to support LE-VS specialists' wellness and VS program sustainability are further described in **Section 3.3.6**.

Need for increased buy-in and leadership support. Some respondents, including LE-VS specialists and internal partners, noted a lack of buy-in or broad support for victim services. Many respondents noted that leadership support for victim services is critical and needs to be explicit. They explained the ripple effect the leadership support has on improving buy-in throughout the agency. Some internal partners talked about their role encouraging officers to engage with LE-VS specialists:

“I felt my role was getting buy-in amongst the [officers]... Encouraging them and simply asking them, 'Hey, did you contact [LE-VS specialist]?'... I think when you order people to do things, it comes across poorly. But if you can highlight, hey, I reached out to her, give an example of how she's helped something out or helped to take the tension out or ease the situation, that started getting buy-in slowly. Nothing happens overnight. You can't expect people to buy-in immediately. But her personality also helped because she was not afraid to roll up her sleeves and get in there...and she was very compassionate.” (*Internal Partner*)

“I think there has to be a big push at the commander and sergeant level to make sure they're always aware and they're reminding their personnel, we have this person available to you. This is the number, make sure you're reaching out. If you have a case

where you know that a victim needs something, put them in touch with this person. Or if not, send an email to her and say, hey, I dealt with this call. Can you please give this victim a call and make sure that they don't need any additional services or point them in the right direction.” (*Internal Partner*)

One external partner shared their perspective from outside of the agency:

“I wish [LE-VS specialists] were regarded as more valuable [within the LEA]... I think the detectives I work with really, I know, appreciate them... But I would love them to be recognized more because they do so much. I don't think people realize, dealing with families and people who have experienced trauma... I just, I can't even imagine responding to something like that and just having to remain calm and collected the whole time and having to think just on your feet all the time... Advocates are, I don't know, they're very special.” (*External Partner*)

Relationship building and LEV utilization. Internal partners reported several barriers to relationship building or collaboration with or utilization of LE-VS specialists.

Lack of VS knowledge. One major barrier that was cited often was a lack of knowledge or understanding about LE-VS specialists and victim services. Initially, LE internal partners often wondered what LE-VS specialists do and what their value was to them. One internal partner reflected:

“I think any time there's a new position, there's going to be skepticism. And an agency like ours, you know, cops are naturally skeptical... I know that it did take some time, at least in my observations, my perception, that it took some time to get buy-in. You know, what is this [LE-VS specialist] going to do for us?” (*Internal Partner*)

As noted, consistency in messaging about victim services and LE-VS specialists proactively connecting with internal partners were successful strategies to inform agency personnel about victim services uses and benefits. One internal partner shared how they could have done this more effectively:

“I don't think that we did enough from the moment we applied [for LEV] and, most importantly, from the moment we were granted, to start preparing the organization for this service. We didn't do enough to explain to our leadership, much less our officers, this is what this grant [is], this is what we can do. Bring in people to do presentations on it. Really start talking about the cultural shift and the incorporation of a civilian and valuing that... I think we should have, as an organization, done a lot more at the beginning to prepare, to build enthusiasm, to build an understanding of [it]. Make sure that line staff were more involved. And what is it that [the LE-VS specialist] can do for you?... And so, we could have been saying, now here is this position that's going to be able to help you with this... I just think we could have done more from a systemic, from a systems perspective of building some enthusiasm for what that position could do.” (*Internal Partner*)

Some respondents thought their peers or colleagues were not aware of LE-VS specialists or what they could do and agreed that word of mouth and sharing success stories can help to raise awareness and buy-in:

“I always think of things in terms of like, how does it benefit people? And I think that's where you get buy-in from anybody. So, I think if you could show the patrol officers or the patrol sergeants...really, how does this benefit you by getting [LE-VS specialist] involved? I think that's where you're going to get the most buy-in.” (*Internal Partner*)

Overcoming prior negative experiences. Some LE-VS specialists described situations in which internal partners had had poor experiences working with victim advocates, whether system-based or community-based, and this influenced how they were initially perceived. One LE-VS specialist shared her experience with a situation like this and how persistence helped her:

“That was really rough when I started... Since the advocate we had previous, she was community-based. She couldn't share her data. Law enforcement are very particular about that. If you're not going to share with me, I'm not going to share with you. So that was a really hard thing to overcome when I started. I mean, you go and talk to them, they're like, 'Yep. Yep, we'll call you. Mm-hmm, sure.' You're like, never, are you? And so, it took, it was probably a solid six months of me working here before any deputy ever called me. And it was me going to briefing every morning or in the afternoons and just sitting like, 'You got anything?' 'Nope. Nope. Just here if you guys need me.' And then they got so used to seeing you in the room that they started discussing the cases and you'd be like, 'Oh, hey, I can help you with that.’” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Lack of visibility and awareness. Several respondents talked about how maintaining VS program awareness was directly related to how visible they were. Of note, all LEV sites were implementing their grants when COVID-19 emerged, which greatly impacted partnership development as many people shifted to remote work for some time. One LEV supervisor said that their biggest hurdle to internal collaboration was being separate from the police department. Other supervisors provided concrete examples of how their LE-VS specialists initially began with no or low visibility and awareness and the strategies they used to improve it. For example:

“[LE-VS specialist] was a professional staff new to the agency and was working in an office, working under the investigation's umbrella, but not part of the unit necessarily. So, she would spend a lot of time reading reports and making contact with victims directly. She would spend time, you know, offering her services, going to briefings, talking to patrol officers, coming into investigations to ask questions, and then going back to her office. So shortly thereafter, we moved her into the unit. So, we took her out of this office, put her in the office itself, so that she's a part of the organization, the investigations organization... I think it has helped her in terms of establishing good working relationships with everybody, being front and center, you know, being present. Top of mind with the investigation's folks.” (*Internal Partner*)

LEA staff turnover. Another barrier that was cited is frequent LE personnel turnover, which results in a loss of knowledge about LE-VS specialists and victim services, the need for frequent education and training, and the need to build new relationships. One LE-VS specialist

empathized that internal partners in new positions were likely having to learn many aspects of their job, and victim services was one more demand on their limited time:

“I think the more we're able to become a permanent fixture within the organization, the more tables we're going to be brought to. I think something that sometimes is a challenge...there's a lot of transition [in leadership positions]... I know there's a lot of advocates out there for what [the VS program is] doing. It's just getting the initial buy-in from people who haven't been exposed to what we do when they also are at capacity. You know, they themselves are learning a new job and they're at capacity themselves.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Roles and responsibilities. Another reported need was the clarification of LE-VS specialists' roles and responsibilities. This was particularly important for other personnel working directly or indirectly with victims (e.g., mental health or crisis response teams), but also to ensure that LE-VS specialists are not asked to do something they should not. One LE-VS specialist highlighted the need to clarify roles and responsibilities as a lesson learned for internal partnership development:

“I think it's understanding your own roles and responsibilities and being very intentional with them, and recognizing when maybe you have stepped outside of those roles and responsibilities, and figuring out, maybe, where and whose responsibility that is... Acknowledge that, you know what, this is not something that I am I am supposed to be doing. But that does not mean that there isn't someone else in this agency who is doing that. And I, instead, can then connect you to that person.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

This can be supported by leadership or supervisors advocating for LE-VS specialists, as one supervisor shared:

“When our advocate got there the first time, it was like, ‘Oh good, you can take this over.’ And we were like, ‘Absolutely not. That is not their role.’... There was just all these things that [officers are] involved in and they're like, okay, we can hand this off to you... And it's like, okay, that's not their role. And then had to kind of just keep reiterating exactly what their role is.” (*Internal Partner*)

Interpersonal dynamics. Respondents gave examples of LE internal partner or LE-VS specialist personality traits or perspectives as conflicting or potentially conflicting and how these factors could negatively affect collaboration. One internal partner noted that “patrol officers tend to be robotic in response. They are dispatched from one call to the next due to being shorthanded on most occasions. They go from violent situation to a traffic accident to general investigative situations to traffic stops.” (*Internal Partner*) Another respondent described how their LE-VS specialist's personality influenced relationship building:

“I think that one of the other challenges is it was new to [LE-VS specialist] as well, so she didn't know the [agency] culture. And I think you've got some personalities that are just very outgoing, and that's not [LE-VS specialist]. And so had there been another person, it might have been easier. It might have been someone going, ‘Hey, can I have a meeting with you? Let's talk. Here's what I do.’ That's not kind of how it went with the

personality that we have... And I say that just from a very objective way. And the pressure was on her to do it.” (*Internal Partner*)

Trauma-informed approaches. Although most respondents believed that their agency had increased its use of victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches, they often also acknowledged room for improvement. Some LE internal partners recognized a need for more trauma-informed education or trainings, which is an encouraging sign because a critical step to addressing a need is acknowledging that it exists. As one internal partner conveyed:

“I hate to say this about police officers because we’re ‘big, bad, and tough.’ But there needs to be more empathy training when it comes to dealing with victims... We need to be more empathetic of their story, their timeline, and the events that are going on in their life. I don't think officers realize a lot of times that 90% of the time when a citizen is interacting with a police officer, it's that citizen's worst day of their life in their mind. So, I think just a little more training on that.” (*Internal Partner*)

3.3.4.2 External Partnerships

As noted in **Section 3.3.3.2**, VS programs developed a variety of external partnerships to ensure continuity of care for victims receiving services. **Exhibit 18**, shows the main types of external agencies or organizations that VS programs had a formalized partnership with, as reported in the web survey. The sites primarily had formalized partnerships with various types of victim services organizations, other local law enforcement agencies, prosecution, and various types of behavioral health services.

Exhibit 18. Top 11 Types of External Partners Collaborating with LE-VS Specialists

External Partner Type	Frequency	%
Domestic violence services/advocacy	29	42.6
Sexual assault services/advocacy	25	36.8
Prosecutor/District Attorney Victim Witness Program	22	32.4
Other law enforcement agency	17	25.0
Other victim services/advocacy	17	25.0
Shelters	15	22.1
Human trafficking services/advocacy	14	20.6
Prosecutor or District/State/U.S. Attorney	12	17.6
Victim compensation program	12	17.6
Behavioral health/mental health/substance abuse services	12	17.6
Child protective services	12	17.6

Data source: LEV Evaluation Web Survey (N=68)

On average, LE-VS specialists reported positive relationships with their external collaborating partners. Frequent communication, through both informal and formal avenues, ensured better care for victims throughout their criminal legal or care-seeking journeys and contributed to self-reported “feelings of success” from collaborating agencies. LE-VS specialists also noted that positive external collaboration enhanced resource sharing, allowed for each agency to provide the best care they were uniquely qualified to provide (e.g., safeguarding

against overstepping boundaries into a role that was not theirs), and ensured that each agency received the information they needed to provide critical resources for victims.

VS programs also reported some challenges with establishing or maintaining external partnerships. Most commonly, programs reported that limited funding and reduced access to resources made it difficult to address victims' needs, especially long-term. Some sites also suggested that role clarification between the LE-VS specialists and external partners would improve their working relationship. Although very few staff mentioned conducting cross-trainings between external partners and LE-VS specialists, most respondents were very interested in that idea.

Types of Partnerships

The vast majority of VS programs ensured regular communication with domestic violence and community-based organizations, child advocacy centers, and child protective services, as well as fellow criminal legal system groups like district or city attorney's offices. Partnerships with community-based organizations seemed to take longer to establish (and, in some instances, were not as frequently utilized), but once they were well established, they required less upkeep to maintain. In contrast, partnerships with fellow criminal legal system groups seemed to take less time to establish but were more complicated and involved once established. One LE-VS supervisor shared:

"I think the only one that we've had a little bit of pushback is at the prosecuting attorney's office, and that's been a little bit more like, you know, this is my role, why are you here?" (*Internal Partner*)

VS programs varied in terms of established formal MOUs with external agencies. Although some agencies had signed MOUs on file, others spoke about trying to get one but the effort not coming to fruition. Some agencies were not aware of the status of their MOU at all. Some external partners described challenges developing contractual agreements with law enforcement specifically:

"The last three MOUs that I have received from [LEA], I've revised and said I've put my revisions, and this is the one I will sign. I will not sign the one you sent me. Because we strongly feel that because of some of the limitations of [LEA]'s victim services around immigration status, around confidentiality, around the role of police officers—because obviously victim services, if they come across information that needs to be reported, they have to report it." (*External Partner*)

Overall, the existence of an MOU, or lack of one, did not seem to affect the strength of the relationships with external partners.

Communication Approaches and Strengths

All of the Phase 2 sites reported that the foundation for a strong partnership with an outside agency was built on frequent and respectful communication. One external partner highlighted how LEA leadership support has facilitated their collaboration within the LEA, but also noted that building trust and relationships can be a lengthy process:

"It really does take the leadership. So, it takes a leadership team and all of these organizations that collaborate and trust each other... [If I say] 'Oh, I have an idea. We could do this.'... [LEA leadership] would always go, 'Okay, [external partner] has an idea and we're going to work together.' And then they tell their lieutenants...because it has to come from the top that we're going to do this together, you know. So, it's just taken kind of years and that, as you know, that ebbs and flows based on leadership... Especially with law enforcement. They have to trust you and you have to build that trust at the leadership level. It has to be top down." (*External Partner*)

The frequency of communication, in which specific external agencies were involved, varied across sites, as did the modes of communication (e.g., email, in person). VS programs that were able to speak with external partners in person or at least a few times a week, usually in informal contexts, reported the strongest partnerships. One external partner who said they had "a really good dynamic" with the LE-VS specialist described their communication:

"I'm in contact with [LE-VS specialist] probably daily, or she makes contact with me. She'll either send me an email looking for updates, I'll text her at the beginning of the week or during the week. 'Hey, I need your help with X, Y, and Z. Can you reach out to this person?' And we communicate back and forth either by email, phone call, or text message." (*External Partner*)

One LE-VS specialist reflected on the value of continual communication and networking with external organizations:

"I think lessons learned is networking. Networking is always going to be important in building relationships internally and externally... I think networking is always going to be something that will always have value in the end just because we just never know when we're going to need each other, and in terms of serving the victims and the survivors, it's just going to work best and more smoothly that way." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists often also participated in coalitions, specialized task forces, and multidisciplinary teams, which offered another avenue for network and partnership expansion. These formalized interactions, occurring monthly or quarterly, provided additional opportunities for sites to connect with outside agencies and maintain open lines of communication for defining roles, learning about each other, and identifying and addressing gaps in services. Importantly, in situations where coalition meetings were not productive, or did not include a multidisciplinary focus, other breakdowns in communication were also reported (e.g., lack of frequent interactions, lack of follow-up to requests). One LE-VS specialist described her positive experience participating in a local task force:

"We have our human trafficking task force. It's fairly new... Per the city manager's request, I was able to get everyone in the county that I knew of that were working with human trafficking survivors into a room for a conversation. So, we all sat in the chief's conference room and just talked about the services that we offer. It was a great collaboration. Even a district attorney that is prosecuting human trafficking cases right now came and talked about her role and what she's looking for. It was, I felt like that was a success because so many people are territorial in that group, but they all came together and had that conversation." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

External Partnerships Successes

The theme of continuity of care was apparent throughout the interviews with both LE-VS specialists and external partners. As noted, resources are scarce in the victim services field, and external partners especially noted that LE-VS specialists could often provide victims with care that was unique within the law enforcement environment. They also noted that this continuity of care encouraged victims to stay engaged during the long and often arduous court process. One external partner explained how being able to coordinate with the LE-VS specialist about the status of a victim's case was a "life changer":

"It's been great to have an inside person that is going to focus just on the victim and informing them of what the [case] status is, how's it going. Because we don't know on our end. So, it works great for us... [Before LEV] we would call the secretary of investigations. She would tell us who the assigned detective was, and then we would call the detective to try to get a status for the victim, and then update the victim. So having [LE-VS specialist] in house—life changer!" (*External Partner*)

LE-VS specialists also found success in collaborating with external partners by referring victims to these agencies for services they were better suited to provide (e.g., advocacy during the court process, ongoing counseling). When LE-VS specialists and external partners reported a positive collaborative relationship, they often noted a shared sense of "credibility" or a mutual understanding of each other's roles when supporting victims. This feeling of collaboration ensured that both LE-VS specialists and external agencies felt they were providing the best continuity of care for victims throughout the criminal legal process:

"Because resources are scarce, we each have a little bit we can do, right? So that's the good and the bad of it, that you have to involve so many advocates along the way. But you can piece together, hopefully, the type of services the victim needs. But I definitely think that [the VS program] has filled gaps in what victims need, especially in terms of like immediate housing and safety, and that they can just be on scene. There's no one else in the system who's going to go to the scene of, you know, domestic violence shooting. That's them and they'll be there. And that's extremely helpful for the victims." (*External Partner*)

"I think one of the things that we hear back often from a lot of people is how hard it is to find the right place to go to, right? So being able to connect with someone and them directly saying, here, call this person, I think that really takes away from the intimidation of calling a place without really wondering who you're going to talk to. And so, one of the things that we've appreciated about the connection is that [LE-VS specialist] connects them directly to us." (*External Partner*)

External partner respondents also noted that LE-VS specialists had access to systems and information that they were not privy to (e.g., contact information, current and historical police reports) that could aid in providing better services and instruction to victims:

"The folks who are the system-based advocates, they have more access to the system and they can, you know, have that access to information. So, it's great. But working together, what you know, hey, you got more access here, you can be able to navigate

this better. We're going to be able to help with the supplemental pieces. So, let's team together, work together to support this person going through.” (*External Partner*)

External Partnerships Challenges

LE-VS specialists and external partners reported some challenges with establishing and maintaining partnerships. Understaffing and turnover presented complications with respondents noting that any hiring freezes and delays ensured that new hiring, training, and rapport building was prolonged:

“And just like we were talking about the turnover with the crisis call like it was pretty much as soon as you had someone and you got to know them, they were gone. And that was before we had our, like, in-house person. It was, there was, like, a new one every school year.” (*External Partner*)

Sites reported that collaboration challenges were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, as one respondent conveyed:

“We used to do two trainings per year and now this year is going to be the first one that's only one per year. So, we invite the community, we invite new staff members, we invite anybody who wants to learn about what every agency does. So, all of us have like different things that we talk about. So, it's like we share information. So that's how we collaborate. And I know in the past, pre-COVID, we used to have them come in and do like presentations at staff meetings. But after COVID, we haven't done that. So, I think it's time for us to start doing it again.” (*External Partner*)

Multiple respondents noted some feelings of role confusion and territoriality between and within LE-VS specialists, law enforcement, and external partners. External partners who experienced challenges sometimes felt that LE-VS specialists or law enforcement were providing services that were not their specialty. Some other external partners noted that they did not understand what the LE-VS specialist role entailed and would appreciate more clarification on the roles, responsibilities, and limits of the position:

“One of the things that I think would be really helpful is to kind of gather a better understanding of what the role entails. I think that we also have another advocate that's also relatively new in their position down in [County]. And so, I think maybe being able to have a better understanding of what they do, their limitations, would be really helpful. Again, like I know a lot about [the LE-VS specialist's] position because of communication and because I worked with her before, but let's say that another staff member who might be newer in the agency or didn't get the opportunity to work with her when she was there may not be as familiar. So, I don't know if there is any type of like brochure or any type of like informational material that can be given to the community, because I also don't know how many other agencies know that her position exists.” (*External Partner*)

As victim services resources are scarce, any instance or perception of duplication of services is often met with pushback and feelings of frustration. Some respondents, both from VS programs and from external agencies, expressed disappointment with service duplication. As one respondent noted:

“We have really great external partners. There's a lot of agencies wanting to do a lot of good. The main issue that I would see is duplication of services. And so just trying to address that, and that's what these meetings [with partner agencies] are, like, how do we all serve these victims but not overwhelm them with, keep trying to give them things, you know. Or sometimes they'll get confused.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

These reports most often came from LE-VS specialists who wanted to assist external agencies with their high case load by providing their own advocacy services to victims. However, when there was a disconnect, these same external agencies felt that LE-VS specialists were providing services inappropriate for their role. One external partner underscored how a victim-centered approach and communication can help to mitigate duplication:

“It just kinda depends because the clients feel rapport with different people so, if they feel like they built a rapport more with one agency than the other, that's kind of how they tend to go. And so, what I always tell my clients is, if you're working on this with them and you feel comfortable that's great, just as long as you're working on it. And so, that's how sometimes we'll talk to each other like, "Okay, you're helping her with that. I just wanted to check on that, and so I'll help her with this.” (*External Partner*)

Although many external partners reported positive experiences with LE-VS specialists, some believed that law enforcement still struggled to respect the role of advocacy and victim care. Some respondents noted that law enforcement's understanding and support of advocacy had improved over recent decades, but there were still improvements to be made. One external partner noted:

“[[It's gotten] better, but I'm still not getting the feeling that the cops are that interested in the victim. They just want to get it done and get out of there. Now, that's my own personal opinion. I don't do ride-alongs. This is coming from the [victims] we work with.” (*External Partner*)

The concern with law enforcement involvement also extended to the LE-VS specialist position, with some external organizations noting they did not want to associate themselves with law enforcement-based victim advocacy for fear that their victims would not trust the services they were providing. “Some agencies have been like...we don't work with anybody with the police. And, you know, they're more along the lines of, they're very...very anti-police.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Suggestions for Improvement

Sites that established transparent and mutually agreed upon roles and expectations for partnerships, ensured all parties routinely revisited expectations and service gaps, and had frequent informal contact were the most likely to report positive working relationships with external partners. One LE-VS supervisor had a direct recommendation for how they established their network:

“So, the way we sort of improved collaboration because we're all system based, but we're in different parts of the system. And so, we did brown bag lunches and we sat

down and we got to know each other better, and we got to understand sort of the challenges that each other experiences and like, what can we do to make things easier for communication? And ultimately, if we're communicating well, that means this person is getting the level of victim service provision that they should. So, we have sort of worked through what that looks like, but it's not necessarily getting cases to court quicker. It's ensuring that once the case transitions from investigation to adjudication, they are receiving the same level of service.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

3.3.5 Case Management and Documentation

As described in **Section 3.2.3.4**, LEV grantees are required to submit standardized performance metrics as part of their grant funding and use different systems and software for doing so. Additional information about the types of data (i.e., PMT, victim surveys, and agency surveys) and challenges of data collection are detailed in **Section 3.4.1.5**. Information about the ethical considerations around VS Program data collection, including confidentiality, methods of information sharing, protecting against subpoenas, and documenting victim grievances and complaints is covered at length in **Section 3.3.1.5**.

3.3.6 Sustainability Planning and Personnel Wellness

Sustainability is a primary goal of the LEV grant and was prioritized by all VS programs as they recognized the value of all they had accomplished during the grant period. In this section, we describe the VS programs’ efforts to sustain, or even expand, their LE-VS specialist positions and victim services, including their successes and challenges. We also report the ways in which LE-VS specialists are supported to safeguard their safety and wellness through agency-level practices and self-care.

3.3.6.1 Benefits of Sustainability

Respondents were asked about their plans for continuing the program beyond the life of the LEV grant. When discussing their plans for sustaining their programs, respondents discussed three primary goals.

First, securing other sources of funding allows agencies to keep grant-funded positions as staff:

“So, after the first year, they asked for 14 [advocates], two per district for the entire state. And so [LEA] asked for that, which was shocking. We were expecting this to take five years to sell. So, after one year, they were all in. Went to the governor, the governor signed it, approved. And once it went to legislature, they cut ten and I don't know how much money. So, we ended up with four.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Second, securing additional funding for victim services for their victim services unit increases the number of staff in their VS program or unit. This allows their VS programs to actually grow beyond the original scope under the grant:

“And then they gave us four additional positions and each like the early part of 2021, and those were just [city government] funded. So, I moved people off of grant and all that. And then they absorbed all the positions in 2022, the LEV positions. So, you

know, the grant ended in September. And then they agreed to absorb the additional [government grant] position.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Third, extra funding allows agencies to potentially change the structure of staff, such as changing staff from part-time to full-time. These changes may be easier to do outside of the grant structure, where there are dual grant and agency or government requirements for staffing. One respondent discussed how their agency’s program could grow if they were able to secure funding for their LE-VS specialists to become full-time, including increasing volunteers and more permanent staff in the future:

“I just think we could build it out...if [advocate] was full time. I just really think, and I know we've had these conversations, I think it could be built out. I mean, we're missing so many opportunities where we could build this unit not with even paid personnel, but volunteers. I mean, there's plenty of people out there who would volunteer, who are either retired professionals and, or just people that enjoy volunteering and want to do good stuff. We could build a huge staff of people to really—it doesn't have to be just two people sitting in an office. We just need someone to coordinate that and really be that focus, you know? And I think that's where I think, hopefully, we can eventually get them full time and sustain it and build this out to be bigger and even better than it is.” (*Internal Partner*)

3.3.6.2 Continued Funding for VS Programs

At the time of site visit interviews, several agencies reported already having secured other sources of funding for their LEV programs. This was most commonly in the form of long-term funding covered by their local government budgets or other types of short-term grant funding. Another long-term funding source, primarily the city or county government’s operating budget, was considered the ideal outcome and contributor to program sustainability:

“I know that the grant is expiring and the city council has already, for the most part, agreed it's going to continue. It's part of the budget. There's no intention to eliminate the position simply because the funding's not there.” (*Internal Partner*)

Some sites reported receiving or seeking another short-term funding source, primarily another grant. One site was able to secure another government grant to cover their program temporarily:

“This funding will probably not come up again. This is local law enforcement funding. And we threw the spaghetti at the wall, and it stuck. Nobody else is coming to them with a law enforcement victim services. So, it's unusual and they wanted to support us.” (*Internal Partner*)

3.3.6.3 Methods of Sustaining Funding

Securing the long-term funding needed to sustain the program depended on leadership support for the program, specifically that of agency leadership and county/city government leadership: “I think as an organization, we have told all of our employees that this is something that we value. And not just as an organization, as a city.” (*Internal Partner*)

Respondents also discussed how program data and documentation can support arguments to continue LEV programming and personnel:

“So, I just have to get people on board, the other people on board, not us, to make sure that we get the program built so that [LE-VS specialist] gets more calls for service, not just the [geographic area] division. So that's the hope of it. That's kind of what we wrote the decision packet for, for the city council, is that we need, like this did such a good job here, we need it everywhere.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

“So, I think the success of this, when it comes time to refund—I mean, a grant’s one thing, but to fund this through budgetary, tax-based moneys, I think it could easily be articulated with the success and the wins to get that money.” (*Internal Partner*)

The relationships to external organizations, when built well, can also support program sustainability. One external partner described the importance of formalizing relationships:

“What's going to happen when I'm gone? You want it to keep going. I think we have to formalize these relationships. I think that's the only way. I think other than that, it's going to be the constant cycle of like, oh, we have a strong relationship. Oh, [LE-VS specialist] left. I don't know who's there now. I don't know who to email... And so that's when it breaks down. There's no communication for months, even years. I think we have to formalize these relationships. Formal referral process or something on either end would be good.” (*External Partner*)

3.3.6.4 Challenges to Sustainability

Not all sites described their programs as making progress toward sustainability. Respondents described how securing additional sources of funding, particularly long-term funding, can be challenging for several reasons. First and foremost, the VS program’s LEA leadership must support efforts to seek sustainable funding. Without agency-level support and approval to do so, seeking to become part of their government’s general operating budget was a nonstarter. Unfortunately, not every VS program reported receiving this support from their leadership, as supervisor described:

“We've got several of them that are on general funds, but I've got 1, 2, 3, 4. At least four that are on grant funds. Rolling over to anything other than a grant is very difficult. Getting the department to understand why we need them to roll over is also very difficult.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

For some VS programs that sought long-term funding to sustain their programs, there was a lack of government support. Respondents in more than one LEV site described asking for their budgets to be absorbed by their city or county governments without success. As one supervisor shared:

“So, we just wrote it into our Office of Victim Services grant. So, it was up for renewal funding. And we just wrote it in. But I don't think that the—I mean, the city didn't approve it. I'm not sure that the county would.” (*External Partner*)

Another site was preparing to make the request for long-term funding for a second year after being unsuccessful the first:

“So that, if you talk about maintaining that, that's my concern. It's something that we're working on right now. Those requests, well, they were made last year. They're being made again. They've been made this year again. So, we'll just see where the county commission decides to spend the money. So, we've done all we can to try to provide them with the information to support the need. So, we'll see how it goes.” (*Internal Partner*)

Another challenge to sustainable funding outside of the agency lack of public awareness of or value of LEV programming, which can build public support for sustainability. One issue is that most of the public do not come into contact with an agency's VS program unless they have been or become a victim of crime, or know someone who has been victimized. This means that the general public is not aware of a VS program's work or their value, as one sworn officer explained: “I don't think the taxpayers know about the group because they don't—they may or may not have been victimized. They should know what a great resource and asset it is.” (*Internal Partner*)

The nature of short-term grant funding means respondents may have to apply for grants that are not a perfect fit for their program's needs, all while experiencing anxiety and stress for constantly applying for and potentially losing grants to cover staff salaries. Short-term grants may be responsive to a popular topic or topic that is garnering attention at the moment, but not what the VS program needs in the longer term. One respondent described applying for a human trafficking grant even though that may not be what they most needed in their VS program:

“I've been thrown three new grant ideas for various different things. Unfortunately, I don't always get to choose what, much like this, which ended up being a wonderful thing, but it really kind of depends on what the hot topic is. So, I may end up having to write for a human trafficking advocate because human trafficking has seen a need for that. I may end up writing for a child witness advocate.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Respondents from another site described the psychological cost of constantly depending on short-term grants to support their staff:

LE internal partner 1: The problem we found is that, you know, these grant applications, you can't apply four different ways to four different people. You have to try to identify which one fits best for you, then do that application process, then hopefully it'll get reviewed, then hopefully it'll get approved. So, it's like one shot all the time. We can't piecemeal...

LE internal partner 2: But it's so valuable that that makes us sweat, you know what I mean? Like some of the other initiatives, they kind of run themselves. But this, this is salary for two people and it's an important initiative that it weighs on our mind, how are we going to continue this?”

Short-term grant cycles are also not guaranteed to last forever or stay the same size, making it challenging for agencies considering them as part of their longer-term sustainability efforts:

“And then what I'm finding is that that's not so easy as we're making—and our agency is seeing it now. I mean, you know, whether it's grants for training grants that we've been awarded for years and years, you know, now that are falling off. You know, the award that they're providing is a fraction of what it used to be. And so, it's really fallen back on, you know, local governments to try to figure out how to fund positions.”
(*Internal Partner*)

Several respondents discussed how their efforts to secure long-term funding for their VS programs was challenging during a time where there was national heightened public and government scrutiny of police departments in general and also police budgets. One site reported their city council as being formerly “100% pro police” and the agency had no problems asking for more funding as a result. However, a new city council much more closely scrutinized their funding requests:

“We have a new city council. And so, this new city council is much more detail oriented. Which is good, but in the past, we had a council that 100% pro police, right. Everything we did, everything got passed, and no questions on money and funding and all of that. We had that meeting that we had been waiting on and it was two hours of nonstop criticism of pretty much every line item that the chief was presenting on, and it was this new city council. Not to say that they didn't agree to things after, but they're looking at things a lot closer.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Another respondent pointed out that because VS programs are embedded within police departments, broader political and social movements criticizing police departments also extend to VS programs:

“I think it's again, a new program within law enforcement. You know, staffing as far as law enforcement is concerned, under that generic umbrella of law enforcement, with the movements over the last few years of defund the police or refund the police or reallocate the police or whichever platform you want to go on has kind of been a hindrance for us. This happened again right as that whole transition was taking place within our country.” (*Internal Partner*)

3.3.6.5 LE-VS Specialist Safety and Wellness

Personnel wellness is closely tied to program sustainability. Factors like staff burnout, lack of organizational (agency) support, and low pay can lead to increased staff turnover (Brabson et al., 2020), which is a primary barrier to achieving sustainability (Pascoe et al., 2021). Prioritizing the safety and wellness of LE-VS specialists can help to avoid staff turnover, which in turn can improve the likelihood of sustaining a VS program.

Ensuring LE-VS Specialists' Safety

LE-VS specialists' and sworn officers' most frequently mentioned safety method for ensuring LE-VS specialist safety was having them go on scene after a crime only with a sworn officer.

Some agencies had a policy where an LE-VS specialist would never go directly to the scene of a crime to meet with a victim without accompaniment. One officer described how they not only accompanied LE-VS specialists, but did so in full uniform and in a marked police car to establish their presence:

“Any time we take a civilian on a visit, we make sure there's a uniformed presence there with a marked unit. I guess you could say it's more of a deterrent, but when people see that—because if they see me walk up in a polo brown pants with just my little badge on my belt, it doesn't have the same effect as a guy walking up in a full uniform with a full duty belt getting out of a marked police car. So anytime we have a civilian with us, we make sure there's a marked unit there.” (*Internal Partner*)

Officers also mentioned how they would never ask an LE-VS specialist to go to a scene that was not already safe and secured:

“Typically our role, since we're police, we have to ensure that it's a safe environment for both of them. We don't necessarily search the entire house or anything like that, but we just kind of look for those clue indicators if someone's hiding in there trying to do something to harm. And then we stay on present with them to see if, aside from speaking to [advocate], they have other concerns that they want to share with us not at the time that, you know, it's a little more calm for them. But as far as standards go, we just make sure that the entire visit is safe before, during, and after.” (*Internal Partner*)

“We're not going to have them come out unless the scene's secure... We're not going to bring anybody into a scene where the scene is not secure or it's not safe or it's an active scene where there's, you know, danger to the victims or the community or anybody else.” (*Internal Partner*)

Aside from having a sworn officer accompany an LE-VS specialist to meet with a victim or enter a crime scene, one supervisor described a system by which LE-VS specialists would notify someone at the agency before they met with a victim at a non-agency location:

“If they're meeting a victim offsite outside of court and outside of the post, you know, they know to like either let post command, somebody at the, like the desk sergeant, you know, like “I'm leaving” or they do that with, you know, me or [supervisor], they text us and say like, “Hey, I'm going to meet such and such client for coffee.” You know, this is where and, you know, make sure somebody knows where they're at.” (*Internal Partner*)

An LE-VS specialist also described how she and her fellow advocates served as backup for each other:

“And we're always there as backup. So, like if you get called out in the middle of the night, you call your backup and I know where you're going to be and I know when you get home, so I know to check on you. Someone always knows if you're out on something, besides the radio. And in saying that, if it is like, unsafe, have someone go with you, or if you're not sure if it's safe. Like if you're going to someone's home,

definitely take another specialist with you or have an officer meet you there or the detective if they're available." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Two officers in separate sites mentioned intervening in situations where there was questionable or inappropriate contact between members of the public and LE-VS specialists. One officer described a situation in which he helped an LE-VS specialist deal with a situation in which she was experiencing "not normal communications" from a member of the public:

"She's gotten some strange calls from some from people, some that may not be, uh, you know, mentally all there. And she's asked for guidance, 'Hey, how do we handle this?' We had one recently that she was getting a call from a lady, middle of the night, and just very not normal communications. So, we walked through the process. We actually went next door...had a conversation with them, got some more background, and kind of figured out the best plan of approach in dealing with that lady." (*Internal Partner*)

In one site, the LE-VS specialist and law enforcement respondents shared how their agency had purchased radios for LE-VS specialists to use when they go on scene to assist victims. The professional supervisor described how access to radios meant her LE-VS specialists had access to emergency dispatch in case anything unexpected or dangerous to the LE-VS specialists occurred:

"I had to work really hard to get radios, because radios are very expensive. But it was really important to me that if we're going out on scenes or we are transporting people, we need immediate access to [dispatch name], which is our dispatch. We need people over the radio to hear that we are in distress. And like, I need someone to know where I'm going so they can check in. Because if we forget to respond back, they're going to radio to VSU one. Like they are going to come over and ask over and over, like until you give them a solid, "I'm good." So, like, I was just thinking in the interest of safety for victim services professionals, like radios are really important if they're operating in that capacity where they're going to things or they're transporting people." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Wellness and Self-care

Agency-level practices. There were many agency-level practices that respondents described as promoting and supporting the wellness and self-care of LE-VS specialists. First, agency leadership, including sworn and professional leadership, could demonstrate and support a culture of wellness for all their staff, including LE-VS specialists. They demonstrate this support by encouraging wellness practices, allowing staff flexibility for self-care, and viewing self-care practices as an important part of working in an LEA. One LE-VS specialist described how her leadership proactively asked about how she was doing, recognizing that wellness efforts targeted at sworn personnel could also apply to professional personnel:

"Even my chief sat down with me a couple of weeks ago and was asking me, "How are you doing? He's like, 'We're making this huge push for sworn, making sure they're taking care of themselves because the work is hard.' And he was like, 'And I was

thinking, you're not sworn, but you're doing the same things that they are, maybe more.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Respondents’ agencies also have created programs, initiatives, and activities that specifically focus on staff well-being and health. Examples that respondents shared included wellness units, staff retreats to build camaraderie in addition to professional development and training, employee assistance programs, and peer support groups. Staff may also draw on county or city programs that are provided to all government staff. One respondent participated in a book club with other colleagues:

“I’ve also participated in other things outside of victim advocacy, such as a book club through the agency, something just that is included as part of my work time. So I have a weekly book club meeting with other individuals who work for the [LEA] and that where we can talk about things outside of our roles and responsibilities and just kind of almost connect in a way that we probably would have never connected with before.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Respondents also reported having check-ins, meetings, and activities to debrief, decompress, and discuss traumatic events or critical incidents and experiences. These were regularized, frequent, and common within their agencies, and ranged in formality:

“If there’s a critical incident, the nice thing is that that team member can just ask how they’re doing without it being official, but being official because [LE-VS supervisor’s] in the team and so she can check in and then see if there’s anything more that she can do for them or if they need anything, and then loop in peer support.” (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists also reported being able to ask for workload adjustments, such as caseload reallocations, when they feel unable to support their caseload effectively. One supervisor discussed how they reassign workloads based on LE-VS specialists’ wellness needs:

“[LE-VS] specialists, I think, for the most part, feel comfortable to, you know, come and say, ‘Hey, I’ve had a really rough couple of days. Can I not get cases through the end of the week and I’ll start fresh next week?’ You know, if somebody goes out on something that has been really difficult and emotionally draining, we take that into consideration when we assign new cases and try to be mindful of their workload.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Some agencies even pushed for unit-level compensation changes, including increased compensation and switching part-time advocate staff to full-time positions that come with more benefits and stability. One professional supervisor described how she had been working to increase the salary levels of the victim advocate positions in the department in recognition of the stressful and sometimes dangerous work they do:

“I’ve been working with HR to articulate why they should be compensated for going out on scenes and working after hours. And I did essentially a compensation study for various agencies across the country that are like-size, that have victim services embedded in their departments.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialist-level practices: Wellness and self-care. When asked about how they practiced wellness and self-care, LE-VS specialists reported incorporating practices and programs that support their physical and mental health, including resources and personnel that provide counseling and mental health supports to all staff, professional or not:

“There were times when, or we still do it now, but we will just get up and walk around. So, we'll take like two laps around the building, just to reset. And then we'll come back and sit down. Sometimes, and I'm a little embarrassed to say, but sometimes we just get up and start to dance. There's been times where we've used one of these rooms and we'll put on a quick song and just start to dance, just to shake anything off that we have going on for that day, or if we had like a bad case, or we need to just let loose for a little bit, we will do that as well.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

“[LE-VS supervisor] is incredible. She knows her team extremely well because her background is in mental health and therapy. She probably has more of a touch point than a, you know, her finger on the pulse of her team more than maybe other, even me as a previous supervisor in victim services, because that's just not where I came from. And so, unless somebody was showing signs or you knew it was an exceptionally bad case, you know, where I would think to kind of check in on how they were doing. Whereas she just, innately that is just a part of her.” (*Internal Partner*)

LE-VS specialists also felt like they had specialized expertise and skills that helped them sustain their work with victims of crime and prevent professional burnout. This knowledge includes how to work with victims in trauma-informed ways and participating in additional training activities to deepen this knowledge. As one LE-VS supervisor explained:

“There are several like online trainings that we have them do that cover trauma, you know, different things, neurobiology of trauma, like all that kind of stuff. And then obviously almost all of our people are coming from CPS [Child Protective Services], so they've had a lot of that background as well.” (*Internal Partner*)

Some LE-VS specialists acknowledged that they cannot help all victims with all of their needs, and coming to this realization helped them not feel disillusioned by their challenging jobs. As one LE-VS specialist explained:

“I think it's also important for the advocate to understand that it's not happening to them, that it's not happening to you, it's happening to the victim... It's very important going into this work to understand, again, vicarious trauma, and also having those strong ethical boundaries in order to remain available and being able to continue to serve in the future.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Another LE-VS specialist described a situation in which she wanted to help a victim but in a way that the victim did not necessarily want to be helped. In her perspective, LE-VS specialists need to understand that they cannot address every need:

“I think that's what leads to burnout a lot, is like you see the situation and you in your mind know how you can fix it, but that's not maybe what the victim wants. And so, then you want this more than them. And then now you've spent 10 hours calling a bunch of

places that they're not even interested in going because you want to help them, and then they don't want the help. Like, they don't want that help. And so, I think something that's been really, really helpful is when I started here, the other supervisor that was my supervisor...she just reminded me that like, like I said earlier, people have [gone] their whole life without you giving them a ride to Walgreens. If you can't give them a ride to Walgreens today, it's okay. And I think just realizing that, like, I am not the only person in the world that can help people, and that we are part of such a bigger system. Like we do what we can do, but you can also—there's lots of other people that can help too.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists also draw on various sources of social support and find meaning in their social relationships, primarily with their families, including children and pets. LE-VS specialists also support and find support in their colleagues who understand what stress they are undergoing as LE-VS specialists and can be a source of commiseration and processing:

“I definitely, I need my people here. Like [colleague's name], I'll definitely go to for a lot of this stuff because you know, her and I having the domestic violence background. We're like, yes, we need to vent about this.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialist-level practices: Establishing work-life balance. Work-life balance was also a core component of wellness and self-care for LE-VS specialists. Because the nature of victimization means that victim advocacy can take place at any time of day, it was often easy for LE-VS specialists to work around the clock in order to be responsive to victims' needs. LE-VS specialists discussed several ways in which they established work-life balance, much of which is supported by their agency leadership.

First, some worked in agencies that allowed the use of comp time (e.g., allowing LE-VS specialists to work fewer hours later in the week because they worked a long evening for a case) and flex time (e.g., allowing LE-VS specialists to take time off if needed for personal reasons and make up that work later in the day or week). Some agencies also had paid overtime where LE-VS specialists earned a higher hourly rate for working beyond their allotted hours. One LE-VS supervisor discussed having comp and overtime as options but needing approval to use it to preserve work-life boundaries:

“Also, as a supervisor, you have to get your comp time or overtime approved. So, you can't just decide that you're going to call a bunch of people on Saturday and then expect to get compensated for that. So, there's kind of like a boundary there. So, you need to get approval first. And a lot of things can wait until Monday. And ultimately, we aren't the most important people in people's lives. Like, yeah, we can help, but if it's that emergent, they can call 911, or it can probably wait till business hours. And so, I think we've set that really clear.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Second, agencies allowed LE-VS specialists to take time off when they needed a mental health day or had a family emergency.

“[LE-VS supervisor]'s a great boss and she understands a lot of us have other circumstances outside of work, as you can imagine, we're real people. And so anytime something comes up with kids or parents or pets or anything like that, [she] allows us

to do whatever it is to where we can get our job done. Or if it's so bad that we're not going to be able to get our job done, [she] will read a report. [She] has no problem with doing grunt work so that we can handle things, so that we don't get overwhelmed. She's given us like two hours off in the middle of the day. Like, 'Hey, go do something and get yourself together and come back.'" (*LE-VS Specialist*)

LE-VS specialists also discussed strategies for setting boundaries between themselves and their work. This meant setting boundaries for when they would reach out to or respond to victims outside of regular or expected hours and how available they would be to LE internal partners. The risk of not establishing these boundaries is overwork and burnout that impacts LE-VS specialists' ability to do their jobs well and serve victims as needed. One LE-VS specialist discussed the importance of setting work-life boundaries for advocates' health and how it impacts their ability to serve victims:

"I think brand new advocates come in and they say they'll do anything, and they just work themselves ragged. And if you are ragged, then your victim sees it and you're never going to be able to promise and follow through with your promises. And they've already had so many promises broken that they don't want that. So, you have to set your boundaries at front on what you're going to do. And so, for me, that boundary was, I'm turning my phone off at 5:00 and you can't call me all night long. Like, I have a supervisor too, and he has to approve who pays for that overtime, right? So, it can't just be you call me like, "Hey, buddy, can I just ask you one quick question?" No! Right? We have a policy now and you can read that policy. But just setting those boundaries, I think, is number one. And everyone says it in trainings, but just to understand that it's for your mental health. But also, if you are that ragged, you're not going to give good services to your clients." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Supervisors, both professional and sworn, also encouraged the setting of work-life boundaries. Like others, the decision to work overtime or outside regular hours is something that is discouraged and done only when necessary and when approved or directed by supervising staff:

"Responding outside of work hours, we do not encourage that, like if they get an email or that kind of thing. But if it is a serious crime, and it's happened, they will contact the captain. The captain makes the decision whether to send them out or not, and they really don't go out that much because most of it can be followed up the next day." (*Internal Partner*)

They also devoted time to their personal life, hobbies, interests, and other activities outside of work.

"As far as self-care, I am all about massages and walks and making sure that I'm outdoors and things that make me happy and connecting to my family, having time to where I am able to just kind of decompress. I think that's really, really important. I blast my music as soon as I get off work so that way, I can just have a moment to decompress because it can affect you huge." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Challenges to LE-VS Specialist Wellness and Self-care

Lack of work-life boundaries. As many respondents discussed, a lack of boundaries with work and self-care practices can lead to burnout among LE-VS specialists. LE-VS specialists regularly experienced burnout on the job, which they explained is related to the nature of their job. A tendency toward overwork and burnout is also sometimes in the nature of people who choose to enter helping professions. They may struggle with not being able to fully help victims with all their needs and long-term healing and not being able to serve all victims due to caseload capacity constraints. As one LE-VS supervisor explained:

“I think the personalities you get that are attracted to this profession and want to help people, some people have to learn for themselves boundaries and what that looks like, because some people—like with some of the newer people, I've had to be really like, okay, but don't do that. Like, you're taking everybody's on-call shift when they need a break. Like you're going to burn out. You're answering your phone Friday night, like because the victim called, and you knew she was upset yesterday when you talked to her so you needed to make sure she was okay. Like you're going to burn out.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

One external partner recognized that advocates face the challenge of not being able to help everyone, which can lead to secondary trauma:

“And so that's the epitome of secondary trauma, right? Being present for someone who is experiencing trauma and not being able to do anything about it... And so that, I think that if you pay attention, like it comes up, it comes up a lot. And advocates are 100,000% experiencing that.” (*External Partner*)

Working alone. Because LE-VS specialists were a minority of agency staff, they could also experience loneliness or feel like other staff in the agency did not fully understand their challenges and experiences. One member of agency leadership mentioned that others assume LE-VS specialists had all the knowledge and training on trauma and therefore did not need additional support:

“I think [mental health support] needs to be available specifically towards victim services, because I think it's overlooked...it's overlooked because they're there as the specialists and they're exposed to it and they know it and they know how to handle it and they know how to deal with it. But do they?” (*Internal Partner*)

Being the only or one of the only LE-VS specialists in an agency hinders their ability to collaborate with other LE-VS specialists, which would be an opportunity to reduce these challenges:

“And another thing that I am very passionate about is for people who work in this field to be able to also be mindful about their wellbeing. And I think sometimes that's very overlooked, and we all will reach burnout at some point, right. But I think that if we're able to receive the tools that we need and the skills to kind of tune in to when we start to feel that way, it will be very beneficial in the long term. So also, being very mindful of how compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma affect us as providers. And I know

that—well, I can't actually imagine what it might be to be the only person doing this job. So I, in an ideal world, I say teams are always better, right? In that sense. Because then you have someone to go back to, someone to talk about, you know, things that you're having a really hard time with, things that need improvement, and really collaboration internally. Um, so I don't know if that's ever something that would happen, where there is a sense of team and maybe having more than one, right. Because I can only imagine to how busy [LE-VS specialist] might be being the only one to take on *all* types of crimes. I know how busy we are, and we cover three, right? So, and we're a big team, so I can't imagine how busy she may be being the only one."
(*External Partner*)

LE-VS specialist compensation and recognition. Agency-level practices, such as how LE-VS specialists are compensated and salaried, can also lead to them feeling like they are not valued within their organizations. This can then lead to turnover in LE-VS specialist staff, which decreases morale. In one site, the LE-VS specialists were not full-time staff. This limited their ability to access full-time employee benefits, including mental healthcare, which is something their sworn supervisors acknowledged:

"And if they had somebody they can turn to, a professional, I mean, outside of EAP or outside of that. But again, they're part-time employees, so they get an hourly rate. And you know what I mean? It's kind of one of the things. So it's kind of hard to, you know, say you have all these benefits as an employee when they really don't have all those benefits, but we kind of help them get those benefits." (*Internal Partner*)

However, these LE-VS specialists reported working beyond their allocated part-time hours without gaining full-time benefits:

"And I, you know, on paper...I only work [#] hours. [LE-VS specialist 1] only works [#] hours, on paper, right. But like, I can tell you, I work way more than [#] hours a week. I can tell you [LE-VS specialist 2] works way more than [#]. And we don't get compensated for that. Like, I have...completely poured my entire heart and soul into this unit." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

In another site, LE-VS specialists discussed how an "easier" job located in the same building paid more than even the LE-VS supervisor job. A supervisor was concerned that LE-VS specialists would leave for this job since they had the required education and experience and yet were being paid much less in their LE-VS specialist roles:

"And then retention. Yes, people aren't leaving yet, like but it's coming. The department has created another unit with very similar requirements to ours, except you're not on call and you don't deal with the public. You aren't in unsafe situations ever... And so, I've heard a lot from upper management or like my boss that like, but if people want to go to that job, they can go do that job. They need to be here because they want to be here. But like at the end of the day, money talks and people need money and it's still in a helping-ish—You still get to be part of the system and you still get to be doing something fulfilling, I think. They're in the same building, still have the same friends like, you know, I mean. Like if you like your coworkers. And you get to make more money... I'm not saying they should have less. I just think we should have

more. And it should be fair. Because right now, we're not even compensated for overtime. Like we don't get money if you work over here. And people have spent 20 hours on a weekend out on calls, you know, and you get comp time, like you don't even get paid. I think that's going to be a struggle with—it *is* a struggle with retention.”
(LE-VS Specialist)

3.4 Evaluability Assessment

Evaluability assessment (EA) is a crucial step in determining whether a program is suitable for rigorous evaluation. It increases the likelihood that further evaluation will yield useful information and minimizes the risk of lost resources spent on an ineffective evaluation (Leviton et al., 2010; Kaufman-Levy & Poulin, 2003). We used the following criteria to assess the extent to which each site is ready to participate in additional evaluation activities:

1. Goals and objectives are clear and measurable
2. Program components are well-defined
3. Caseload is sufficient in size
4. Program is fully implemented and sustainable
5. Program has the capacity to collect data needed for an evaluation

The rest of this section details our findings regarding these evaluability criteria, describes additional evaluation considerations, and provides our recommendations for future evaluation activities.

3.4.1 Evaluability Criteria

In this section, we assess the evaluability criteria for the LEV programs.

3.4.1.1 Clear and Measurable Goals and Objectives

As described in **Section 3.2.1**, common goals across sites included increasing capacity to provide trauma-informed services and resources, increasing awareness of VS program capability within the LEA, building and enhancing external partnerships, and sustaining programmatic staff and activities after the LEV grant ends. In **Section 3.2.5**, we also outlined potential short- and long-term outcomes that could be used to assess whether these goals have been achieved. Although the overarching goals for each site are clear, measurement is straightforward for some and challenging for others. **Exhibit 19** lists the key potential short- and long-term outcomes.

Exhibit 19. Potential LEV Outcomes

Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of victims assisted • Increase the number of external partners • Increase the number of internal partners who have been trained • Achieve steps toward sustainability (e.g., hire additional advocates or receive additional funding) • Victim satisfaction with services provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase successful victim outcomes • Improve the agency response to victims • Enhance agency awareness and knowledge of the VS program • Increase collaboration or integration between the VS program and other units • Increase agency support for the VS program

For the most part, these outcomes are measurable. Some are already being tracked through existing data collection systems and surveys while others will present data collection challenges (described in more detail below). However, it is important to note that the crucial concept of a “successful victim outcome” is difficult to define and measure. For example, a few interviewees described the challenges with articulating what “success” means for a victim. They describe how there is no one-size-fits-all definition of success because it varies by the individual victim and the situation. As shown in the full quotes below, different types of respondents (police chief, victim, and non-sworn internal partner) similarly described the iterative nature of success that victims may experience.

“Well, I think it varies on the victim and the situation. I mean there is the cases where you might have somebody that's victimized or has an abusive thing and maybe they figure out how to mend that relationship. And it's no longer, you know, a problematic relationship. So that could be an outcome. I mean, that's maybe not the one that we see a lot because it could be something that happens once and goes away. We never have contact again. We would have no way of knowing how that relationship ended without following up years later on with every person that's been listed in our thing... The other extreme would be, you know, where there's a court case and somebody is going through the process, the motion, and there's an adjudication of that and what does that look like? But I guess the true sign of a success story would be that the abuser and sort of victimization stopped. But how that, where along that path it stopped or how, I don't know that that's an outcome that you can measure very well or easily which probably leads into this. So, I guess success is that somebody is no longer abused or victimized, but that “how” becomes the end of that. So, I don't think that success always ends in arrest. I think the success ends in the stoppage of a problem or behavior. And it can go either way. You might have an arrest and you might have something that resolves in a different way, but you just have to stop the behavior.” (*Internal Partner*)

“So, you have your, you have your small success of just staying away from the area, the person or the situation that got you there. And then you have your next success, like moving, removing yourself completely and finding resources to build yourself. And then there's the next step where you, you're thriving. And this could be two weeks, two years, and everyone's different. Yeah, it's just depends... Like drugs, I imagine takes a long time to get over that, like it's 21 steps for a reason. It's fluid. I think that's the hard

part. It's like, well, this person did it really well. What was their support system like? As opposed to this person who's struggling?" (*Victim*)

"I think that this is where we have to look at it from the perspective of, I'll give one example that [LE-VS Specialist] talked about, which is, you know, those domestic violence where you go in and you go in and you go in, and you're you may never fully break that cycle, but are you successful in linking them? Are they learning tools? Are they, are you inching, **are you moving the needle**? And helping the quality of life that that victim has, even though the simple answer people want is, leave, get out, set them up at home. What does it take? Seven engagements. I mean, so what are we doing? Have we, are we following up? Hey, just want to make sure that your resources--are we looking at, you know, the, the hierarchy of needs that, you know, if they can't eat and they don't have housing and they don't have that, how are we, you know, how are we looking at that bigger perspective? I think so often we're focused on that crisis and providing services and providing that brochure, that crisis. And then there isn't that follow up afterwards to say, okay, I may not have made the change that would be our ultimate goal, but **did I leave that person in a better place?**" (*Internal Partner*)

This key measure may be the most challenging to operationalize and measure in future evaluation efforts.

Program goals are clear and measurable: Clear and mostly measurable

3.4.1.2 Well-defined Program Components

By design, LEV program components are broad and not well defined. They are meant to be tailored to fit the needs of each individual program and, as such, vary substantially across sites. They are also intended to evolve over time to meet the ever-changing needs of the agency and the community they serve. One LE-VS supervisor described how their program's goals evolved as new needs arise:

"Last year was marketing, was our goal like we have. So, two years ago it was collaboration and we really wanted to focus on a couple of our organizations in the community that were not getting along. They were kind of like at odds with each other and we were having a really hard time placing a shelter because of that. And so, two years ago we said, okay, how do we get them together? So, we formed this collaboration, and we talked about like how stressed they were about volunteer training, getting volunteers, and it worked really, really well. So, two years ago, that was our goal. Last year was marketing. And this year we're actually really focused on taking care of ourselves, working with and focusing on our unit. And that's been a really interesting experience because very recently it's been really rough but a really, really hard situation. And so, to me, I don't know, but it's nice to have an overall goal for the year because I think if everybody knows what that goal is and they're working towards it, it's easier to get there." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

As described in detail in **Section 3.3**, the core LEV programmatic activities include personnel, supervision, and policy; identifying victims for outreach; providing services,

assistance, and referrals to those they identify; developing internal and external partnerships and networks; managing and documenting programmatic activities; and planning for sustainability. Although these were common activities, there was substantial variation in whether and how these components were implemented. LEV grantees were given considerable freedom to implement the grant to fit their needs and were provided two guiding documents: (1) OVC's *Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime* and (2) a set of key considerations developed by IACP that provide general guidance that apply across sites, regardless of model.

Program components are well-defined: No, by design

3.4.1.3 Sufficient Caseload

Data from the PMT indicate that the average number of individuals served by each site ranged from 25 to nearly 1,000 per quarter, with an average across sites of nearly 300 individuals per quarter. This large range can be explained, at least in part, by the program type, agency size, and program focus. For example, Site 6 (n=57 cases/quarter) and Site 9 (n=65 cases/quarter) are both new programs developed by small law enforcement agencies. Site 8 (n=25 cases/quarter) is an enhanced program in a medium-sized agency; however, this program was very narrowly focused on embedding an advocate in a specialized unit. The largest caseloads were found in medium to large agencies that served mostly urban communities (i.e., Sites 2, 3, and 5). Overall, we feel that the sites have demonstrated sufficiently large caseloads to support an evaluation.

Caseload is sufficient size: Yes

3.4.1.4 Implementation and Sustainability

According to the PMT data, eight of the nine sites reported that they have other sources of funding in place and will sustain their program efforts after their LEV grant ends, and one site was still working to identify funding (as of Quarter 2, 2023). Interviewees reported that additional funding was most commonly in the form of long-term funding covered by their local government budgets or another type of short-term grant funding. A long-term funding source, primarily the city or county government's operating budget, was considered the ideal outcome and contributor to program sustainability. Some sites reported receiving another short-term funding source, primarily another grant. One site was able to secure another government grant to cover their program temporarily. However, not all sites described their programs as making progress toward sustainability due to funding challenges. As described in **Section 3.3.6.4**, respondents described how securing additional sources of funding, particularly long-term funding, can be challenging for several reasons. Primarily, lack of LEA leadership or local government support is a major obstacle to obtaining funding to continue VS program activities sustainably.

Program is fully implemented and sustainable: Mostly

3.4.1.5 Data Collection Capacity

As part of their grant funding, all LEV sites are required to submit a series of standardized performance metrics (i.e., PMT). Although each site has a system for documenting their activities, there was no one-size-fits-all approach. Sites used different systems and methods for documenting VS program activities and managing their caseloads, which primarily included off-the-shelf software developed for victim services and spreadsheets that agencies or individual LE-VS specialists created to meet their individual needs. In general, sites were pleased with the off-the-shelf victim services software. Some of the interviewees compared what they can do with the software to their previous experience using spreadsheets. For example, “I think it’s, the reporting has been really difficult. It’s gotten better since I have the software with everything into it. But when I was tracking it on Excel spreadsheet, yeah, it’s hard to put in every service that you offer every time you talk to the person. So that was a big challenge.” (*LE-VS Specialist*) Some participants described juggling multiple systems at the same time such as tracking specific activities in agency software and keeping more detailed case information in a spreadsheet. Although agencies and individual advocates had various preferences for which systems they use, the ability to track case information is critical. One interviewee described the challenges confronted when they lost access to a tracking system, including how it made it harder for them to validate their efforts.

“I think some of the barriers are the fact that there was probably within the 18 months that we’ve actually been receiving clients, there was three months that we actually had [victim services software]. So we switched to a whole new system and then they took it away from us. So then we had to go back to and then make up that data, make up all that data. And then we were just recently told that we were going to get it again and then it was taken away from us again. And so that from a case manager perspective is super difficult to transition from one way of managing to another and then reporting it out to validate why you’re doing what you’re doing more than just a feel good story.” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

We anticipate that sites that consistently used victim services software may be better situated to provide the data needed for a future evaluation.

In addition to the grant-required performance metrics, several sites also collected other data, primarily through surveys of victims or internal law enforcement partners, to better understand agency and client perspectives of VS program services and assistance. Six sites reported administering victim surveys. The modes of administration and timing varied across sites. For example, one site mentioned administering a survey to their clients using multiple modes (e.g., in person, over the phone, online) and partnering with a local university to help analyze the data. Another described sending surveys to their clients as part of their closeout process (most sites did not have a formal closeout process). Others posted a link to the survey on their websites, allowing anyone to provide feedback. Although advocates using surveys thought it was important to solicit client feedback, they also noted some of the challenges in doing so. For example:

“And so we had [survey name] last year, which is a survey that goes out to anyone who has a cell phone after an interaction with officer and just says, how was this? Was this helpful? So, we responded to 112,000 calls last year. We got less than 200 responses from our [survey name] surveys. I'm not sure that victims are going to be any more apt to complete it than the general population who just calls because an alarm. And so it becomes how can you get that feedback that obviously it's going to be a really big challenge. So I appreciate this. But yeah, I really I want there to be some real brainstorming on that.” (*Internal Partner*)

In addition to victim surveys, two sites administered surveys to their internal law enforcement partners, primarily to capture the agency's overall awareness of VS services, which is critical to their success. As one advocate described:

“There's only four or five questions and it was just to get a kind of a broad understanding and it was just the investigations unit first, because they would fall under that category. And then we did it agency wide. But the goal was to only take one or 2 minutes... One of and I don't remember a lot of what was said in it, but I do remember one person said, 'I'd like to know what she does besides a friendly smiley face.’” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Only one site conducted research with the broader community, which included focus groups to understand gaps in the agency response and guide their planning.

“And we wrote for a DV car grant where we had all this funding that was allocated to patrol after hours to only respond to domestic violence calls and really fully investigate, do all the follow up and do essentially what a detective unit would do. So, and then we did a focus group. We were really fresh for domestic violence again. So, we did we wrote a grant just to run some focus groups and to kind of get an idea like, what do people in the community think about our response [to] domestic violence? Where are we missing? Where are our gaps? I think there's just so many things that, like I constantly want to learn and I feel like that's what I do is I just I have this list of things like, oh, this seems like this is a bigger priority because this is what's happening right now” (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Despite systems in place and the capacity to collect certain types of data, the interviews revealed numerous challenges with collecting data and measuring key constructs that should be considered in designing a future evaluation. They also highlighted the value respondents place on data and their desire to have more and better information about their programs. Several respondents expressed frustration with the PMT data they are required to submit as part of the grant. This included the extensive amount of time needed to gather the metrics as well as the perception that the measures are inadequate and unhelpful. Concerns about the value of the PMT data are particularly important as these are the only outputs and outcomes consistently collected by all sites. As one internal partner assisting with the PMT quarterly report noted:

“So I think that the challenge with the PMT report, and I've even waffled over, **I don't feel like gives a big picture of what it is that we're doing or what the benefit of it is.** And I think that I'll give you one example in it where it says, you know, you're supposed to talk about where you are and all the goals and objectives. Well, by nature

the development plan changes, but there isn't. So we had a huge issue with the development. [Advocate] went in and renumbered everything and I'm like, Wait, but I'm reporting on the PMTs of where I am. And so trying to keep track of, of adequately, what we've accomplished and then what we're expanding to was a real challenge and spent a huge amount of time on that." (*Internal Partner*)

Other challenges included the ability to accurately capture the level of effort associated with various activities that LE-VS specialists engage in. The PMT includes a count of the number of individuals assisted or services provided; however, this does not capture the time spent building rapport with law enforcement, establishing a relationship with a victim, or identifying and providing the services a victim needs. As an LE-VS specialist explained:

"The way that the grant was written or whatever, only kind of allows certain things to be captured and stuff as far as data. And where it's not capturing the amount of times I'm in custody or the hours I've spent meeting and building rapport for law enforcement for us or just a relationship with the survivor to help them gain trust and get them services needed. It was not allowing to capture the amount of effort and time of getting scholarships or connected to education or employment and things like that to where a lot of my time is spent on that." (*LE-VS Specialist*)

Another common challenge was quantitatively measuring case outcomes. Although sites have anecdotal success stories, they are not consistently tracking quantitative outcome measures (e.g., services are beneficial, referrals result in successful engagement). However, they recognize the importance of collecting this type of data. As one advocate explained, "We can provide very great success stories. But at the end of the day, where are the stats behind it?" (*LE-VS Specialist*) Another internal partner thought it was critical to document whether their services are appropriate and beneficial, not simply whether assistance or referrals were provided:

"And in particular, my big piece is from a client, I come from a patient client support services perspective. Really, how can we do better from the organization, but **are we providing the most appropriate and most beneficial services to the people that we're touching? And I don't know that we are, and I say that because we don't have a mechanism to really assess that.... We're not looking towards outcomes.** We're not looking, we're not doing all of that, which I think that could really be beneficial for us.... But that, that's going to require more time." (*Internal Partner*)

Another participant described how it is even harder to measure whether the VS program is helping to reduce crime rates, one of the potential long-term impacts of LEV programs. Although data on crime rates are available, they recognize that any reductions in crime are hard to tie directly to their work:

"They want to see how it fits back into a reduction of intimate partner violence, right? That's what everybody wants to see. Is that [LEA] is doing their job to end domestic violence. So, when I got that response back, I had to say, okay, well, it's not really how that works, but what we can do is track something along the way of like number of victims educated or provided safety planning, those types of things. So, the response back was, let me see what your survey says. And let me see if I can pull something

there because the department wants hard and dead facts that things are improving. That's not always the case with domestic violence. And it's just it's different than an area that's getting hit by a bunch of car burglaries and then you put a bunch of officers over there or you put a bunch of pole cameras and then that stops. That's not going to happen with this. And unfortunately, sometimes the department and the powers that be don't understand that there's not a measurable outcome sometimes for that.” (LE-VS Specialist)

These challenges with collecting data and measuring key constructs should be carefully considered in the design of any outcome or impact evaluation. Additionally, the supplemental data collection activities, particularly victim and agency surveys, are essential to track some of LEV’s key outcomes (e.g., improved victim outcomes and an increase in agency awareness of and collaboration with the VS program). These metrics are not collected by all sites and not measured consistently when they are collected. External research support would likely be needed to increase programs’ capacity to collect and analyze survey data.

**Program has the capacity to collect data needed for an evaluation:
Yes, with the help of external researchers**

3.4.1.6 Evaluability Summary

We believe that the LEV program, and the system-based victim services field more broadly, would benefit from additional research and evaluation activities to help identify promising and effective strategies. The need and desire to better understand the effectiveness of LEV activities was also highlighted by interviewees. We provide an overarching assessment of each evaluability criterion in **Exhibit 20**. The biggest challenge to conducting a traditional outcome evaluation is the lack of well-defined program components. Another minor issue is the difficulty in defining and measuring some program outcomes. The intended loose nature of the program components and some of the definitional and measurement issues are indicators of the LEV program’s complexity. We believe that this is the key consideration in developing further evaluation activities for LEV, which is discussed in detail in the next section.

Exhibit 20. Evaluability Criteria Scores

Criteria	Score
Program goals are clear and measurable	Clear, mostly measurable
Program components are well defined	No, by design
Caseload is sufficient in size	Yes
Program is fully implemented and sustainable	Mostly
Program has the capacity to collect data needed for an evaluation	Yes, with the help of external researchers

3.4.2 Program Complexity and Evaluation Design

Although sites have the capacity to collect evaluation data and would benefit from additional evaluation activities, there are challenges that need to be considered in an evaluation design.

As noted in the evaluability criteria, the LEV program's core components are intentionally broadly defined, and a diverse range of outcomes are possible (some of which are difficult to define and measure), which reflects the program's complexity. This level of complexity has implications for evaluation design.

Traditionally, experimental designs have been held as the "gold standard" in evaluation research because of their ability to assess the causal link between a program and its outcomes, and quasi-experimental designs have been viewed as the next best option. Assessing causality is achieved using both a treatment group and a control or comparison group that demonstrates what would have happened without the treatment or intervention. As such, experimental approaches may rule out many threats to internal validity. Although these are powerful designs, they have several shortcomings that limit both their feasibility and usefulness for some types of programs (e.g., threats to external validity). Limitations to the feasibility of such designs are widely recognized. For example, in many settings, creating a comparison group that does not receive the treatment is either impossible or unethical. However, less attention has been paid to the conditions under which an experimental approach may be most useful. It is important to recognize that the complexity of the intervention and the relationship between the intervention and outcomes impacts how the results from an experimental approach are interpreted (Harrison-Evans et al., 2016).

Considerations in evaluating programs of various levels of complexity have gained attention in the field of evaluation over the past 20 years. Rogers (2011) developed a typology that distinguishes between programs that are simple, complicated, and complex (see **Exhibit 21**). On one end of the spectrum, simple programs involve discrete, standardized interventions that are implemented by a single organization and are expected to work the same way everywhere. At the other end of the spectrum, complex programs are characterized by being dynamic and emergent rather than following a tightly defined model to achieve a specific outcome. Complex programs are planned with a general model or guiding principles and are intended to develop as people become engaged and implementation begins. Rogers (2011, p. 36) argues that:

"Programs with complex aspects are fundamentally dynamic and emergent in response to needs and opportunities. It is not possible to report on these in terms of "what works" (as can be done for simple programs) because what "it" is constantly changes. Nor is it really possible to report in terms of "what works for whom in what circumstances" as the number of possible combinations is effectively endless, and results are sensitive to small differences in starting points."

Recognizing a program's level of complexity is crucial for designing a rigorous evaluation—evaluating a complex program as if it were simple risks producing findings that are inaccurate and/or not useful to the field.

Exhibit 21. Distinguishing between Simple, Complicated, and Complex Programs

	Simple	Complicated	Complex
What interventions look like	Discrete, standardized intervention	Interventions that have multiple components or that only work in conjunction with other interventions or favorable conditions	Non-standardized and changing, adaptive, and emergent in response to changing needs, opportunities, and understandings of what is working
Who implements them	Single organization	Multiple identifiable organizations in predictable ways	Multiple organizations with emergent and unpredictable roles
How interventions work	Pretty much the same everywhere	Differently in different situations (different people or different implementation environments), which can be clearly identified	Generalizations rapidly decay; results are sensitive to initial conditions as well as to context
Implications for reporting and using evaluation findings	Findings are about “what works”	Findings are about “what works for whom in what circumstances”	Findings are about “what’s working”

Adapted from Rogers (2011)

Simple interventions—such as those that are tightly defined, target few outcomes, have a clear relationship between intervention and outcomes, and have hard indicators (e.g., blood pressure)—lend themselves to experimental approaches because constructing comparison groups and interpreting the findings is straightforward (e.g., Drug A reduced blood pressure by 10%). **Complex interventions, such as programs with multiple components and multiple stakeholders that focus on softer outcomes (e.g., behavior change) are not as amenable to experimental approaches** (Harrison-Evans et al., 2016). For these types of programs, outcomes may be harder to measure, and comparison groups may be difficult, if not impossible, to create. **Moreover, the results of an experimental evaluation of a complex intervention may not be particularly useful since it is difficult to attribute observed outcomes to a single component of the program.** In assessing the value of evaluation results for practitioners, Green (2008) noted that context and external validity are as important as experimental control and internal validity for interventions where psychological processes, cultural contexts, and socioeconomic conditions may mediate or moderate the relationship between the intervention and the outcomes (i.e., complex programs). Because an experiment is a black box–type of design, the results tell you whether (and how much) an intervention influenced an outcome; however, without a thorough process or implementation evaluation and the substantial sample sizes that may be needed to test various mediators and moderators, the results do not shed light on why an intervention had this effect. This black box effect may not matter for a simple intervention with one lever of action and one anticipated outcome. However,

with more complex social programs, questions surrounding why and how the observed results occurred may be as important. For example, we may want to better understand what about an intervention caused the results or why an intervention did not work (e.g., the underlying theory was wrong, or the program was not implemented as planned).

3.4.2.1 LEV Is a Complex Program

The LEV program is intended to assist LEAs develop or enhance VS programs. LEV grantees receive TTA, where they are provided guidance “towards the provision of high-quality services (coordinated, collaborative, multidisciplinary, and trauma-informed) that address the broader needs and rights of all crime victims,” including an overview of key considerations and more comprehensive resources on some topics (e.g., advocacy parameters and documentation) (IACP, 2019). As such, LEV is not a well-defined program; rather, grantees are allowed to custom develop or enhance their VS program to meet their communities’ needs, as is appropriate.

Moreover, delivering victim services under LEV involves multiple stakeholders from three key groups: law enforcement officers, LE-VS specialists, and external community partners. The nature and extent of collaboration and coordination among these groups, including the various roles they play in addressing the needs of victims, is partially determined by the grantees but is also affected by each group’s willingness to engage. Grantees have more influence over LE-VS specialists and LE officers but considerably less or none over external community partners. Additionally, the services and support provided to a given victim is limited by what is available in a site while also fully customizable—not all victims will have the same needs, so they do not receive a pre-determined bundle of services. For example, while some victims may need only minimal assistance to understand how their case will proceed through the system, others may require short- and long-term support across multiple domains (e.g., housing stability and financial assistance) from the LE-VS specialists and various external community partners.

Many of the desired outcomes of LEV are soft, including ensuring victims feel informed, supported, and empowered. Other indicators, such as increased victim participation in the criminal legal process, are easier to quantify but are not necessarily easy to attribute directly to LEV (i.e., they could be mediated or moderated by various conditions or impacted by external factors). For example, if we found that LEV implementation was associated with higher victim participation, we would not know whether that was attributable to a specific aspect of LEV (e.g., positive initial interactions with a patrol officer, the LE-VS specialists clearly explaining the process, the emotional support and care provided by an external partner, and/or some combination thereof that we may not be able to disentangle) or something completely unrelated to LEV (e.g., improvement in police-community relationship due to another program or event).

In short, LEV is a customizable intervention that involves multiple components that are delivered by multiple stakeholders aimed at achieving a range of hard and soft outcomes at the grantee, stakeholder, and victim levels. Given the complexity of LEV, an experimental approach to evaluation is neither appropriate nor feasible. Random assignment to be contacted by an LE-VS specialist raises ethical concerns, and there are no readily available comparison groups. In most sites, LE-VS specialists made efforts to contact all eligible victims, so there is not a pool of

similar victims from which to create a comparison group. Some programs also have eligibility criteria, such as serving only victims of certain crime types (e.g., intimate partner violence), or other discretionary ways of determining who they ultimately reach out to, which introduces a selection mechanism whereby victims served may systematically differ from those who are not. In sites that used LEV funding to enhance an existing program, we considered whether victims served without LEV funds (e.g., an LE-VS specialist whose position was not supported by the grant) could serve as comparisons. However, the services and support provided by another specialist would not substantially differ from those that were provided with LEV funds. Indeed, we learned during the site visit planning process that many VS program and other agency staff struggled to distinguish LEV from their existing VS program. Some questioned their participation because they did not know if they could disentangle LEV-specific information from that of their broader VS program. As such, we do not anticipate a difference in experience for victims who were served by an LEV-funded LE-VS specialist or another one and the same LEA. Although the complexity of LEV suggests that an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation design will not render accurate or useful results, there are other rigorous evaluation designs that have been developed to accommodate complex programs.

3.4.3 Recommendation: Theory-based Evaluation

Theory-based evaluations serve as an alternative to experimental approaches—they provide a way to assess the extent to which a program has produced outcomes while also opening the black box and examining how and why the intervention produced the observed results (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2021). This approach to evaluation differs from experimental approaches by paying explicit attention to the contextual factors that help (or hinder) an intervention from working and using a mechanistic, rather than counterfactual, approach to assessing causality. For complex social programs, a wide range of factors or mechanisms, both internal and external to the intervention, may lead to an observed outcome such that it is impossible to attribute an outcome to one single mechanism. Instead, theory-based evaluations seek to understand the contribution of the intervention to the outcome. Empirical evidence is gathered for all the potential causal mechanisms, including any contextual influencing factors. Theories of change and logic models are used to articulate these mechanisms. Theory-based approaches have been used for decades to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of various complex programs, including intimate partner violence interventions (e.g., Paphitis et al., 2022; Rivas et al., 2019; Taylor-Dunn, 2016), adult social care (e.g., Malley et al., 2022), illicit drug use deterrence (e.g., Leone, 2008), deterrent effects of closed circuit television (e.g., Gill & Turbin, 1999), and a wide range of public health initiatives (e.g., Alvarado, 2017; Lacouture, Breton, Guichard, & Ridde, 2015; Marchal et al., 2012).

Realist evaluation (Pawson, 2006; Pawson & Tilley, 1997), a form of theory-based evaluation, focuses on the underlying program theory and the conditions supporting the program. The emphasis is on identifying the most promising context-mechanism-outcome configurations (CMOCs), or how the program is supposed to work and under what conditions. Mechanism refers to the process that brings about the outcome of interest (e.g., participant reactions to program activities), and context refers to the circumstances or settings that may impact whether a mechanism can work as intended. Each CMOC can be viewed as a mini

theory of change that can be assessed against empirical data. In the rest of this section, we outline the LEV theory change and present recommendations for how it could be evaluated using a mechanistic rather than a counterfactual-based approach to assessing causality.

3.4.3.1 Proposed LEV Evaluation Design

An initial step in developing a theory-based evaluation is to describe the program's theory of change.

LEV theory of change. In the absence of law enforcement-based victim services (i.e., business as usual), some victims will seek information about the criminal legal process and/or reach out to community-based agencies and organizations for assistance, support, and services. Some may participate in the criminal legal process. Some may receive the short- and long-term assistance and support they need. Under LEV, LE-VS specialists actively reach out to victims to provide them with (1) information about the criminal legal process, (2) assistance to meet their immediate needs, and (3) referrals to other resources available in the community. Sworn staff in agencies with an LEV program are made aware of the available advocacy services and are also exposed to trauma-informed approaches to interacting with victims. As a result of LEV, we expect that more victims will receive the short- and long-term assistance and support they need, resulting in more positive victim outcomes, and higher rates of participation in the criminal legal process. In the long-term, this could result in higher prosecution rates and lower victimization rates.

Taking a realist approach, we have identified three preliminary CMOCs for LEV, and **Exhibits 22–24** map them onto the data that could be used in an evaluation.¹ For each CMOC, we first describe the anticipated outcomes and then work back to the mechanisms that produce the outcome and the context that may impact whether each mechanism can work as intended. It is important to note that many more CMOCs for LEV exist, and these examples serve to illustrate how a theory-based evaluation of LEV could be carried out. As described in more detail later, we strongly advocate that these mini theories of change, and all aspects of a future evaluation, are developed in collaboration with both LE-VS specialists and victims.

¹ Although Exhibits 22–24 include both short-term outcomes and long-term impacts, we recommend only focusing on short-term outcomes during the next phase of evaluation given the small incremental changes that are anticipated with the longer-term impacts.

Exhibit 22. LEV Preliminary Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration 1

Context	Mechanism	Outcome	Long-Term Impact
<p>Agency engages advocates, who have the capacity to serve target population (e.g., # staff, education/ training/skills)</p> <p><i>Program data: # victims, # staff, # service types, # bilingual staff (if relevant)</i></p> <p><i>Stakeholder interviews</i></p>	<p>Improved victim outcomes (e.g., victims feel emotionally supported, victims feel knowledgeable about how their case will proceed through the criminal legal system, victims are aware of other resources available in the community, and victims feel empowered to determine the best course of action; immediate needs are met)</p> <p><i>Victim surveys or interviews</i></p>	<p>Increase in victim participation</p> <p><i>Agency data on victim cooperation rates (pre/post); victim surveys or interviews</i></p>	<p>Increase in prosecution rate</p> <p>Decrease in victimization rate</p> <p><i>Agency data (pre/post)</i></p>

As shown in **Exhibit 22**, the primary outcome in CMOC 1 is an increase in victim participation in the criminal legal process, which could be measured through quantitative agency data on victim participation rates before and after LEV was implemented. We anticipate that an increase in participation post-LEV may result when victims have their immediate needs met and feel emotionally supported, knowledgeable about the criminal legal system, and empowered to determine the best course of action. These mechanisms could be measured through victim surveys and interviews (see sidebar).

Evidence supportive of this mechanism would include seeing both an increase in participation as well as evidence of positive victim outcomes. However, the mechanism would not be supported if we saw positive responses about victim outcomes but no change in participation (i.e., victim outcomes are not related to participation) or negative responses about victim outcomes and an increase in victim participation (i.e., victim outcomes are inversely related to participation). We would follow the same process to understand the impact of the context. We can only reasonably expect improved victim outcomes if an agency engages LE-VS specialists who have the proper training, skills, and capacity to serve the target population. This context can be assessed through programmatic data on the number of individuals served, the number of LE-VS specialists on staff, the number and types of services offered, and other program-specific measures of adequate capacity (e.g., bilingual staff are available in communities with limited English proficiency) and through interviews with LE-VS specialists and other internal partners. If sworn staff are not engaging LE-VS specialists or the LE-VS specialists are unable to serve the target population, we would not expect to see positive victim outcomes and, in turn,

CMOC 1: Potential Victim Survey/Interview Questions

- In your interactions with the LE-VS specialist,
- » Did you feel emotionally supported?
 - » Did you feel more knowledgeable about how your case would proceed through the criminal legal system?
 - » Were you made aware of other resources available in the community?
 - » Did you feel empowered to determine the best course of action?
 - » Were your immediate needs met?

we would not expect a change in victim participation rates. Data contrary to this linkage suggests that the CMOC may need to be revisited and revised.

As shown in **Exhibit 23**, the primary outcomes in CMOC 2 are that victims feel a sense of procedural justice after their interaction with law enforcement and are thus more likely to participate in the process, both of which could be measured through victim surveys and interviews. Sworn officers have the first interaction with victims, and this experience may influence whether a victim will engage with the process.

We anticipate that positive interactions with law enforcement, where officers use trauma-informed approaches during the encounter, will impact the extent to which victims feel they have been treated fairly and with respect. This mechanism could be measured through both victim and officer surveys and interviews (see sidebar). Evidence supportive of CMOC 2 would include officers reporting that they use trauma-informed practices and victims reporting that they had a positive first interaction with law enforcement, felt they were treated fairly, and wanted to engage with the criminal legal process. The mechanism, for example, would not be supported if victims reported that they had a negative first encounter with law enforcement and were not treated fairly but were still inclined to cooperate with the process or if victims reported having a positive interaction with law enforcement but still did not want to continue with the case (i.e., trauma-informed approaches by law enforcement did not affect the decision to cooperate). Regarding context, we could only reasonably expect that officers at all levels will use trauma-informed approaches if they agency culture is supportive of these principles.

CMOC 2: Potential Victim Survey/Interview Questions

- » Did the officer you first interacted with treat you with dignity and respect? Did they treat you fairly?
- » Did the officer ensure your physical concerns were acknowledged and addressed?
- » Did the officer listen to you attentively and without judgement?
- » Did the officer explain what would happen next in your case?
- » After your initial interaction with law enforcement, were you inclined to continue moving forward with your case?

Potential Officer Survey/Interview Questions

- » What are the signs of trauma that victims may exhibit?
- » Describe how you interact with a victim when you first arrive on scene.

Exhibit 23. LEV Preliminary Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration 2

Context	Mechanism	Outcome	Long-Term Impact
Agency culture supportive of LEV principles	Officers at all levels use trauma-informed approaches in encounter with victims	Feelings of procedural justice and police legitimacy	Increase in prosecution rate (e.g., charges and convictions)
<i>Stakeholder interviews</i>	<i>Victim surveys or interviews</i>	<i>Victim surveys or interviews</i>	Decrease in victimization rate
	<i>Officer surveys or interviews</i>	Increase in victim participation	<i>Agency data (pre/post)</i>
		<i>Agency data on victim cooperation rates (pre/post); victim surveys or interviews</i>	

This context could be assessed through stakeholder interviews with internal partners capturing the awareness and perceptions of trauma-informed practices. If stakeholder interviews reveal that agency leadership and others are not supportive of victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches, we would not expect individual officers to regularly use them. This finding would suggest that the context needs to be adapted before the mechanism will work.

In complex programs, it is possible that a given outcome will be impacted by multiple mechanisms. This is demonstrated in CMOCs 1 and 2, which share an outcome: an increase in victim participation rates. Changes in these rates may result from different mechanisms: for example, one deriving from interactions with the LE-VS specialist (victim’s needs are met, and victim feels supported, knowledgeable, and empowered) and the other from interactions with law enforcement (use of trauma-informed practices resulting in perceptions of procedural justice). If both CMOCs are true, we would expect to find evidence that victims who are more likely to participate in the process reported having positive experiences with both law enforcement and the victim advocate. However, if we found that a victim did not have a positive interaction with law enforcement but found the LE-VS specialist helpful, it would suggest that the advocate was the effective mechanism (i.e., only CMOC 1 is supported).

As shown in **Exhibit 24**, the primary outcome in CMOC 3 is that victims have their short- and long-term needs met across multiple domains, which could be measured through victim surveys and interviews (see sidebar). Because LE-VS specialists typically provide only immediate assistance, we expect that meeting victims’ long-term needs relies on victims being referred to external partners for ongoing assistance and support and engaging with the partner for services. This mechanism could also be measured through victim surveys and interviews (see sidebar).

CMOC 3: Potential Victim Survey/Interview Questions

- » Which community partners did the LE-VS specialist refer you to?
- » What types of services or assistance were you hoping to receive?
- » What types of services or assistance did you receive?
- » Were these services helpful in meeting your needs?
- » Did you seek other formal or informal help on your own?
- » Was this assistance helpful in meeting your needs?

Exhibit 24. LEV Preliminary Context-Mechanism-Outcome Configuration 3

Context	Mechanism	Outcome	Long-Term Impact
Robust network of external partners <i>Program data: # and types of partners; stakeholder interviews</i> <i>Stakeholder interviews (quality/level of involvement of partners)</i>	Victims are referred to external partners and engage with partner for services <i>Victim surveys or interviews</i>	Short- and long-term needs are met across multiple domains <i>Victim surveys or interviews</i>	Victims move from surviving to thriving <i>Victim surveys or interviews</i>

Evidence supportive of CMOC 3 would include victims reporting that they were referred to services, received services, and felt that their needs were met. However, the mechanism would not be supported if victims reported that they were referred for services but did not have their needs met (i.e., services are not effective) or victims reported having their needs met but did not receive services (i.e., victims are having their needs met through other means). We would follow the same process to understand the impact of the context. We can only reasonably expect that victims would be referred to and receive services if the LEV program had a robust network of external partners. This context could be assessed through programmatic data on the number and types of partners and through stakeholder interviews capturing the quality and level of involvement of the partners. If the LEV program does not have a solid external partner network, we would not expect victims to be referred to services, and, in turn, their needs would not be met.

In summary, we recommend taking a mixed-methods, theory-based evaluation approach to help the field better understand what is working in providing system-based victim advocacy. The recommended approach would incorporate a combination of:

- Administrative data
- Stakeholder surveys or interviews
- Victim surveys or interviews

The **administrative data** would include programmatic data from LEV to document various outputs (e.g., number of victims served, number and type of services provided, and number of external partners) as well as data from the LEA (e.g., victim participation rates). The administrative data would be supplemented with **stakeholder surveys or interviews** of LE-VS specialists, internal partners, and external partners to gather more nuanced information about LEV program activities, perceptions of the value of the LEV, use of trauma-informed approaches, and relationships with external partners. Finally, **victim surveys or interviews** are critical in understanding the effectiveness of the assistance they received from LE-VS specialists and external partners, the nature of their interactions with law enforcement, and their understanding of and willingness to participate as their case is processed through the criminal legal system. As described in previous sections, some LEV grantees are already administering victim surveys that could potentially be used for evaluation purposes. Moreover, the National Institute of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, and the Office on Violence Against Women have supported the development of a tool that may reduce the burden of initiating victim surveys in additional sites. Measures for Providers Responding to Victimization Experiences (iMPRoVE: <https://www.improve-tool.org/home>) is a free, customizable platform that helps victim service providers readily collect and analyze a variety of outcomes and satisfaction measures.

We also strongly recommend that any future evaluation of LEV take a **participatory approach** to the research. This should include engaging both LE-VS specialists and lived experience experts in a meaningful and ongoing manner throughout the evaluation. This could be accomplished by developing advisory groups with these different types of experts to provide input on (1) the CMOCs to be assessed, (2) key outcome definitions and operationalization

(especially the softer outcomes like victim success), (3) survey instrumentation, and (4) site selection.

Finally, although this report focuses on LEV grantees in the first three cohorts, additional programs were funded in FY2023. There may be benefits to including newer sites and initiating data collection earlier in the implementation process. Any future evaluation effort should consider the inclusion of newer grantees.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of the LEV grant is to help LEAs develop or enhance and sustain system-based victim advocacy within their agencies. Grantees were given considerable latitude to develop and implement their program to best fit the needs of their communities, which resulted in a wide range of implementation approaches. LEV programs were incredibly diverse regarding agency size (small, medium, or large), jurisdiction type (city, county, state, tribal, or other), program type (new or enhanced), supervisor type (sworn or professional), and number and type of community partners. Given all these differences, it is perhaps not surprising that we did not identify distinct program models. However, we did find a clustering of program characteristics such that new programs tend to be supervised by sworn officers, offer fewer services, and have fewer internal and external partners. This is not surprising, but it reinforces that VS programs need time to grow and evolve, and expectations around program capacity and staff responsibilities should be realistic.

In general, LEV programs sought to increase capacity to provide trauma-informed services to victims, increase agency awareness about VS program resources, develop and expand community partnerships, and sustain these efforts after grant funding ends. Sites sought to accomplish these goals through a core set of programmatic activities:

- Situating the VS program in the agency, developing a supervisory structure, hiring personnel, and developing policies to guide the VS program
- Developing eligibility criteria for victim assistance, identifying eligible victims who may benefit from assistance, and conducting initial outreach
- Providing a range of services and supports both directly and through referral to community partners
- Developing and strengthening partnerships both with individuals and groups within the agency (e.g., LEA leadership and line officers) and with external agencies and organizations
- Managing caseloads and documenting victim services activities to meet grant requirements and to better understand client and agency perspectives of the services, assistance, and resources provided
- Planning to maintain or expand programmatic activities after the initial grant funding ends

Despite focusing on a similar set of activities, LEV programs implemented them in very different ways. LEAs interested in developing, expanding, or improving a VS program should carefully consider how best to implement each of these activities. As discussed at length in **Section 3.3**, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, and agencies need to develop and refine their program to best meet the needs of their agency and community in a way that is sustainable.

We strongly believe that the field of system-based victim services needs additional research, evaluation, and learning to help identify what is working in efforts to improve the LEA response to victims and increase successful victim outcomes. Our findings also suggest that the LEV program is evaluable, with a few caveats. Given the complexity of LEV, traditional counterfactual-based evaluation designs are not feasible and would not produce actionable results. In lieu of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation, we recommend implementing a mixed-methods theory-based evaluation that triangulates findings from LEA and VS program administrative data and surveys or interviews with both stakeholders (i.e., LE-VS specialists, internal partners, and external partners) and LEV clients. This type of study would shed light on what is (and is not) working and why some outcomes are not being achieved (e.g., whether the current context is not allowing a mechanism to function as planned or the theory is simply wrong). The results can be used to refine and adjust theories of change to better reflect how LEV programs operate to achieve the desired outcomes. Through iterative learning and programmatic refinement activities, LEV programs can make the incremental adjustments that are needed to better serve their communities. Moreover, these findings can be used to support the development or enhancement of all law enforcement-based VS programs regardless of whether they received LEV funding.

Finally, it is important to highlight that there is inherent value in informing victims of their rights, providing them with information about the criminal legal process, and connecting them with the supports and services they need. We do not need an evaluation to tell us that using victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches in responding to crime works better than not doing so. However, the field does need information and guidance on how best to develop, structure, and implement law enforcement-based VS programs. The findings presented in this report and other products associated with this project have laid a foundation on which to continue learning about what is (and is not) working. Ongoing research on LEV is critical to assess how these programs can be improved to better serve victims, their families, and communities. Victims of crime deserve no less.

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