

Minnesota Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Program Standards for Victim Service Providers

LEGAL ADVOCACY PROGRAM STANDARDS

Programs awarded crime victim services funding from the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) must show continual progress toward meeting the expectations detailed in the Program Standards.

The goal of victim services funding is to increase victims/survivors' safety, ensure access to services that meet their self-defined needs, and create consistent levels of quality services. Program services must be tailored to the needs of the populations within the funded service area(s).

When funded to serve a particular county, grantees must have a physical office location in the primary county of business that can accommodate walk-in service requests. This requirement is waived for smaller agencies (defined as "less than 3 FTEs") working remotely, as well as for adjacent counties being served remotely by larger programs. Staff working remotely must be physically available to:

- meet privately in person when requested, at a safe, confidential location; and
- accompany victims to court and for other appropriate appointments.

OJP Expectations of Funded Programs

- A. Commitment to Accessibility:** Provide an accessible, welcoming, and respectful service environment. Provide services in a culturally sensitive and respectful way that honors and values diverse life experiences for those seeking services, and for program staff, leadership and advisory boards.
- B. Commitment to Using a Trauma-informed Approach:** Provide services in a way that recognizes, understands, and responds to the effects of trauma experienced by crime victims/survivors. A trauma-informed approach emphasizes physical, mental and emotional health and safety, and helps victims/survivors rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. Services need to be flexible to respond to the impact of different types of trauma, and on meeting victims' self-defined needs toward recovery and healing. For more information: <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/4-supporting-victims/41-using-a-trauma-informed-approach/>
- C. Confidentiality:** Programs are prohibited from disclosing, revealing, or releasing personally identifying information or information collection in connection with services utilized, requested, or denied unless: (1) the service participant has signed a release of information, (2) a law mandates disclosure, or (3) a court has ordered disclosure. Releases must be unique to the individual victim/survivor and circumstances, be voluntary, and cannot be presented as routine practice.

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1. Services

A. General Services. Address the legal needs of crime victims/survivors. Services include but are not limited to:

1. **Information:** Provide information about civil and criminal legal remedies available to crime victims; explain how to report crimes and its implications; and explain the criminal prosecution process and the victim/survivor's role in that process.
2. **Referral:** Discuss with and refer victims to the support services available to them from victim-serving organizations and social service agencies in the community. Identify available services such as crisis intervention, safety planning, legal advocacy, emergency shelter, emergency assistance, crime victim reparations, support groups, and counseling services.
3. **Legal consultation and advice:** Make suggestions and provide advice to crime victims about their legal options based upon the evaluation of the victim's particular situation.
4. **Legal representation:** Provide direct civil legal representation to crime victims for their legal needs related to their crime victimization, including, but not limited to, family law matters, privacy issues, immigration issues, and consumer law issues.

2. Staff Development

Provide a formalized orientation and training for new employees, volunteers and board/advisory members. Provide for ongoing training opportunities for their employees and volunteers, utilizing both in-house and outside training sources.

3. Community Education and Outreach

Conduct outreach and training to educate the community, criminal justice partners, and crime victim service providers on victims' legal needs related to crime victimization and crime victim rights.

4. Systems Coordination and Partnering

Develop working relationships with other programs, services, and systems who may respond to the advocacy and legal needs of crime victims/survivors. The goal of these relationships is to ensure the needs of victims/survivors are being met, and their rights are being upheld. Partners may include law enforcement, court services, legal representation, corrections and probation, other victim service providers, medical, education, social services, spiritual/religious representatives, etc. Activities may include training, collaborative work groups, information sharing, community provider networks, referral agreements, co-advocacy coordination, etc.