

The Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission VOCA Council of Advocates, November 20, 2002

Meeting Summary

Historical Background

Each year since 1999, the Michigan Crime Victim Services Commission (CVSC) and the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) have hosted a day-long meeting with a small group of crime victim advocates in Michigan. Each participating advocate is an employee of a Michigan agency that receives Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funds administered by the CVSC. Additionally, each advocate represents an agency specializing in services to one or more diverse victim populations, such as child abuse, domestic violence, drunk driving crashes, sexual assault, crime victims in American Indian communities, those accessing hospital-based services, and victims working with prosecuting attorneys.

These annual meetings serve several purposes. The CVSC is required to receive feedback from VOCA Grantees with respect to prospective changes to the grant administration process. Of equal importance, these meetings serve to enhance the sharing of valuable information concerning crime victim services in Michigan and allow the participants to network with each other and the respective staff members of the CVSC and MPHI. Following is a summary of the Annual VOCA Council of Advocates for Fiscal Year 2003.

I. Welcome/Participant Introductions

The FY2003 Annual VOCA Council of Advocates meeting was attended by:

Julie Boggs	Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, Detroit
Valerie Hoffman	Underground Railroad, Saginaw
Connie Lawler	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Shari Murgittroyd	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Deb Neibor	Van Buren County DV Coalition, Paw Paw
Hedy Nuriel	HAVEN, Pontiac
Ruth Oja	Hannahville Indian Community, Wilson
Leslie O'Reilly	Crime Victim Services Commission, Lansing
Victoria Reese	Safe Place, Battle Creek
Nancy Skula	Macomb County Child Advocacy Center/Care House, Mt. Clemens
Jennifer Sykes McLaughlin	Michigan Public Health Institute, Okemos
Katherine Tucker	Detroit Receiving Hospital, Detroit
Phyllis VanOrder	Battle Creek Health System, Battle Creek

II. Remarks from the CVSC-Open Discussion/Q & A

The following are the CVSC's responses to questions posed to the Crime Victim Services Commission in advance of and during the meeting.

1. *Does the CVSC have suggestions for communication and collaboration efforts regarding Full Faith and Credit Issues? PPOs generated from tribal courts sometimes have a different appearance and can cause confusion for other agencies.*

[NOTE: The Full Faith and Credit provisions of the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994 state that a valid protection order must be enforced everywhere throughout the country. A valid protection order is enforceable in the community where it is issued, as well as in the following jurisdictions of the United States: all 50 states; Indian tribal lands; the District of Columbia; the U.S. Virgin Islands; Puerto Rico; American Samoa; the Northern Mariana Islands; and Guam.]

Other than participating in the initial information-gathering phase of the Full Faith and Credit effort, the CVSC has not been involved in more extensive communication or collaborative efforts surrounding this issue. Misunderstandings involving justice systems operations, including those of Indian tribal courts, are probably not a unique situation to PPOs. We support tribal victim advocates and understand jurisdictional issues create challenges that impact their work. Tribal advocates may often encounter the need for additional advocacy when PPOs are not consistently being accepted by all court systems. However, VAWA does require there be Full Faith and Credit for issuance of PPOs.

[Comments from participants] The Law Enforcement Information Network (LEIN) and the registry of perpetrators do not currently reflect a collaborative integration of PPO efforts. This has created more concern for the safety of crime victims and additional work for victim rights advocates. Full Faith and Credit implementation and development training opportunities will be taking place over the next two years. This will be a good opportunity for victim advocates to initiate discussion of LEIN and the registry with respect to Full Faith and Credit endeavors.

2. *How do agencies know when a grant amendment request has been approved? Would it be possible to establish an amendment request timetable to provide grantees with at least four weeks to execute the approved changes before the contract expires?*

Amendments will be considered by the CVSC according to the following schedule for this fiscal year. Agreement Amendment Requests submitted with incomplete information will cause delay in consideration until the additional information is received.

- ◆ Submitted by January 1 - reviewed by February 20
- ◆ Submitted by April 1 - reviewed by June 20
- ◆ Final Agreement Amendments submitted by May 3 - reviewed by July 20

The CVSC will approve changes to the Agreement in one of two ways. If the change falls under the standard deviation allowance, the change may be approved on-line with e-mail notification to the contractor. The CVSC will ask the contractor to acknowledge this notification. A written Agreement Amendment will be issued for those changes that exceed the standard deviation. This written Amendment must be executed by all parties to this agreement before the modifications can be implemented.

3. *Are budget amendments needed when the change is within the allowable variance?*

The contractor is required to report the changes noted below **within 30 days** through the on-line Agreement Amendment Request process. The CVSC may disallow costs for those changes not reported within the required timeframe.

- ◆ Resignation, termination, or transfer of project funded or match staff. This Agreement Amendment Request is required **even if** the financial impact of this change is under the standard deviation and/or occurs during the 4th Quarter of the Project Period. The contractor must create a new Personnel Budget Detail Worksheet (PBDW) for new staff and adjust to actual expenditures of the PBDW for old staff
- ◆ Change of Project Director, Project Contact, Financial Director, or Authorizing Official
- ◆ Agency address, telephone, e-mail changes for agency or any of the above named Agreement officials

The Contractor is required to seek prior approval from the CVSC for changes noted below. If approved by the CVSC, a written amendment will be issued and must be executed by all parties to this agreement before the modifications can be implemented.

- ◆ Increase/decrease in funding for project
- ◆ Change in scope of project including staff qualifications, victims served, services offered, or project activities
- ◆ Budget changes in excess of the standard deviation

4. *How would someone know if their grant request has been changed before receiving the contract? Is it possible to discuss potential changes to a grant request before the changes are made, i.e. via clarifying questions to the applicant?*

At this time the CVSC does not have additional staff or resources to provide such additional communications and negotiations of every change in the agreement during the application approval process. The CVSC has accommodated this request by asking grant applicants to rank priorities of staff positions and all other areas of the budget. The CVSC will review the lowest ranked items to help guide these difficult budget-reduction decisions.

5. *What is the likelihood VOCA funds would support forensic interviews and medical examinations for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner programs (SANEs) and Children Assessment Centers (CACs) in the future?*

This issue will be addressed in the revised federal guidelines when they are issued.

6. *Since many people check their e-mail on a daily basis but do not check the VOCA website as often, is it possible for generic e-mails to be sent to grantees and/or applicants about possible changes to a contract, budget, or amendment request?*

The CVSC has requested that the contractor address this issue. There are technological issues to be resolved prior to the implementation of mass communication. Once these technological challenges are addressed the CVSC will have the capacity to generate automatic e-mails to all VOCA-funded projects.

7. *Is it possible to provide an update on federal VOCA funding issues, including the issue of capped monies?*

Please contact Leslie O'Reilly, Program Specialist, for updates on the federal VOCA funding issues.

8. *Could the CVSC notify all grantees via e-mail, fax, or letter of changes to contract requirements such as final report due dates, etc.?*

Changes to contract requirements have to be done through an Amendment process, so grantees will get written notification of any changes to the program reporting requirements.

9. *The CVSC has indicated that they are concerned about long-term VOCA funded staffing vacancies and these could be a factor in determining where to cut funds if Michigan's VOCA federal allocation is reduced. Are there any suggestions on what agencies should do when faced with the challenge of filling positions with the most qualified candidate in a timely manner? Would it be best to fill the position quickly rather than waiting for the most qualified candidate to avoid funding cuts?*

Agency applications demonstrate the need for staffing at a particular level. The agreement reflects the approved staffing level; contractors have an obligation to staff the project as indicated. According to the agreement you must provide the CVSC with an update on a vacancy within 30 days, the second notice in 60 days, and again after 90 days. If the position remains vacant contractors can assume that they will have to further justify continuing support for that position. If agencies experience quick turnover in certain positions, contractors may consider continuous recruitment of staff for these positions.

10. *Is it a VOCA federal requirement that the grant contract must be read to the grant recipients?*

It is not a federal requirement, but it is a Commission requirement. Administrators of VOCA grants have expressed that the grant award workshops have been helpful in the past.

11. *Is it a federal mandate that all grant recipients attend an annual workshop? And if so, is it possible to have one for new grant recipients and one for seasoned grant recipients?*

The federal guidelines do not require that we hold grant award workshops. However, a number of these frequently asked questions are covered in the workshops. The CVSC has offered the grant application and reporting workshops as the CVSC implemented new technologies. We had an abundance of new information to share with our grantees and we required our grantees to attend. These workshops are the only opportunities the CVSC has to share that information in a cost-effective, efficient manner. It may be a good idea to hold separate workshops, or even sessions,

for new and seasoned grantees because new attendees may be intimidated by the whole process and may not feel comfortable asking questions. But in addition to a networking opportunity, we also rely on the seasoned people in those workshops to pose clarifying questions.

[NOTE: Participants also suggested VOCA grantees be divided into groups according to their service population (e.g. child advocacy or domestic violence) so more attention can be given to answering questions specifically related to that victim population, data collection, and reporting. The Commission relayed that it will consider this. However, current budget constraints do not allow for these additional training sessions.]

III. VOCA On-line Application & Reporting Processes

The VOCA on-line application and reporting processes have been well received and utilized by grantees. On-line improvements and updates, shaped by input from grantees, are ongoing efforts for the CVSC. To better assist grantees with on-line functions, a help-line (1-800-820-1890) is now operational from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday. VOCA grantees calling the help-line should provide a name, the agency's name, the grant you are working on, and a description of the problem you have encountered. Whenever on-line changes or updates are implemented, we are likely to experience some technical challenges. With the help desk available these technical issues should be addressed quickly.

IV. *The Michigan Advocate* VOCA Newsletter

The Michigan Advocate, a twice-yearly publication generated by the CVSC and MPHI, was created to help share information matters relating to crime victim services in Michigan. Recipients of *The Michigan Advocate* include all VOCA grantees, state programs serving crime victims, prosecuting attorney offices, national association colleagues, and federal offices. The meeting participants discussed article topics from the previous year and suggestions for upcoming issues. The CVSC and MPHI extended an invitation to participants to propose topic ideas, nominate authors, and/or author an article.

The CVSC and MPHI are discussing converting all editions of *The Michigan Advocate* into an electronic format to be shared easily with a wider audience. The CVSC encourages all VOCA Grantees who are interested in authoring an article or suggesting a topic to contact Jennifer Sykes McLaughlin, Managing Editor, at (517) 324-8387 or jsykes@mphi.org at the Michigan Public Health Institute.

V. Grant Compliance & Needs Assessment

The close of Fiscal Year 2002 (October 1, 2001 – September 30, 2002) marked the completion of the first 4-year-cycle of VOCA Grant Compliance and Needs Assessment site reviews. A total of 88 agencies throughout Michigan were reviewed during that period. The second round of site reviews will commence in Fiscal Year 2003 in December. Despite some significant changes in VOCA Grant processes in the last four years, data-collection for the site reviews will remain generally consistent during the second cycle of site reviews. Participants were asked to share recommendations for improving the Grant Compliance & Needs Assessment review instrument, as well as the process itself. The following is a short summary of the suggestions offered:

- ◆ The Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board (DVPTB) Review has a very different process than the CVSC. It is a three-day long peer-review process in which three people from the DVPTB and three peers who work in victim services are present during the visit. It is helpful to have an opportunity to converse with peers who are experts in the field with whom you can share ideas and resources.
- ◆ It was suggested that one month to prepare for a site visit after receiving the self-review checklist is not sufficient time for all/some agencies. Participants suggested sending the self-review checklist to all agencies scheduled for review 3-4 months before the site visit.
- ◆ It was suggested that the level of detail in the Service Identification Section of the site review process was unnecessary and cumbersome for the agency staff to answer. Such questions as “How long does it take to provide counseling?” or “How long does it take to provide information/referral services?” are too difficult to answer because each client is an individual with unique needs. For instance, one client may only need five minutes to adequately provide a service, whereas another client may need six hours. This section takes a lot of time while providing no real benefits to the agencies themselves.
- ◆ Participants suggested the development of a user-friendly list of documents needed for the review to help them better prepare copies and relevant agency forms. MPHI has implemented this suggestion.

VI. VOCA Program Evaluation Trainings

Program evaluation is not only a funding requirement for most agencies, it can also drive improvements to services. To that end, MPHI has partnered with the CVSC and Dr. Cris Sullivan to conduct several trainings for VOCA-funded agency staff over the last four years. The most recent trainings presented in Fiscal Year 2002 focused on developing short-term outcomes, outcome measures, and reporting actual outcomes. Evaluation surveys administered after workshops continue to yield very positive feedback with respect to Dr. Sullivan’s presentation and the training materials provided. Council members were invited to share suggestions for improvement of the program evaluation trainings. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and no changes were suggested.

VII. Conclusion

Council members from all agencies, the Crime Victim Services Commission, and the Michigan Public Health Institute were each thanked for their participation and feedback regarding the process of improving VOCA grant management throughout Michigan. Council members representing VOCA-funded agencies expressed their desire to hold the 6th Annual Council of Advocates meeting at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing again because of its central location. It was also recommended to perhaps schedule the meeting around deer hunting season so participants traveling from out of town will not have to contend with heavy traffic. Several council members thanked the CVSC for hosting an event dedicated to an open dialogue that both values the work crime victim service agencies perform and allows the agencies a strong voice in the VOCA Grant process.