



USER'S GUIDE

# EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING: A GUIDE FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

A DOCUMENT DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT THE  
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS'  
EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING (EBDM)  
IN STATE AND LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
SYSTEMS INITIATIVE

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EBDM

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Advancements in the Criminal Justice System: Evidence-Based Practice and Evidence-Based Decision Making</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Purpose of the Guide</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Audience for VSP User’s Guide</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Why Should Victim Service Providers Participate in an EBDM Process?</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Becoming Part of the EBDM Process</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>How Do the EBDM Principles Apply to Victim Service Providers?</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Victim Service Providers as an Integral Part of an EBDM Process: What Would an Ideal Scenario Look Like?</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Common Interests and Potential Challenges/Solutions</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Postscript: A Holistic Approach to Serving Victim Needs</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Why Is It Important to Victims for Victim Service Providers to Understand the Purpose and Use of Risk/Needs Assessment Tools?</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Tools/Resources</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Appendix 3: References</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Additional Resources</b> .....	<b>30</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Victim service providers (VSPs)<sup>1</sup> are relatively new stakeholders in the criminal justice process (Office for Victims of Crime [OVC], 2013). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, VSPs worked outside the criminal justice system to advocate for justice and safety for crime victims.<sup>2</sup> As part of early, grassroots domestic and sexual violence movements, they challenged the criminal justice system and lawmakers to ensure better outcomes for victims in individual cases and fought for changes to the law that would recognize victims' rights and safety concerns. Those efforts were rewarded when, in 1994, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act,<sup>3</sup> and, in the following year, the

Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)<sup>4</sup> was created. Today, OVW's mission is to develop "the national capacity to reduce violence against women and administer justice for and strengthen services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking" (Office on Violence Against Women, 2014).

In the 1980s, a movement emerged to fight for similar changes on behalf of all crime victims. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan proclaimed the first National Crime Victims' Rights Week to honor victims and their families. In 1984, the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) was passed, establishing the Crime Victims Fund, to support state victim compensation and local victim assistance programs.

The Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) was established in 1988 and was charged with the responsibility of increasing public awareness of victims' rights through education initiatives and of funding research on the impact of crime on victims, on victim assistance training, and on the organizational development of victims' programs. During this same period, there was an increase in civil litigation on behalf of victims and increased attention to crime victims' legislative rights. States began to adopt bills of rights for crime victims; as of 2006, over 32,000 laws defined and protected the rights of crime victims (Edmunds & Seymour, 2010). Ultimately, Congress passed a federal law creating a victims' bill of rights.<sup>5</sup>

In 1998, OVC released *New Directions from the Field: Victims' Rights and Services for the 21st Century*, a report that documented the progress over the last decade in advancing victims' rights and providing services. In 2013, OVC undertook a new evaluation of progress in the victims' rights and services field, resulting in *Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services*, a call to action for a comprehensive, systemic, and evidence-based approach to addressing the needs of victims.

### TEN CORE CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS

- Right to be treated with dignity and respect
- Right to notification and information
- Right to be present
- Right to be heard
- Right to reasonable protection from intimidation and harm
- Right to restitution
- Right to information and referral
- Right to apply for victim compensation (for violent crime victims)
- Right to speedy proceedings
- Special rights and protections
  - Employer intervention
  - Prompt property return
  - Privacy (Edmunds & Seymour, 2010)

<sup>1</sup>Differences regarding a preferred title exist among those providing assistance to victims. Some prefer "advocate" to "victim service provider," as a title that more appropriately portrays their active engagement with and on behalf of the victim (versus a less active role of "service provider"). For purposes of this guide, we have elected to use the term "victim service provider" to refer to all individuals serving in a victim assistance/advocacy role.

<sup>2</sup>Some victims prefer the terminology "survivor" to "victim." For purposes of this guide, we have elected to use the term "victim" as it has a specific legal definition within the law and the criminal justice system.

<sup>3</sup>42 U.S. Code Chapter 136, Subchapter III—Violence Against Women.

<sup>4</sup>Originally, Violence Against Women Office (VAWO).

<sup>5</sup>Section 3771 of Title 18 of the U.S. Code, Crimes and Criminal Procedure.

## ADVANCEMENTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE AND EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

In recent years, while crime victims' movements have gained momentum and defined a formal role for VSPs in the criminal justice process, advancements in the criminal justice arena have occurred, with important implications for victims, victim service providers, offenders, and justice system policymakers and practitioners.

Decades of research have provided information on methods that are proven to be most effective in changing the behavior of offenders, and many jurisdictions are working hard to incorporate these evidence-based practices (EBP) into their policies and practices. Often, these changes are identified and implemented by a criminal justice policy team—a multidisciplinary team of professionals representing the justice system at the state, county, regional, and/or city level.<sup>6</sup> These teams are at the core of the Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems Initiative. . The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) launched the EBDM initiative in 2008. NIC is a federal agency within the U.S. Department of Justice. It provides training, technical assistance, information services, and policy/program development assistance to federal, state, and local justice system agencies and public policymakers.

Evidence-based decision making is built on the belief that decisions made by justice system policymakers should be informed by the best and most current research. The EBDM initiative was developed to harness the knowledge from a growing body of evidence that can inform justice system agencies' performance and increase effectiveness. It was also designed to address a lack of system collaboration around a common set of outcomes and principles.

It is important that VSPs be included in these multidisciplinary teams in order to ensure that the voices of victims remain central to the decisions made by justice system policymakers and practitioners. As will be described in this guide, VSPs are critical to the development of sound criminal justice policy and the achievement of public safety; for this reason, they must have a seat at the table.

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Examples of successful outcomes achieved by EBDM policy teams can be found in EBDM Case Studies: Highlights from the Original Seven Pilot Sites.

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<sup>6</sup> Criminal justice policy teams are generally comprised of representatives who are responsible for defendants/offenders at various stages in the criminal justice process. Typically, core members of a criminal justice policy team include law enforcement, pretrial, prosecution, defense, courts, probation, parole, and community and institutional corrections. Criminal justice policy teams may operate on a state, county, or local level, and membership on the policy team is determined by the jurisdictional focus of the team. In some situations, state, county, and local teams may work hand in hand to ensure a consistent approach across the state.

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## EVIDENCE

In the justice system, the term “evidence” is used in a variety of ways. It can refer to items collected at a crime scene, eyewitness accounts, or security camera footage. These types of evidence are referred to as “legal evidence.”

For the purposes of the EBDM Framework and this document, however, the term “evidence” is used to describe findings from empirically sound social science research. The Framework and this document refer to the results of this research as “evidence-based practices.”

## EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

Evidence-based practices are *policies, practices, and/or interventions* that are supported by research. For example, the use of an empirically based risk tool to determine the appropriate amount of intervention an offender should receive is considered an evidence-based practice.

## EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

Evidence-based decision making is a *disciplined approach* to using data and research to inform and guide decision making across the justice system. It is a deliberate process undertaken by a collaborative team that includes identifying mutually shared goals, analyzing current practice, understanding pertinent research findings, and adopting change strategies that will improve outcomes for individuals, agencies, systems, and communities.

## LINKING EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES AND EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

The connection between evidence-based practices and evidence-based decision making can be summarized as follows: an EBDM approach seeks to engage and organize the entire justice system in aligning policy and practice with research evidence (EBP) to reduce harm and improve systemwide outcomes.

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## PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to prepare and assist VSPs to become part of an EBDM policy team, as outlined in [A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems](#). To help prepare VSPs for this role, the guide provides:

- a rationale for VSPs to become involved with the policy team;
- an examination of the benefits that can accrue from the participation of VSPs in the EBDM process;
- a description of how VSPs can become part of the EBDM process and how the EBDM principles apply to their work;
- an exploration of common interests and potential challenges and barriers that VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders collectively face while engaging in this work, and possible solutions;
- a link to a primer on EBP and EBDM;
- a brief overview of why it is important to victims for VSPs to understand the purpose and use of risk/needs assessment tools, a critical component of EBP and EBDM; and

- links and references to other information and resources that can help VSPs to educate themselves about becoming part of EBDM policy teams and to conduct evaluations of their own programs.

#### INFORMATION ABOUT EBDM AND EBP

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Before proceeding further with this guide, users may wish to review the following materials to become more familiar with the concepts of EBDM and EBP:

- **A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems.** This is the core document for the EBDM process. It identifies the key structural elements of a system informed by evidence-based decision making; defines a vision of safer communities; and puts forward the belief that risk and harm reduction—including improved public safety—are fundamental goals of the justice system, and that these can be achieved without sacrificing defendant/offender accountability or other important justice system outcomes. It defines a set of principles to guide evidence-based decision making and highlights some of the most groundbreaking research in the justice field—evidence that clearly demonstrates that we can reduce pretrial misconduct and offender recidivism.
- **An Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) Primer.** This primer provides an overview of EBDM, EBP, the Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems Initiative, and the EBDM roadmaps.

## WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION?

“Harm reduction” is a term used to describe a reduction in the ill effects caused by crime experienced by communities. While risk reduction focuses specifically on a justice-involved individual and their potential to reoffend, harm reduction focuses more broadly on the effects of crime on the community, encompassing not only the direct results of a specific crime but also the impact all crimes have on the community. Harm reduction includes financial harm (e.g., costs of incarceration, erosion of property values, loss of business revenue); psychological and emotional harm (e.g., a loss of commitment to, or sense of, community among residents; the influence of criminal behavior from one generation to the next; the disruption of normal day-to-day activities); and the erosion of social structures (e.g., growth of crime cultures, increased distrust of the criminal justice system, the destruction of families). Criminal justice systems measure harm reduction by measuring improvement in four broad categories:

### Increases in Public Safety

Reduced harm to primary victims, fewer victims harmed by released offenders, fewer victims revictimized by the original perpetrator, a reduction in the number of protection orders/stay-away orders violated, and lower rates of recidivism overall.

### Improved Community Wellness

Reductions in the number of drug/alcohol-related traffic accidents, emergency room admissions, and fatalities; reduced child welfare interventions in offenders’ families; fewer jail and prison admissions for offenders with mental health issues; increased number of drug-free babies born; and more offenders successfully completing treatment programs.

### Increased Satisfaction with the Criminal Justice System

Increase in the number of victims expressing satisfaction with the criminal justice system’s response and willing to cooperate with the criminal justice system; increased cooperation of the general public; and an increase in positive media reports about the criminal justice system.

### Improvements in the Social and Fiscal Costs of Justice System Interventions

Decreases in the costs of incarceration; increased tax base; increases in the amount of child support and court fees collected; improved return on investments from treatment, rehabilitation, and alternatives to incarceration; reduction in the number of family members of known offenders who are likely to become involved with the justice system.

—A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems



## AUDIENCE FOR VSP USER'S GUIDE

### Victim Service Providers: A Variety of Perspectives

VSPs can make substantial contributions to the EBDM process. It should be recognized, though, that there are different types of VSPs: victim assistance, victim rights, men's violence against women (domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking), and restorative justice VSPs. VSPs may be community-based or system-based.<sup>7</sup> In addition, this guide takes into account the fact that, in some jurisdictions, victims may work with multiple VSPs, either sequentially or simultaneously, during the course of their involvement with the criminal justice system, and that there may be differences in perspectives among VSPs. The guide's approach, therefore, is based on assumed commonalities among various types of VSPs, such as providing information and resources to crime victims (including access to victim compensation and services); assisting with safety planning; and providing advocacy within the criminal justice system (e.g., keeping victims informed about the progress of a case, assisting victims with victim impact statements, notifying victims of hearings, and accompanying victims to such hearings).

Despite these commonalities, it is important that VSPs and EBDM policy teams recognize the differences that exist among VSPs, and understand that without a full representation of VSPs on the team, important victim perspectives may not be heard. One example of an important difference that may exist between community-based and system-based VSPs is that community-based VSPs may serve victims who elect not to report their victimization, whereas system-based VSPs are more likely to come into contact with victims after an arrest has been made or a charge filed. A second difference is that system-based VSPs may be more likely to engage with all types of crime victims in the course of their work, whereas community-based VSPs may be more specialized (e.g., domestic violence VSPs or sexual assault VSPs).

The information in this guide is intended to identify the role of VSPs—regardless of their differences—on these criminal justice policy teams and to prepare them to fully engage in the teams' collaborative efforts.

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<sup>7</sup> System-based advocates are employed by the criminal justice system, such as those based in prosecutor and community corrections offices.

## COLLABORATION AMONG VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

Becoming part of an EBDM process can bring community-based and system-based VSPs in closer communication with each other for the benefit of victims. Like their criminal justice system professional counterparts, some VSPs may operate in silos, independent of one another, each providing assistance during only one part of the criminal justice process: arrest, charging, pretrial, trial, or probation, for example. Community-based advocates may be more likely to provide assistance to a victim throughout a case, but even their assistance may be limited by the type of victim their program serves, whether they provide emergency or longer-term assistance, and—critically—their access to information about a case. System-based advocates may be limited by the duration of involvement with the victim—for example, prosecutor office-based VSPs may only be able to provide assistance to a victim through a trial or when entering a plea bargain.

Yet victims require services throughout the process—from the point of time when a crime was committed to the eventual discharge of the offender from the criminal justice system, and even beyond. They may need assistance with emergency services, seeking restitution, case processing notification, safety planning, and so on, at some stages or all stages. Unless VSPs work together to determine a systematic way of sharing information and providing assistance, there is a significant risk that victims' needs will not be met.

Working together as part of the EBDM process, community-based and system-based advocates can collaborate to conduct gap analyses (with criminal justice system stakeholders) on the matrix of advocacy services available to the victim, determine *who* is responsible *when* for providing support, and create models for sharing information and responsibility for working with victims, so that all VSPs are as effective as they can be. Collaboration as part of the EBDM process can be the first step in breaking down the silos that can endanger victims and affect their satisfaction with the criminal justice system.

### Additional Audience for the Guide

The secondary audience for the guide is EBDM policy team members. The guide seeks to encourage EBDM policy teams to reach out to, and include, the myriad voices of VSPs on the team, especially community-based VSPs (with whom criminal justice system stakeholders may have less routine contact), by demonstrating the benefits that can accrue to the EBDM process when VSPs are included.

## WHY SHOULD VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS PARTICIPATE IN AN EBDM PROCESS?

To put it simply, VSPs should participate in an EBDM process because it acknowledges victims. The EBDM process offers new ways for the various components of the criminal justice system and other stakeholders to work together to achieve a goal that everyone shares: fewer victims

### VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS' ACCESS TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM STAKEHOLDERS

Because most system-based VSPs work directly within government offices, they may have regular and routine opportunities to form positive and productive relationships with criminal justice system policymakers. Community-based VSPs may not have such opportunities unless the criminal justice system works with community-based VSPs to implement a collaboration strategy that is ongoing and entrenched. An example of such a collaboration is a Coordinated Community Response, a strategy in which all community stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement, pretrial, prosecution, probation, health care, child protection services, local businesses and employers, faith-based community services, and VSPs) create a network of support for victims and accountability for offenders (Pence & McMahon, 1999).

and safer communities. The process is designed to be applied to the criminal justice system as a whole and to all stakeholders in that system—including victims—at all decision points in that system. The participation of VSPs in the EBDM process promotes the inclusion of unique and important perspectives, and brings victims' voices into the discussion to inform and enhance the process. In the context of their work with the EBDM policy team, VSPs should see their contributions as part of a collaborative effort to improve the justice system.

### The Unique Contribution VSPs Can Make to the EBDM Policy Team

It is important to recognize the unique contributions VSPs, like other members of an EBDM policy team (e.g., law enforcement, pretrial, prosecution, defense, judiciary, probation), can make to the efforts of the team. Just as the perspectives and goals of other stakeholders may not completely align with those of one another, VSPs should not expect their concerns and priorities to align perfectly with the concerns and priorities of other stakeholders on the policy team. There will likely be a need to educate, deliberate, and engage in discussions that involve give and take in order to find common ground. However—and this is one of the important benefits of the multi-disciplinary collaboration that is part of the EBDM process—what VSPs can

expect is that the contribution they bring to the table will enhance the system's responsiveness to the needs of victims and strengthen the community's overall approach to offender management, resulting in measurable harm reduction that benefits both individual victims and the greater community.

Specifically, including VSPs in criminal justice policy teams can generate the following benefits:

### VICTIM BENEFITS

- Victims' satisfaction with their criminal justice system experiences will increase as the system becomes more responsive to victims.
- Greater satisfaction with individual experiences with the criminal justice system can generate greater confidence among victims and the general public in the system's ability to address crime and effectively manage offenders.

#### **PUBLIC SAFETY BENEFITS**

- Release decisions can be better informed by the participation of VSPs.
- Public safety and supervision strategies can be enhanced, resulting in better outcomes for defendants and offenders.

#### **BENEFITS TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

- VSPs will have a formalized avenue of input into developing criminal justice system policies and can offer a victim-centered perspective, raising concerns that might not otherwise be identified.
- VSPs can contribute to the collection of data and to the development of research intended to inform the EBDM process. In particular, VSPs, through their work with victims, can provide data on the number of victims served (which may include victims who elected not to report the crime to the criminal justice system), characteristics of victims, services requested, victims' satisfaction with the criminal justice process, and the changes in policy and procedure that may be put in place as part of the EBDM process.
- VSPs can help criminal justice system stakeholders who are unsure how to help repair the damage caused by crime—and who, therefore, find it easier to focus on the offender—work through their uncertainty by bringing victims “to the table” as a normal and routine part of their discussions. In addition, criminal justice system stakeholders may feel that their efforts to serve victims are more effective when directly informed by the participation of VSPs in the EBDM process (Herman, 2010).
- Individual VSPs participating in EBDM policy teams can act as conduits, providing policy teams with information and perspectives from a variety of VSP agencies serving a community, and providing a variety of VSP agencies serving a community with information and perspectives from the criminal justice system.
- VSPs can develop closer and more effective working relationships with criminal justice system practitioners, making it easier to reach out to them in individual cases and creating avenues for practitioners to reach out to them for their expertise and experience.
- Formal (organized) and informal (one-on-one) opportunities for training and education of practitioners within the criminal justice system may more naturally arise.
- Having a VSP perspective included in efforts to solicit additional funding, lobby for legislative change, or educate policymakers can have significant positive impacts on the effectiveness of those efforts.

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN VICTIM ADVOCATES AND SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In 2014, the Center for Sex Offender Management, as part of the Building Capacity to Reduce Sexual Victimization by Promoting Collaboration Among Victim Advocates and Sex Offender Management (SOM) Practitioners project (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women), conducted a needs assessment of 323 victim advocates. The project was designed to gather information about the perceived importance of collaboration with SOM practitioners, the extent to which such collaboration currently exists, what factors support or impede such collaboration, and what information and assistance are required to create or enhance such collaborative efforts.

### Perceived Priorities for Criminal Justice Outcomes

The needs assessment revealed that victim advocates perceived different priorities for criminal justice outcomes between victims and VSPs, between victims and the criminal justice system, and between victim advocates and the system. While it is important to remember that the assessment measured VSPs' *perceptions of* priorities for a distinct population of victims, the result can serve as a starting point for a discussion about the need to find common ground between victims, VSPs, and the criminal justice system; how to define the common ground; where critical disagreements about priorities may exist; and the role of collaboration in arriving at a consensus. The findings of the needs assessment revealed the following:

- VSPs identified *justice* as victims' top priority, with *retribution/punishment and reparation/restoration* ranked closely as the perceived second and third priorities of victims. *Specialized treatment and deterrence* were ranked as the victims' lowest priorities, as perceived by VSPs.
- VSPs ranked *reparation/restoration* for victims as the top priorities of VSPs for criminal justice outcomes, followed by *justice*. *Deterrence, specialized treatment and deterrence, and retribution/punishment* were ranked fairly equally by VSPs as the third priority.
- VSPs ranked *retribution/punishment* as the perceived primary focus of criminal justice system outcomes in cases involving sexual violence. *Justice* and *deterrence*, respectively, were the perceived second and third priorities. *Reparation/restoration* for the victim was ranked as the perceived lowest priority of the criminal justice system.

(Cont'd.)

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN VICTIM ADVOCATES AND SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT (CONT'D)

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### Shared Goals

Despite some of these differences in perceived priorities for criminal justice outcomes, the findings of the needs assessments indicated that VSPs believe that VSPs and SOM professionals:

- could share a number of goals, such as increasing community safety (97%) and reducing reoffending among known perpetrators (95%); and
- currently share a number of goals, such as increasing community safety (74%) and reducing reoffending among known perpetrators (69%).

Other shared goals included ensuring that the rights of victims were addressed, prevention, education, and increasing resources for both victims and sex offender management.

### Collaboration

Even though results pointed to a low incidence of current collaboration (62% indicated that collaboration never or rarely happens), the findings of the needs assessment indicated that VSPs:

- strongly support (98%) collaboration with SOM communities (e.g., criminal justice system, treatment providers);
- believe that a multidisciplinary collaborative approach is an effective strategy in sex offender management (88%); and
- feel that the timing is good for collaboration efforts (96%).

Identified common barriers to collaboration between VSP and SOM professionals included perceived competing interests, limited or no exposure to promising examples/models, a lack of clarity regarding their respective roles and responsibilities, demanding workloads, the lack of cross-training opportunities, and limited opportunities to interact with one another. Victim service providers identified the need for training, technical assistance, and resources to maximize this window of opportunity and their ability to collaborate effectively. These identified needs are supported by VSP responses to questions related to their understanding of best practices; while most respondents indicated confidence in their understanding of matters specific to their roles as VSPs, they indicated less confidence in their understanding of “what works” with regard to sex offender management strategies.

## BECOMING PART OF THE EBDM PROCESS

The first step in becoming part of an EBDM process is to become a member of the EBDM policy team. A fundamental principle of EBDM policy teams is that all members are equal partners, sharing in the decision making processes and governing of the team. This will require VSPs, like

### TEN THINGS YOUR POLICY TEAM SHOULD DO

1. **Include VSPs as equal partners on the EBDM policy team.**
2. **Ensure all VSP perspectives are included on the team.**
3. **Share leadership with VSPs.**
4. **Meet the VSPs' needs regarding the confidentiality of victims.**
5. **Include VSPs in formal trainings for criminal justice system staff.**
6. **Participate in trainings conducted by VSPs.**
7. **Include VSPs in data collection efforts.**
8. **Share data collected as part of the EBDM process with all members of the EBDM policy team (including VSPs).**
9. **Include VSPs in efforts to communicate the work of the team to a larger audience.**
10. **Partner with VSPs to identify resources for the team.**

all other members of the team, to engage in thoughtful discussions with other team members about their purpose in coming together, to determine individual roles and responsibilities within the partnership, and to identify any limits that may exist with regard to information and resource sharing. Such transparency on the part of everyone involved in the EBDM policy team encourages trust among the members and minimizes the potential for future conflicts. Agreements made among the members of the EBDM policy team should be written down and referenced when necessary to resolve questions about policy and procedure. It is particularly useful if the results of these discussions are formalized in a charter, or memorandum of understanding (MOU), and oftentimes signed by all parties to the policy team. Cross-training and education among EBDM policy team members is often used as a method for fostering collaboration and addressing concerns, as all parties of the team gain a greater understanding of each agency's obligations and responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

Confidentiality is an issue that will likely be critical to both VSPs and other criminal justice system members of the EBDM policy team. It must be recognized that policy discussions held by the team will need to be shared with policy team members' agency staff in order for change to be implemented—this will be true for VSPs and their agencies as well as criminal justice system agency staff—while adhering to federal, state, and local laws, as well as agency policies, regarding confidentiality. Questions that will need to be asked and answered by the team are:

- What kinds of information will be shared with non-team members? This may include information that will allow each agency to consider the impact, on the agency, of policy and procedure changes proposed by the team, such as the factors that the team considered before recommending a policy change.
- When will information be kept confidential within the policy team? Confidentiality may include information that maintains trust, honesty, and respect among team members, such as information about the internal functioning of the team during the course of vigorous debate.
- How will team members handle questions from the press? It is critical that members of the team respond “with one voice.” This unity is necessary not only to maintain trust within the team but also to gain the trust of the public in the EBDM process.

<sup>8</sup>There are codified steps to building a genuine, collaborative EBDM policy team. These steps are outlined in the [EBDM Starter Kit](#).

Once agreement among the policy team members is reached, these rules should be included in the MOU so that there isn't any confusion about what information can (and sometimes should) be shared outside the team meetings.

### What EBDM Means to VSPs

Engaging in an EBDM process typically results in changes in policy and practice that affect all members of the EBDM policy team. As a result of their participation in the EBDM process, VSPs may make changes to their current (common) practices, or add new practices, to bring them into greater alignment with research-based practice. The following chart reflects some of the changes in, or additions to, VSP practices that *may* result.

TRADITIONAL PRACTICE	POTENTIAL CHANGES IN PRACTICE
VSPs speak to victims immediately following the incident, share information about the pretrial process and the victim's rights, offer support services, and prepare a recommendation for pretrial release that is informed by the victim's preference.	VSP responders are knowledgeable about the pretrial risk assessment process and equipped to explain to the victim what information the criminal justice system decision makers may consider relevant to determining an individual's pretrial risk. This will enable VSPs to gather information from the victim that is pertinent to the risk assessment and provide this information to appropriate parties (e.g., pretrial staff preparing pretrial release recommendations, prosecutors).
VSPs and probation officers operate in relative isolation (i.e., VSPs working with victims and probation officers working with offenders) to address the needs of each.	VSPs and probation officers work collaboratively to develop safety plans for victims and to share information regarding supervision conditions and adherence to those conditions, and are knowledgeable about offenders' activities in the community.
VSP organizations evaluate programmatic success based upon the number of victims served (e.g., the number of shelter beds provided, the number of safety plans created).	VSP organizations evaluate the system's success based on data gathered from victims served regarding their satisfaction with their criminal justice system experiences.



## HOW DO THE EBDM PRINCIPLES APPLY TO VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS?

The EBDM Framework is built upon four principles; these principles can guide VSPs in their work with victims, the EBDM policy team, VSPs' own agencies, and other VSPs. Following these principles may contribute to better outcomes for victims (e.g., enhanced understanding about why the criminal justice system is responding in ways that may seem contrary to their safety concerns, greater satisfaction with the system, increased engagement in the criminal justice system to the benefit of the criminal justice process) and more opportunities to educate and influence criminal justice system decision makers and, therefore, implement change on a systemwide level. Below is a list of the four principles and their implications for victim service providers:

### **Principle 1: The professional judgment of criminal justice system decision makers is enhanced when informed by evidence-based knowledge.**

#### **POTENTIAL ACTIVITY IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS<sup>9</sup>**

- Identify all the points where VSPs make, influence, or should influence decisions through their work with victims, including providing information to victims regarding their rights and assisting victims with making appearances and preparing victim impact statements.
- Identify all the points where VSPs make, influence, or should influence decisions related to defendants. This would include working with victims to make recommendations that will be submitted to the court at initial appearance and when determining what actions should be taken on a notice to the court of defendant noncompliance.
- Determine the empirical evidence available—either directly on point or perhaps from another part of the research literature—that would better inform these decisions.
- Educate victims regarding the research available, taking care not to influence their decisions but allowing them to make decisions informed by empirical evidence.

#### **POTENTIAL OUTCOME IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

- Victims report a greater level of understanding about the criminal justice system process.
- Victims report greater satisfaction with the criminal justice system process.
- Victims report a higher degree of confidence about the benefits of participating in the criminal justice system process.

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<sup>9</sup>The potential impact and outcome implications included in this section and those that follow are intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive.

**Principle 2: Every interaction within the criminal justice system offers an opportunity to contribute to harm reduction.**

**POTENTIAL ACTIVITY IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

- Identify all the points in which there is interaction between VSPs and victims. These are opportunities to educate victims about EBDM and the research behind decisions being made by the criminal justice system.
- Identify all the points in which there is interaction between VSPs and defendants/offenders, such as restorative justice, mediation, or sentencing circles. These are opportunities for the victim to communicate to the offender the degree to which they have been harmed, in order to increase the offenders' understanding of the impact of their crimes.
- Identify all the points in which there is interaction between victims and criminal justice system professionals. These are opportunities for educating these professionals about the needs of victims in general and the needs of specific victims. These interactions also present opportunities to encourage criminal justice system professionals to become more comfortable with engaging victims and to honor the important role victims/VSPs can and should play within the criminal justice system.
- Identify the research available that would make interactions between professionals and victims more conducive to harm reduction.

**POTENTIAL OUTCOME IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

- Victims report that the opportunity to be heard and have input increased their sense of safety.
- In some cases, victims report that the opportunity to interact with the offender helped alleviate their feelings of anger/fear/frustration/grief.

**Principle 3: Systems achieve better outcomes when they operate collaboratively.**

**POTENTIAL ACTIVITY IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

- Determine what formal and informal mechanisms are in place to aid in collaborative policy making toward improved outcomes for victims. Such formal mechanisms may include, among others, Coordinated Community Responses already formed between VSPs and criminal justice system decision makers.
- Identify past challenges that have been resolved with regard to collaborative policy making (e.g., unsuccessful previous attempts to partner with the criminal justice system in a Coordinated Community Response). Consider how those challenges were addressed and determine if there are opportunities to learn from or build upon those experiences.
- Determine what opportunities exist for increasing collaboration (e.g., funding opportunities that seek partnerships between criminal justice system agencies [such as prosecution] and VSPs).

- Determine a plan of action that will take advantage of those opportunities (e.g., meet with other VSPs in the jurisdiction and identify one or two priority goals, decide who in the criminal justice system is best positioned to help achieve those goals, and arrange a meeting).

#### POTENTIAL OUTCOME IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Victims report higher levels of satisfaction with regard to having their needs and desired outcomes acknowledged.
- Victims report greater satisfaction with the outcomes achieved, even if all of the desired outcomes were not achieved.
- VSPs report greater satisfaction with their interactions with criminal justice system professionals.
- VSPs report an increased sense of confidence in their ability to assist victims to achieve their desired outcomes.

#### **Principle 4: The criminal justice system will continually learn and improve when professionals make decisions based on the collection, analysis, and use of data and information.**

#### POTENTIAL ACTIVITY IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Educate and inform VSPs and criminal justice system staff about the importance of having both social science research as well as local data to understand/fine-tune jurisdiction-specific practices. Such research would include (but not be limited to) understanding the predictive accuracy of risk/needs assessment tools,<sup>10</sup> the benefits of specific offender programming, the efficacy of victim service programming and services, and how to improve services for victims.
- Work within VSP agencies to develop an EBP approach to evaluating victim services programs<sup>11</sup>—developing victim services outcome models (logic models) that examine the purpose, content, and sequence of activities designed to produce positive victim outcomes (e.g., victim safety, satisfaction with the criminal justice system, access to emergency services) (OVC, 2013; Voth, 2010).

#### POTENTIAL OUTCOME IMPLICATIONS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

- VSP organizations demonstrate measurable increases in success in terms of meeting victims' needs and desired outcomes.
- Victims express greater satisfaction with VSP programs.
- Victims express greater confidence and/or greater levels of perceptions of safety as a result of working with VSP programs.

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<sup>10</sup> For an overview of risk/needs assessment tools, see the *Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM) Primer*. For information on why it is important to victims for VSPs to understand the purpose and use of risk/needs assessment tools, see Appendix 1.

<sup>11</sup> For a list of resources that VSPs might use to evaluate their programs using an evidence-based approach, see Appendix 2.

## VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF AN EBDM PROCESS: WHAT WOULD AN IDEAL SCENARIO LOOK LIKE?

Collaborative relationships are often developed in fits and starts, driven initially by a core group of stakeholders committed to creating the collaboration, with the circle gradually expanding as the team recognizes voices that are missing from the table and the need to include other

### SYSTEM MAPS

System maps depict the steps in the criminal justice process and chart the key decision points in the process. A system map also indicates which criminal justice professional (e.g., police, prosecutor, judge) is responsible for making key decisions at each point and the amount of time it takes a case to move from one point to the next.

critical partners. In an ideal world, VSPs would be part of the collaborative team from its conception; however, when they are not, the opportunity is not lost for them to join at a later time and bring value to the process. Under the EBDM initiative, VSPs were included from the beginning in some sites; in others, they joined the team later in its formation. Indeed, some EBDM teams are still in the initial stages of identifying and including VSPs.

When VSPs are included in the policy team from its inception, they contribute to the development of the team's vision and mission, ground rules, and action plan. With VSPs at the table, the needs and concerns of victims are raised and addressed frequently, decision points that directly affect or should incorporate victim input are reflected on system maps, and decisions made by the team incorporate and consider (if not are driven by) that information.

Another key role VSPs can play—like other team members whose day-to-day role is more outside the system than inside—is to ask the critical question “Why?” Oftentimes, it is the people not involved in a daily practice who are best positioned to question routine activities and challenge those within the system to think differently about their policies and practices.

### VSPs' Involvement in Key Decision Points in the Criminal Justice Process

There are key decision points in the criminal justice process in which VSPs are involved as part of the EBDM policy team and in their work with victims. Exhibit 1, on page 19, provides a basic system map of these decision points. At each of these stages, the criminal justice system may engage in a process<sup>12</sup> to determine the risk posed by offenders. VSPs may work with victims at each stage to determine the risk the offender poses to the victim's safety and the best methods to minimize that risk. Ideally, in this way, VSPs and criminal justice system practitioners collaborate to make the best possible evaluation of an offender's risk and ensure the safety of the victim.

Exhibit 1 serves as an illustration; indeed, key decision points in the criminal justice process are important to victims beyond the assessment of offender risk, although this is typically a central concern. For example, at key decision points, VSPs work with victims to keep them informed about the actions of the criminal justice system and the status of the offender, clarify for victims what decisions are made at each stage and what those decisions might mean for them, help victims provide input into the criminal justice process, assist them in applying for the remedies

<sup>12</sup> Because these processes vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, it may be necessary to become familiar with the ways they are operationalized in the local community.

available to them, and help them understand why delays may occur between stages of the process. As a result, key decision points in the criminal justice process also represent key opportunities for ensuring victim satisfaction with the system. Exhibit 2, on page 20, demonstrates the intersection of key decision points for offenders with victim concerns and illustrates the myriad ways that VSPs may be involved in working with victims.

Each decision point also provides opportunities for VSPs to interact with criminal justice system practitioners; to share with them the needs and concerns of victims; to contribute to policy teams' awareness of the impact of criminal justice system decisions and timelines (e.g., limitations on shelter stays, deadlines for filing for restitution or unemployment benefits); and to increase policy team members' understanding of other victim service-related policies, procedures, and statutes in order to ensure victims receive services throughout the process. Each opportunity for VSPs to interact with criminal justice system professionals is an opportunity for an informal exchange of information about the needs of victims and the workings of the system, and an opportunity to improve the system's response to victims and further increase victim safety and satisfaction. Victim service providers who become part of the EBDM process have the advantage of not only maximizing these informal opportunities but of also engaging in more formal training efforts as part of the EBDM policy team.

**EXHIBIT 1: DECISION POINTS IN THE EBDM PROCESS**

EBDM DECISION POINT	CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE CASE
<b>Arrest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cite</li> <li>• Detain</li> <li>• Divert</li> <li>• Treat</li> <li>• Release</li> </ul>
<b>Pretrial status</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Release on recognizance</li> <li>• Release on unsecured or secured bond</li> <li>• Release with supervision conditions</li> <li>• Detain</li> <li>• Respond to noncompliance</li> <li>• Reassess supervision conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Diversion and deferred prosecution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualification for diversion</li> <li>• Qualification for deferred prosecution</li> </ul>
<b>Charging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Charge</li> <li>• Dismiss</li> </ul>
<b>Plea</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terms of plea agreement</li> </ul>
<b>Sentencing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence type, length, terms/conditions</li> </ul>
<b>Local and state institutional intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security level</li> <li>• Housing placement</li> <li>• Behavior change interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Local and state institutional/parole release</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing of release</li> <li>• Conditions of release</li> </ul>
<b>Local and state reentry planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reentry planning decisions</li> </ul>
<b>Probation and parole intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision level</li> <li>• Supervision conditions</li> <li>• Behavior change interventions</li> </ul>
<b>Community behavior change (treatment) interventions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duration, intensity, and type of treatment</li> </ul>
<b>Noncompliance response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response level</li> <li>• Type of response (accountability/behavior change)</li> <li>• Continued supervision/revocation</li> </ul>
<b>Discharge from criminal justice system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timing of discharge</li> </ul>

**EXHIBIT 2: INTERSECTION OF EBDM DECISION POINTS AND VICTIM CONSIDERATIONS**

VICTIM CONSIDERATIONS	EBDM DECISION POINTS
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim safety must be considered at all EBDM decision points.</li> </ul>
Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim notification should occur at all EBDM decision points, and victims should be provided with information regarding their right to provide input.</li> </ul>
Hospital/SANE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest</li> </ul>
Verbal, written, and in-person statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest</li> <li>• Pretrial status</li> <li>• Diversion and deferred prosecution</li> <li>• Plea</li> <li>• Sentencing</li> <li>• Local and state institutional release/parole</li> <li>• Local and state reentry planning</li> <li>• Probation and parole intervention</li> <li>• Violation response</li> </ul>
Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest</li> <li>• Pre-trial status</li> <li>• More likely at the early decision points, but always an issue if victim safety is at risk</li> </ul>
Protection orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrest</li> <li>• Pre-trial status</li> </ul>
Victims' compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversion and deferred prosecution</li> <li>• Plea</li> <li>• Sentencing</li> </ul>
Restitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversion and deferred prosecution</li> <li>• Plea</li> <li>• Sentencing</li> </ul>
Family reunification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local and state reentry planning</li> <li>• Probation and parole intervention</li> <li>• Community behavior change (treatment) interventions</li> <li>• Violation response</li> <li>• Jail and prison discharge from criminal justice system</li> </ul>

## COMMON INTERESTS AND POTENTIAL CHALLENGES/SOLUTIONS

Victim service providers and criminal justice system stakeholders share many of the same interests and face many, if not most, of the same challenges, and can—working collaboratively—find common solutions in many situations. Both VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders share a concern for victims and their safety, reducing the risk of revictimization, and taking steps to reduce harm to victims. They also share common challenges such as operating with limited resources, working with diverse populations, and navigating changing political environments.

### Prevention

Both VSP and criminal justice system stakeholders have a common interest in prevention. Effective prevention promotes greater safety for known, individual victims by providing them with assistance and resources to avoid revictimization, and for the general public by preventing potential victimization. Achieving greater safety for individual victims and the public reduces the burden on limited resources; contributes to a healthier community; reduces the economical, emotional, and psychological burden on the victim and the community; and fosters faith in the criminal justice process.

### Offender Accountability

Victim service providers and criminal justice system stakeholders share a common goal of offender accountability. The criminal justice system is the mechanism through which the public holds individuals who violate the law responsible for their acts and the harm they have caused. Ensuring that the public and individual victims retain faith in that system is a critical goal of the criminal justice system. Victim service providers are important agents in ensuring that individual victims experience a just outcome and that their rights as crime victims are respected. VSPs also can serve as important allies of the criminal justice system in educating the public about the system's responses to crime and offender management strategies.

## TEN THINGS VICTIMS WOULD WANT TO KNOW

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1. What are evidence-based practices?
2. What is evidence-based decision making?
3. How is the criminal justice system's definition of risk different from mine?
4. What is a risk/needs assessment tool?
5. Do I have a say in any of the criminal justice system processes? Which ones?
6. I don't feel safe. Why did the criminal justice system decide to release the offender?
7. Why is the VSP partnering with the criminal justice system, and how does it benefit me?
8. I don't want to report what happened to me. Will the VSP have to report it to the policy team?
9. Will the information I provide be confidential?
10. Why did people make the decisions they made with regard to my situation and the offender?



## Victim Needs

Both VSP and criminal justice system stakeholders are confronted with the often challenging task of addressing sometimes wide-ranging and diverse victim needs. Some victims, based on past experience or community culture, express a distrust of the criminal justice system and may therefore be reluctant to engage the criminal justice system at all. Others want to be fully engaged in the criminal justice system's response and may not understand the limits placed on their participation. All victims need to be supported in their efforts to deal with the impact of their experience, but the type of support needed may vary, from emotional or psychological support to restitution for their losses to other measures for dealing with the impact of the crime.

Through collaboration, VSP and criminal justice system stakeholders can provide the widest possible range of responses to victims. Although their individual roles in responding to victim needs may vary, collectively they can ensure that victims feel heard, that their concerns have been taken into account, and that they receive the fullest level of support possible.

## Limited Resources

Availability and access to resources, and ensuring resources are used as wisely as possible in a limited economy, are common problems faced by VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders alike. Both are often asked to do more with less. Criminal justice system stakeholders may be subject to state or local budget cuts, the implementation of new policies that increase costs, or hiring freezes. VSPs are often dependent on revenue funding streams that require them to compete for a limited pool of resources with other VSPs in their community or nationally. Because of these limited resources, VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders may be working with limited staff, resulting in larger than optimal workloads and increased stress on staff to respond to a myriad of work demands.

When VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders collaborate, they may find that sources of funding that were previously unavailable to them are now available as a result of their collaboration. For example, some grant funds are only available when applicants can demonstrate that an effective multidisciplinary collaboration is in place. In addition, by identifying ways in which common concerns (such as providing services to victims) can be addressed collaboratively, VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders may find that they can maximize the use of existing resources.

## Working with Diverse Populations

Cultural competency is a common challenge for both VSPs and criminal justice system professionals. It is a critical component of the responsiveness principle in EBP, which informs how

effective interventions should be delivered.<sup>13</sup> Cultural competency includes the ability of the criminal justice system to engage offenders and victims in a language they understand, accommodate the differently abled, and recognize the differences in cultural communities as they relate to familial relationships, social engagement, and the criminal justice system. The same is true for VSPs. Victim services must accommodate these same differences among victims in order to respond effectively to their needs, assist them in seeking services, and serve effectively as liaisons between them and the criminal justice system.

When VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders work together, they can seek common solutions to these challenges by sharing information on resources and sponsoring joint training opportunities for staff to enhance cultural competency within their organizations. Victim service providers working with victims from particular cultural communities can assist criminal justice system stakeholders in understanding the specific concerns these victims may have, and why they may not want to engage with the system. With a strong collaboration in place, VSPs may be better equipped to help victims from diverse communities understand the role of the criminal justice system and provide important support in victim/system interactions.

### Navigating a Complex Political Environment

VSPs and criminal justice system stakeholders sometimes struggle with negotiating a complex political environment. The stakeholders are often subject to intense scrutiny by the public with regard to public safety and offender accountability. They may need to respond quickly and effectively when an incident has occurred involving a high-profile case, such as a new offense by an offender released on probation or parole that has evoked public outrage.

VSPs are less likely to be subject to public scrutiny but may find themselves operating within an environment in which funding is affected by political differences of opinion. When VSP and criminal justice system stakeholders collaborate, they have an opportunity to create a powerful alliance that can overcome some of the challenges posed by a complex political environment by participating in joint efforts to educate the public, other stakeholders, and decision makers.

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<sup>13</sup> According to the responsivity principle, each offender's unique traits should be matched to services, service providers, and ways of working, to the degree possible, in order to maximize the potential for risk reduction.

## CONCLUSION

Victim service providers can bring important new perspectives and additional knowledge and resources/avenues to a criminal justice policy team. Research on EBP and EBDM has identified VSPs as vital partners to those efforts. VSPs should seek active engagement with EBDM policy teams, collaborating to implement the EBDM process within their communities, and criminal justice system policymakers should work equally hard to bring VSPs to the EBDM table.

In order to be an effective part of EBDM policy teams, VSPs need to enhance their knowledge around EBP so that they understand how such practices relate to EBDM and enhance the delivery of services to victims. In addition to being prepared to provide the EBDM policy team with a strong voice for victims, VSPs should consider how their own programs might benefit from an EBP evaluation and how such evaluations could contribute to the knowledge of the policy team and to the enhancement of victim services.

Evidence-based decision making teams are encouraged to include VSPs on their teams, making sure to reach out to different types of VSPs—including those who are community-based and those who are system-based—so that the different perspectives of these VSPs are reflected on the team and the local community can take its strongest stand against future victimization.

## POSTSCRIPT: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SERVING VICTIM NEEDS

According to the OVC's 2013 report, *Vision 21: Transforming Victim Services*, a holistic approach is needed to advance the field of victim services. Such an approach would bring together community- and system-based advocates, as well as other victim support service providers and criminal justice system professionals, to engage in deliberate and sustained collaborative efforts among these stakeholders and the victim community. The report offered four recommendations for realizing this vision:

- Conduct continuous rather than episodic strategic planning—targeting improvements in research, policy, programming, and capacity building.
- Support the development of research to build a body of evidence-based knowledge about victims and the efficacy of victim services.
- Ensure that an effective and responsive statutory, policy, and programmatic infrastructure is available to address enduring and emerging victim issues.
- Build and institutionalize capacity by employing the best in technology, training, and innovative practices to ensure the field remains responsive to victim concerns.

Much of this work must occur in the VSP community, among community- and system-based VSPs and other community services; however, some of these efforts can be initiated or improved upon through the collaboration of VSPs and the criminal justice system, as part of an EBDM policy team. Identifying gaps in services to victims and recognizing the need for a holistic approach to victim services—one that includes community- and system-based VSPs working together to ensure an effective “hand off” of the victim as they progress through the various stages of the criminal justice process—is an important aspect of EBDM and its focus on public safety, and should be of critical importance to VSPs and, indeed, the EBDM policy team as a whole.

## APPENDIX 1: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO VICTIMS FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS TO UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE AND USE OF RISK/NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS?

Effective offender management is driven, in part, by the ability to match offenders to programs based on their criminogenic needs; it is key to recidivism and harm reduction. Research has indicated that too much programming (in the case of low risk offenders) can be as harmful (and as likely to produce recidivism) as too little programming (for higher risk offenders). As noted earlier, reducing recidivism and harm reduction clearly benefits victims by reducing the likelihood of revictimization or new victims. Correctly matching offenders to programs based on their risk level can also allow the criminal justice system and VSPs to maximize the use of limited resources.

As part of the EBDM policy team, victim service providers should be involved in discussions that shape the policies and processes related to assessing offenders' risk. Thereafter, VSPs help victims understand what risk assessment is and why it is important, why a particular assessment tool was selected, the research that informed its selection, and the benefits that may accrue to the victim from its use. Victim service providers can also help victims understand how the risk/needs analysis may affect the criminal justice system's response at different decision points, so that the victim will have a greater understanding of this process.

Victim service providers can also educate victims on the benefits that may accrue to the offender when a proper risk/needs assessment is conducted. While some victims—unconcerned about the needs of offenders or dissatisfied with the risk/needs assessment—may not be supportive of offering services to offenders and may be resentful of a risk/needs assessment that could result in a less intrusive justice system response, other victims—particularly those who are in intimate or familial relationships with the offender, or victims who may identify themselves as part of a marginalized community—may welcome a structured assessment process if they believe it will prevent (or at least ameliorate) harsh treatment as the result of systemic bias or stereotypes. They may also welcome it as a means of ensuring that offenders are required to participate in proper programming (e.g., substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment) that will ultimately reduce the risk posed by the offender (to themselves and to others).

A greater understanding of risk/needs assessment tools, including their intended use and limitations, would help VSPs explain to the victim conditions of release, sentencing decisions, revocation decisions, and other criminal justice system decisions that may not coincide with the victim's desires (either for greater severity or leniency), which can contribute to addressing victim concerns, improving their satisfaction with the criminal justice system, and increasing their cooperation with the system. It is important to note that effective risk/needs assessment without the availability of appropriate programming in the community can make the criminal justice system aware of the offender's risk without providing the means to address that risk. Victim service providers will want to be involved actively in assessments and understanding the availability of local services designed to reduce offender risk in the future.

## APPENDIX 2: TOOLS/RESOURCES

Victim service providers may find the following resources useful in evaluating an evidence-based approach to their programs.

### EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

#### [A Framework for Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems](#)

The Framework is the principal product of the Evidence-Based Decision Making in State and Local Criminal Justice Systems Initiative. The current edition (fourth edition) is a “work in progress” that will be finalized after further testing at the EBDM state and local sites. The Framework identifies the key structural elements of a system informed by evidence-based practice, defines a vision of safer communities, and puts forward the belief that risk and harm reduction are fundamental goals of the justice system, and that these can be achieved without sacrificing offender accountability or other important justice system outcomes. It identifies key stakeholders who must be actively engaged in a collaborative partnership if an evidence-based system of justice is to be achieved.

The Framework is complemented by other tools and resources, including the [EBDM Primer](#), [EBDM Starter Kit](#), [EBDM Case Studies: Highlights from the Original Seven Pilot Sites](#), and [The Evidence-Based Decision Making Initiative: An Overview for Victim Service Providers](#).

For more information or to view other resources on EBDM, visit <http://www.nicic.gov/ebdm> or <http://ebdmoneless.org/>.

### APPLYING EBP TO VICTIM SERVICE PROGRAMS

#### [Program Evaluation & Improvement for Victims Services](#)

This webinar, with experts from both the National Center for Victims of Crime and Social Solutions, explores how evidence-based practices are affecting victim services program evaluation and addresses the use of technology to connect research, evaluation, reporting, and service delivery. Information about how victim service agencies can prepare for these changes and become more data-driven is covered.

#### [Office for Victims of Crime’s Technical Assistance Guide Series: Guide to Conducting a Needs Assessment](#)

This guide, developed by the Office for Victims of Crime, provides basic information about how to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of target populations and services available to them in a community. It also provides guidance in using the results of the needs assessment to further develop, refine, and implement a victim services program.

#### [National Institute of Corrections’ Post-Conviction Victim Service Providers Resource Page](#)

This web page, hosted by the National Institute of Corrections, provides links to resources for post-conviction VSPs, focusing on victim services often required after an offender has been convicted (e.g., corrections/incarceration, reentry, parole, and probation).

*Quality Victim Advocacy: A Field Guide* (David Voth, 2010, Workplay Publishing)

This guide for evaluating and improving victim service organizations addresses such issues as designing a quality program that emphasizes victim-centeredness, and understanding and measuring outcomes as defined by victim success. Logic models are defined and explained, and a victim outcome logic model is presented. The guide also outlines a process for measuring outcome success and applying outcomes internally (e.g., as the basis for job descriptions and evaluations) and externally (e.g., in fundraising). The guide includes a number of exhibits to assist victim service organizations in conducting this process.

#### **GENERAL VICTIM ADVOCACY ISSUES**

*Parallel Justice for Victims of Crime* (Susan Herman, 2010, National Center for Victims of Crime)

Susan Herman draws on more than 30 years of criminal justice experience to present a new approach to responding to victims of crime. Designed to address what are identified as the three basic needs of victims (to be safe, to recover from the trauma of the crime, and to regain control of their lives), this book presents a new, holistic approach to responding to victims that requires all stakeholders providing services to victims—from the criminal justice system to social services and healthcare agencies—to reorient their core business practices to helping victims rebuild their lives.

*Victims' Rights Education Project: Victims' Rights Handbook* (National Victims' Constitutional Amendment Passage, 2004)

This handbook was designed to educate victims, victim service providers, and the general public about the rights of victims and how to exercise them. It was designed with input from victims, victim service providers, criminal justice professionals, and other legal advisors. The handbook provides a variety of tools that can be used to educate the public and others about crime victim rights and to design effective programs to deliver services to victims.

### APPENDIX 3: REFERENCES

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## APPENDIX 4: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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