

# Enhancing Technical Assistance to Rural Program Grantees Responding to Violence Against Women

*A Report to the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice*



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**Praxis International – Rural Technical Assistance on Violence Against Women**  
*Enhancing TA to Rural Program Grantees: A Report to OVW*



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## **Enhancing Technical Assistance to Rural Program Grantees Responding to Violence Against Women**

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## Introduction

Since the passage of the 1994 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) has provided grants through the *Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, and Stalking Assistance Program* (Rural Program) to develop programs, policies, and practices aimed at ending domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking in rural communities.<sup>1</sup> Rural communities encounter unique challenges in addressing and preventing violence against women. A recent public health study found that 26.7% of rural women in 16 states reported experiencing physical or sexual interpersonal violence during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Geographic isolation, traditional gender stereotypes, lack of resources, lack of anonymity, economic dependence, a shortage of services, and inadequately trained professionals have been identified in the literature as barriers for rural women in obtaining the help they need.<sup>3</sup>

OVW provides training and technical assistance (TA) under the Rural Program to provide grantees with the “training, expertise, and problem-solving strategies they need to meet the challenges of addressing sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking”.<sup>4</sup> OVW’s TA providers offer educational opportunities, conferences, peer-to-peer consultations, site visits, and tailored assistance to assist grantees in responding effectively to crimes of violence against women. As part of its commitment to continuous improvement, OVW seeks feedback on a regular basis from its grant recipients so that the TA can be enhanced and refined as necessary to meet the needs of communities.<sup>5</sup>

Since 1998, Praxis International (Praxis) has implemented OVW comprehensive and targeted TA projects for Rural Program grantees offering direct assistance, training, networking and planning opportunities to support the successful implementation of local projects funded by the Rural Program. This has included training more than 10,000 individuals in rural communities through more than 400 training sessions, while collaborating with many other OVW TA providers. In 2012, on behalf of the Office on Violence Against Women, Praxis conducted a comprehensive TA needs assessments to identify the best approaches to content and delivery of TA to grantees funded under the Rural Program. The needs assessment examined:

- Program characteristics of Rural Program grantees
- Current TA provided to grantees
- Grantees’ use of TA and their assessment of its effectiveness
- Grantees’ successes and challenges in implementing grant-funded activities
- Successes and challenges of training and TA provision to rural communities
- TA strategies employed by rural educators outside the field of violence against women

Praxis collected data from in-depth discussions with 54 Rural Program grantees (over half of currently funded grantees participated in one or multiple data collection methods utilized for



the assessment), OVW technical assistance providers (OVW TA), OVW Rural Program Specialists, and rural education experts outside of the field of violence against women. The assessment used multiple data collection methods: an on-line survey questionnaire, audio and videoconference focus groups, an in-person think tank, and individual phone interviews (see Appendix A for detailed information on data collection methodologies).

The goal of the assessment is to enhance the content and delivery of TA to rural grantees. The following summary presents an analysis of the key findings of the assessment and recommendations to strengthen TA overall. The full report which follows the summary includes the complete assessment findings and grantee priorities for TA needs.

### ***A Snapshot of Key Findings***

- TA is highly useful, yet sometimes difficult to access
- TA must recognize and account for “rural realities” to be fully relevant and effective
- There is a critical need for increased TA related to basic and advanced advocacy services for all forms of violence against women
- Enhanced TA efforts to strengthen advocacy leadership skills and capacity would improve outcomes and create long-term change
- TA is needed to promote and support implementation of best practice models for sustainable institutional reform to move communities beyond general collaboration

### ***Recommendation***

Focus rural program TA to enhance comprehensive change-oriented efforts to end violence against women in rural communities, strengthen foundational advocacy services, concentrate collaboration efforts on replicable models of institutional reform, and emphasize advocacy leadership to encourage sustained, long-term change.





## Summary of Findings and Recommendations

### **Key finding: TA is highly useful, yet sometimes difficult to access**

*[Our work] can be so hectic that it unfortunately becomes a luxury to have time to reflect and think. I can't begin to tell you the value of in-person training. Participants come home truly rejuvenated, eager to incorporate what they have learned from the training itself, and from those they connected with while there. – Rural Grantee*

The assessment identified many elements in current TA content and delivery that have supported grantees to fulfill goals under the primary Rural Program areas: advocacy/short-term assistance to individual victims, collaboration with other community systems and professionals, and public education/prevention. Overall, the efficacy and relevance of TA were highly rated by survey respondents.

### **Effectiveness of TA methods and learning environments**

Grantees cited the following TA delivery methods as particularly effective:

- Rural-specific TA and related events, utilizing rural trainers and models
- Face-to-face events that foster peer learning, rural leadership, commitment and motivation, exposure to new ideas and strategies
- Distance learning, such as webinars, audio-conferences, and self-paced on-line courses
- Networking opportunities
- Individualized consultation via phone calls, email, and site visits
- Multiple levels of training, from beginning to advanced
- Literature and other resources that are easily accessible at any time of the day
- Frequent updates on TA sources to meet specific needs

#### **Assessment Survey Highlight**

##### **Relevance of TA to grantee's goals**

*79% of respondents said "relevant" or "very relevant"*

##### **Top-rated TA**

*91% of grantees who received intensive, onsite TA rated it as "effective or very effective"*

These are methods that emphasize and reinforce building connections, accounting for local conditions of distance and resources, and finding strategies that do not merely substitute "rural" for "urban." They are methods, in other words, that help address *rural realities*, another key finding (see later discussion).



### **Barriers and limitations in utilizing available TA**

Grantees also cited a number of barriers related to their ability to access the TA currently available. The following factors, in particular, were related to limitations in fully utilizing TA:

#### A patchwork of content and focus

Reflecting the expanse of rural landscapes and distances, the goals of the Rural Program are similarly ambitious and vast, covering any crime related to violence against women and including services to individual victims, interagency collaboration, and prevention/education. Rural grantees are often the only organization or agency in the community or across a large geographical area that is addressing violence against women. They do not have the time or resources to look for updates on research, best practices, and emerging issues. They must figure out what training and TA is the best fit with little guidance.

The assessment demonstrated that grantees take advantage of and appreciate the variety of content, topics, and delivery methods in the TA they have received. One-hundred percent of the assessment survey respondents had utilized some form of OVW-sponsored TA. At the same time, 73% also utilized non-OVW TA offerings, indicating that they have TA needs that are not being met by OVW offerings.\* The TA that is currently available emphasizes training, which provides many benefits. Yet TA providers are not adequately organized to connect back with attendees and engage in long-term support as grantees try to adapt and implement the training content back home.

Grantees would benefit from a highly visible centralized resource for problem-identification and planning that would help them match TA with their goals and community conditions. Developing a relationship with one point of contact would build trust and provide consistency and a means of sifting through the welter of information available. Grantees would be more quickly connected with what is relevant to their needs. In the assessment survey, grantees who received community-specific support through ongoing engagement and onsite TA reported the greatest success in meeting their goals.

#### **Assessment Survey Highlight**

##### **TA helps grantees achieve their objectives by:**

- *Providing outside expertise that enhances credibility with community partners*
- *Developing knowledge & skills for team building*
- *Providing up-to-date information on best practices, tools, & resources*
- *Helping focus on defining, implementing, and monitoring objectives*
- *Providing networking opportunities to exchange ideas & resources*

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\*It is unclear from the response, however, whether TA providers perceived as non-OVW-sponsored may have actually been providing TA under an OVW source with which assessment respondents were unfamiliar.



### Lack of relief staff

Many rural grantees have a small number of staff and often only one or two people cover vast distances and multiple shifts. Advocates and practitioners in community systems often wear many hats, without the kind of specialization found in more urban settings. Whether or not primary staff can attend a specific training or TA event often comes down to whether or not someone can fill in. Grantees cited a need for flexibility in funding conditions that would enable them to hire relief staff when participating in TA events. Nearly 40% of survey respondents said that “no relief staff” considerably limited their use of TA.

### Short funding cycles

Grant cycles, whether OVW-funded or from other sources, typically run from twelve to twenty-four months. The nature of building relationships and trust in rural communities requires time. A grantee may just get to the point where community decision-makers or practitioners have become invested in addressing violence against women and would benefit from specific training and TA when the grant-related staff, coordinator, and TA ends. Short-term funding cycles also inhibit the kind of engaged, sustained relationship between grantees and TA providers that supports ongoing, community-specific problem-solving and change. The stability of longer-term funding would provide time for the capacity building and leadership development necessary for sustained change in rural communities.

## ***Key finding: TA must recognize and account for rural realities to be fully relevant and effective***

*What I am looking for is a lot more in-depth information on what the challenges are in rural communities . . . There are so many different kinds of rural. Rural means something different in each community; even what rural means across our state is very different. What are those needs that ARE consistent throughout—and what are those that are different within rural [communities]? – Rural Grantee*

Among the assessment’s key findings was the identification of a set of *rural realities* that TA must recognize to be effective and useful to rural communities. These realities are features of rural life that are not inherently positive or negative. They can open avenues for change in addressing violence against women, but can just as readily be barriers that Rural Program grantees often confront, as they emphasized throughout the assessment. These realities are not a sequential set of steps, but highly intertwined features. The grantees, rural educators, and OVW Program Specialists who contributed to the assessment emphasized the significance of understanding the rural realities and both the challenges and opportunities they present.

### 1. No single “rural”

*Rural* means geographies, populations, cultures, histories, and governments that are at once shared and distinct. Tribes are sovereign nations with great diversity across nations; many also



have Tribal lands that are in or near “rural” areas. Further distinctions of “rural” include frontier, Alaskan, agricultural, small town, Deep South, suburban rural, migrant, tourist, etc. Cultural traditions and assumptions vary tremendously and shape how rural communities respond to violence against women.

## 2. Connection and trust

“Everybody knows everybody,” was a common refrain when rural grantees and educators spoke about their communities. Relationships are highly valued and built slowly. A “newcomer” is as likely to be someone who has lived in a community for twenty years as someone who has just arrived. The value placed on relationships and connections can strengthen or impede the response to violence against women. Close relationships can link victims with support and resources, as well as reinforce messages of accountability to perpetrators. But close-knit connections can also mean that a perpetrator’s reach extends deep into the community; or that new residents who are immigrants are met with hostility or exclusion. One individual in a key role can have an enormous influence—whether helpful or harmful—on the community response. Grant-funded programs typically come and go within a year or two, a short time frame for the ways in which connection and trust develops in rural communities.

## 3. Long-held traditions and customs

A slower pace and honoring tradition are common values across rural communities. Long-held traditions can sustain a community and bring people together for the good of the community, particularly in times of adversity. Yet grantees cited long-held social norms and beliefs that tolerate violence against women and make rural communities slower to acknowledge or confront that violence. Coupled with an emphasis on “minding one’s business,” these qualities often present a daunting resistance to change.

## 4. Expertise at “making do”

Rural communities have historically been creative at managing scarce resources. Rural poverty has long been a reality as well, however, both in terms of income and social supports. There is a limit to making do: beyond a certain point, limited resources mean significant barriers to safety. Rural grantees have been left trying to fill voids in community needs for transportation, housing, health care, and language access.

## 5. Vast and dynamic landscapes

Rural communities are spread across vast geographical, social, and political landscapes. Bridging physical distances is an ever-present challenge. Rural grantees must also navigate local, state, territorial, federal, and Tribal agencies, regulations, and practices, depending upon the nature of their communities. Shifting economies—e.g., the boom-bust cycles of energy development or a closed meatpacking plant or an upsurge in tourism—can trigger big shifts in populations and introduce new or more complex social issues than a rural community has faced previously. Shifts in policies and funding priorities by state and federal entities can derail efforts at long-term change and introduce an “either/or” tension in addressing violence against women: e.g., shifting funding focus from domestic violence to sexual assault.



## 6. A distinct voice

While there is no single *rural*, there is a distinct rural voice that is grounded in all of these realities and that frequently gets lost in translation when ideas and strategies for responding to violence against women are introduced. This distinct voice requires that TA providers avoid approaching rural as simply “not urban,” but consider how to adapt and convey new approaches and recommended practices in ways that reflect rural realities.

### ***Implications of the rural realities for TA content and delivery***

Because the rural realities impact every aspect of grantees’ work in their communities, addressing them becomes central to TA providers’ work, as well. The overarching implication for TA content and delivery is to apply the lens of the rural realities to any relationship, strategy, adaptation, product, or training. More specifically, this includes:

- Awareness of and responsiveness to the diversity of rural communities
- Tailored TA, particularly on-site, that allows for comprehensive consideration of unique rural realities
- Sufficient time within the community and between TA providers and grantees to build relationships
- Concrete approaches to dispel myths, acknowledge the problem, and see possibilities for change: i.e., counter assumptions that “it doesn’t happen here” or “that would never work in our community”
- Models of change that are adaptable, fit local conditions, and can be effectively promoted in the most resistant communities
- Assistance building the expertise and relationships to be effective within and across jurisdictions
- Avoiding approaches that rely on assumptions of an easily available response or support, whether legal advice, shelter, medical care, or police
- Featuring the work of rural programs and using rural examples, success stories, and trainers who are from rural communities or well-grounded in rural life
- Connecting with state coalitions and other local experts who have established trust and relationships in rural communities and are aware of local and regional realities

#### ***Assessment Survey Highlight***

##### ***Among the most useful TA topics:***

- *Coordinated community response (CCR) development & sustainability*
- *Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) development & sustainability*
- *Women’s use of violence*
- *Working with rural communities & victims/survivors*
- *Working with immigrant survivors of domestic & sexual violence*
- *Confidentiality*

In brief, the rural realities are the “new normal” for TA providers working with rural grantees.



***Key finding: There is a critical need for increased TA related to basic and advanced advocacy services for all forms of violence against women***

*In our rural area, tromping out into the wilderness into a home where you don't know what's going on or there is no signage that says where you are makes some advocates pretty nervous...there are dangers in rural areas that are unique because of the isolation. – Rural Grantee*

Conditions related to the rural realities—particularly to the challenge of providing advocacy services in areas of enormous distance, uncertain resources, and community resistance—have had a significant impact on basic advocacy services in rural communities. Assessment respondents noted that even something as promising as satellite offices to bring services closer to victims presents concerns about and TA needs related to adequate staffing, community acceptance, and staff isolation and safety.

Rural advocacy programs face persistent problems of high staff turnover, heavy reliance on volunteers, and a limited employment pool. The education and professional experience are often a poor fit for social-change advocacy organizations. New staff may have limited life experience with issues of violence against women or may approach it more as a problem of individuals in need of help versus a significant social problem requiring fundamental change. Consequently, there is a significant need for training and TA that helps rural advocacy programs successfully prepare advocates to be of use both to individual victims/survivors and in the context of changing community systems on behalf of all victims/survivors. Assessment respondents also noted that rural advocacy programs increasingly need more advanced knowledge and skills related to specific issues, such as substance abuse or the impact of violence on victims' health, in order to address the needs of individual victims/survivors.

Many rural advocacy programs also have TA needs related to developing relationships with, and providing advocacy on behalf of, specific communities. Advocacy services that may have worked well within the dominant-culture community may need a different framework and adaptation to be welcoming and useful to victims/survivors from marginalized communities. For example, a rural advocacy program that has served a largely white, Midwestern agricultural community is likely to be poorly prepared to work with Somali immigrants who have recently arrived to work in a new meat-packing plant. Rural programs also need readily accessible connections to TA that will help them advocate on behalf of victims/survivors from populations they may not routinely encounter. For example, solid basic advocacy skills plus connection with advanced TA resources will help position advocates to work with a transgender man who has been battered or a Deaf woman who has been sexually assaulted. Grantees that reported the greatest success in bridging the distance between non-Native advocacy programs and Native communities emphasized the importance of non-Native programs anchoring their work in humility, openness, a willingness to address racism, and understanding of Tribal sovereignty. TA that supports this approach can in turn be of great benefit to many rural grantees.



TA that more fully addresses needs related to basic and advanced advocacy would include:

- Basic advocacy skill training that is easily replicable at the local level and draws on flexible delivery methods, such as webinars, e-learning courses, and self-paced tutorials
- Core training that emphasizes recognizing and understanding violence against women, using engagement and dialogue to build relationships with victims/survivors, and applying advocacy strategies in rural settings
- Attention to complex topics that increasingly impact advocacy in rural communities, such as:
  - Legal advocacy for individual cases
  - Advocacy for women with substance abuse and mental health problems
  - Strategies for ensuring advocate safety while working in isolated, remote areas
  - Managing satellite advocacy offices
  - Advocacy related to public benefits and housing
  - Advocacy with and on behalf of victims/survivors from culturally specific or underrepresented communities, such as Latino, immigrant, Native American, people with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning individuals
  - The breadth and connectedness of different forms of violence against women (what battering, rape, and trafficking have in common and how they intersect)
- Strategies and guidance on developing relationships with and advocacy services on behalf of specific communities, such as:
  - Openness and trust in the context of a history of violence and oppression
  - Advocates who speak the first language of specific communities and other strategies for bridging language barriers
  - Readily accessible connections to TA providers that have worked with and have credibility with specific communities

### **Assessment Survey Highlight**

#### **Populations served by Rural Program grantees\***

- 45% Hispanic/Latino
- 40% Homeless or living in poverty
- 36% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 35% People with mental health issues
- 28% People with substance abuse issues
- 27% Immigrants, refugees, or asylum seekers
- 27% People with Disabilities
- 21% Black or African American
- 17% Migrant farmworkers
- 15% Elderly
- 10% Lesbian, Gay, Transgender
- 8% Asian
- 5% Deaf
- 1% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

*\*In addition to “general rural” and many indicated that they serve multiple groups*



**Key finding: Enhanced TA efforts to strengthen advocacy leadership skills and capacity would improve outcomes and create long-term change**

*Leadership is the greatest determinant of sustainability, of outcomes. It's a broad concept that people think is not teachable. But it very definitely can be developed in rural communities and it needs to be supported.*

– Rural educator

Community-based advocacy organizations have the most direct and sustained contact with victims and survivors of any single entity in a community. Advocates thus have a distinct role in leading a meaningful community response to violence against women: i.e., they are a foundation of the movement to end violence against women. When sufficiently prepared and supported, advocates can recognize and develop partners and champions within community agencies and systems—and the community at large—and do so in ways that challenge myths and carry consistent messages about violence against women.

Assessment respondents spoke of the challenges in “selling the need,” “building the case,” “telling the story,” and “effective messages” related to building political will among project partners and the community at large. Grantees are looking for help in getting others to recognize the issue of violence against women and the urgency for change. Rural advocates described feeling unprepared to navigate entrenched power dynamics within community systems that are often closed to “outsiders.” In particular, it is difficult for advocates to gain the respect of criminal justice system practitioners when advocates’ knowledge and expertise is frequently discounted by police, prosecutors, and courts.

The barriers to advocacy leadership and capacity are similar to the barriers to sustaining basic advocacy skills: high staff turnover, heavy reliance on volunteers, and an employment pool with limited skills, backgrounds, and experiences in implementing social-change strategies. In addition, the patchwork of TA content and focus plus the lack of sustained funding cycles discussed earlier make it difficult to initiate and sustain institutional and cultural change.

The grantees, TA providers, and rural educators consulted during the assessment spoke to ways in which TA could better position advocates to provide stronger and more consistent leadership in creating, nurturing, and fostering a culture that supports efforts to end violence against women. TA that more fully incorporates the following will help strengthen advocacy capacity for leadership:

- Models, frameworks, and strategies for long-term change such as coordinated community response (CCR) or sexual assault response teams (SART)
- Basic and advanced institutional advocacy skills, such as:
  - Building and facilitating effective collaborative, interagency processes
  - Assessing community practice





- Monitoring implementation of institutional change
- Networks of peer leaders steeped in rural realities and cultures
- Building sustainable social change-oriented organizations
- Building community capacity to take responsibility for the issue of violence against women and make meaningful change to end it
- Utilizing social media and technology to support leadership development and messaging
- Using the “art of storytelling,” supported by research and data, as a tool for institutional and community change

With the necessary support and resources, advocates can be positioned to provide a distinctly local, rural-focused leadership for institutional and community change.

***Key finding: TA is needed to promote and support implementation of best practice models for sustainable institutional reform to move communities beyond general collaboration***

*It feels like we’re back to square one . . . even though we created policies. Priorities change as funding shifts. Having them hold the priorities in place is difficult within the CCR partners. – Rural Grantee*

Many grantees reported a sense of feeling stuck in moving institutional reform to enhance the safety of rural victims beyond a series of meetings with criminal justice system agencies. Institutional reform too often gets equated with a CCR or SART meeting and even those monthly meetings have widely varying degrees of participation and engagement by project partners. In these ways, institutional reform efforts have been reduced to mean general collaboration, particularly related to criminal justice system response. Grantees struggle to foster best practices by law enforcement and prosecution to reduce crimes of sexual and domestic violence against women. When they do have some success in negotiating and implementing working agreements or new policies and protocols, that progress can easily be derailed by turnover in key players when there is a new job assignment, election, or funding change. Advocates who have been promoting institutional reform are left having to begin over.

While urban grantees face similar issues related to institutional reform, the rural realities magnify the challenge in rural communities. In order to get any movement forward, advocates may have worked for years to overcome entrenched suspicion and reluctance to change. TA that reinforces substantial and sustained institutional reform has much in common with the TA that helps build advocacy capacity and leadership. It focuses on:

- Collaboration that clearly reforms practices and responses to victims, rather than collaboration for the sake of collaboration



- Identifying institutional problems and crafting and implementing change
- Adapting and replicating best-practice models of institutional reform
- Strategies to ensure fully-functioning CCRs and SARTs, with mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of reform efforts
- A clear focus on new policies and protocols to improve outcomes for victims/survivors, strengthen accountability, and provide perpetrators with opportunities to change
- Building sustainable social change-oriented organizations

***Recommendations: Focus rural program technical assistance to enhance comprehensive change-oriented efforts to end violence against women in rural communities, strengthen foundational advocacy services, concentrate collaboration efforts on replicable models of institutional reform, and emphasize advocacy leadership to encourage sustained, long-term change***

The assessment demonstrated that grantees have made wide use of and benefited from existing Rural Program TA. The assessment also discovered a set of rural realities that shape grantees' day-to-day work and that the current approach to TA recognizes and accounts for with varying degrees of success. A patchwork of content and focus has left grantees without the kind of concentrated, long-term, engaged support that would help them adapt and implement replicable best-practice models, frameworks, and strategies for change in rural areas. This patchwork has left grantees largely adrift without clearly defined outcomes and adherence to those outcomes when pursuing criminal justice system collaboration. Enough is known at this point in time about best-practice in the criminal justice system response to domestic violence, for example, and other replicable models of change. Collaboration—and TA to support it—should focus on adapting, implementing, tracking, and monitoring those models.\*

#### **Assessment Survey Highlight**

##### **Grantees would like more on:**

- *Specific knowledge & skills (rural culture, safe home visiting, child custody, community engagement)*
- *Strategies (institutional change, being part of a broader social movement)*
- *Best practices (monitoring and evaluation, victim-centered approaches, assessing lethality)*
- *Program capacity building (leadership, effective use of technology & social media, focus on mission)*

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\* Examples of such replicable approaches currently in existence include: pro-arrest and prosecution policies and protocols for domestic and sexual violence, child protection and advocacy collaboration protocol, SANE and SART protocols, school policies on response to victims and perpetrators of sexual and domestic assaults, advocacy-initiated response following police intervention, law enforcement protocols in support of U-visa petitions for immigrant women, full-faith and credit enforcement of protection orders, and a wide range of approaches to advocacy and institutional change established by state and Tribal coalitions.



The assessment also identified critical needs for training and TA related to basic and advanced advocacy services, advocacy leadership and capacity, and rejuvenating institutional reform efforts. Assessment respondents offered many examples of poor outcomes for victims/survivors that reinforce the need for institutional reform and for building the advocacy capacity to lead long-term change in responding to and preventing violence against women in rural communities. For example: retribution directed toward victims who speak out, victims/survivors living in extreme isolation from any kind of help and support, arrests and prosecution of battered women for resisting the violence, sexual assaults and rapes that have “doubled and tripled,” Native women caught between the “turf wars” of multiple jurisdictions, lack of confidentiality in communities where “everybody knows everybody,” and a persistent, widespread belief that violence against women “doesn’t happen here,” i.e., is an urban phenomenon and not a reality for rural communities. Grantees need specific advocacy tools and TA support to better enhance safety for women, increase accountability for perpetrators, and change the culture that supports violence against women.

In the assessment survey, respondents were asked to list topics where they would like more TA. Grantees wanted to see more attention to specific knowledge and skills, strategies for institutional change, best practices, and program capacity building. This list of topics points the way to an enhanced TA that increases individualized, customized, and on-site TA and focuses on building capacity for both basic advocacy and institutional change.

The rural educators consulted during the assessment reinforced the importance of developing and strengthening community leadership as a foundation for long-term change in rural communities. They emphasized the need for TA that is shaped by a defined mission and clear framework, strengths-based approach, and attention to developing local leaders (see Appendix B for a synopsis of the rural educators involved in the assessment).

An enhanced, change-oriented rural TA model would strengthen foundational advocacy services in rural communities, focus collaboration efforts on implementing existing, replicable best-practice models of institutional reform, and emphasize advocacy and grantee leadership

***An enhanced, change-oriented TA model***

*TA organized around sustained, customized support to a rural community would look like this, for example, to build a coordinated community response to violence against women:*

- *Community matched with a primary TA provider that will have an ongoing relationship & provide or link to needed TA*
- *Community readiness assessment*
- *Interagency coordinator leadership training & support*
- *Community training on CCR/SART and its goals*
- *Criminal justice system practitioner training & support*
- *Implementation support*
- *Monitoring support*
- *Developing local leaders*



to encourage sustained, long-term change. Elements of an enhanced, change-oriented TA that accounts for rural realities would include:

- Emphasis on adapting and implementing replicable models, frameworks, and strategies for change, with longer period of times and more resources to do so
- A thorough assessment of the full ecology in which a model is being implemented to inform the implementation and sustainability plan
- Increased individualized/customized TA to support adaptation, implementation, and sustainability of replicable models. Specific TA activities might include:
  - A comprehensive assessment of the community’s existing response to violence against women and identification of problematic practices and needed reforms
  - Site visits related to planning, implementing, and evaluating institutional reform
  - Advocacy leadership development, including effective messaging, i.e., story-telling with support from data to build political and community will
  - Peer learning among those implementing similar models
- Prioritizing funding to concentrate on a specific replicable model or approach, with clearly defined goals and outcomes to enhance the safety of rural victims
- Core and advanced training and orientation tools on individual and institutional advocacy, provided to new grantees, advocates, and volunteers
- Preparation of TA providers on addressing violence against women in rural communities, including attention to rural realities, building trusting relationships, incorporating peer-to-peer networking, and utilizing rural case examples, trainers, and consultants
- A central point of contact for grantees and coordination that will help them navigate available TA and connect them with individualized/customized TA that is the best fit for their community and for the kind of reform work they are undertaking

For grantees to achieve the kind of institutional change that this model supports involves factors beyond the parameters of any single activity. This model of TA will be most effective if funding prioritizes a specific staff position for each Rural Program grantee that will coordinate, promote, adapt, implement, and monitor institutional reform directed toward ending violence against women in all forms. Doing so would help orient the work of the grantee program toward long-term change by centralizing attention to institutional reform. Such a position would have the main function and responsibility of monitoring community systems’ responses to violence against women, identifying problematic outcomes for groups of women, and coordinating changes to correct and prevent those problems.

The detail, nuance, and expanded discussion of the findings and recommendations presented in this summary are available in the full report found in the following pages.



## Detailed Findings

### *Summary of Data Collection Methods*

Over the course of 10 months in 2011 and 2012, Praxis engaged in numerous activities to gather information for this assessment from four primary groups (see Appendix A for full description of data collection methods). **Rural Program grantees:** All rural grantees were invited to participate in an extensive online survey, 53% of which responded to two or more questions. All rural grantees were also invited to participate in one of six audio focus groups that were 90 minutes and held during October 2011 and April 2012. In total, 34 staff from rural programs participated in these focus groups. Finally, 18 rural grantees, identified in collaboration with OVW Program Specialists, were invited to participate in a 2-day in person “Think Tank” for an in-depth discussion of TA needs; 16 were able to participate. **OVW TA providers:** Sixteen of the 25 OVW TA providers who self-identified as being funded to provide TA to rural grantees were able to participate in audio focus groups. Six were able to participate in a 3-hour video conference discussion, and interviews were conducted with 13 staff from seven separate OVW TA provider agencies to explore in more depth the adaptations and tailoring of TA provided to rural grantees. **Rural education experts outside of the field of violence against women:** Thirteen rural educators from 11 regional and national organizations outside of the field of violence against women were interviewed and five were able to participate in a 3-hour video conference discussion. **OVW Program Specialists:** Extensive interviews were conducted with 3 of the 4 primary OVW Program Specialists assigned to the Rural Program.

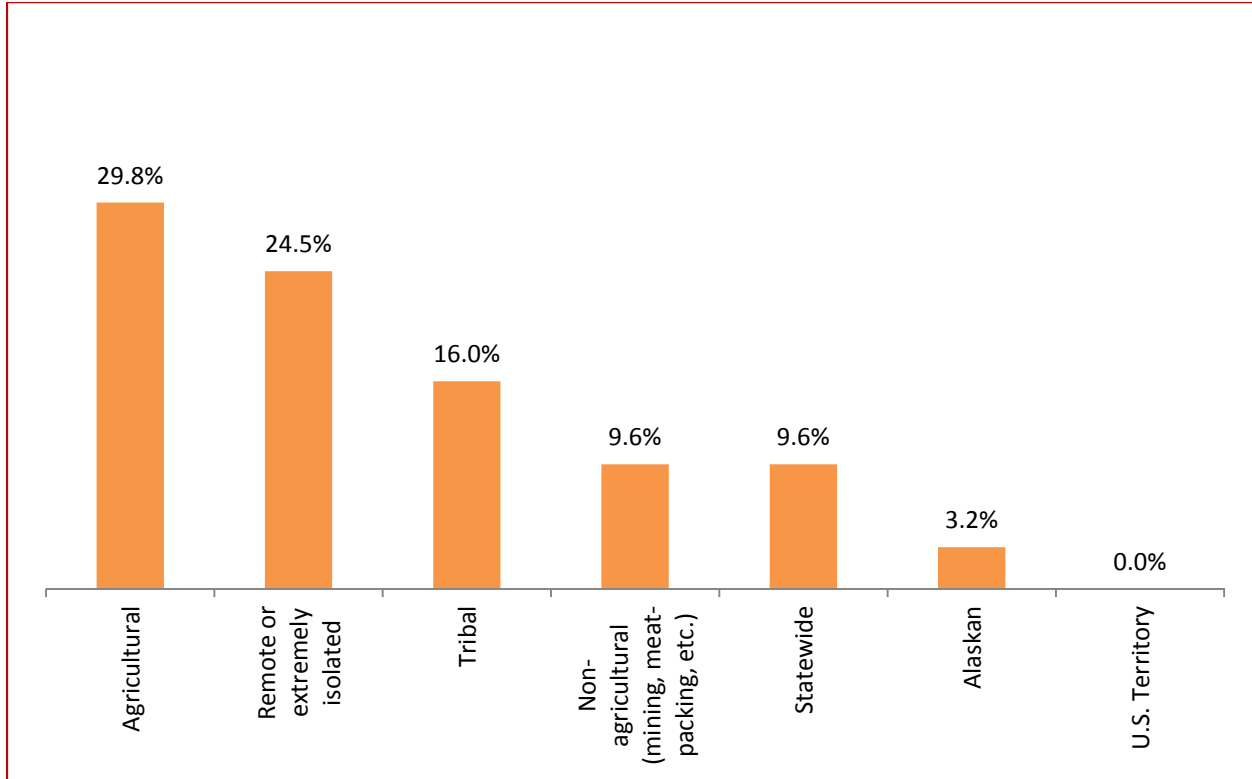
### *Program Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

To understand the context within which grantee respondents engage in OVW-funded activities, this report begins with a description of the primary characteristics of survey respondents, including the geographical context, primary demographic groups they serve, and the focus of their grant activities specific to the types of violence against women they address as well as the types of activities in which they are engaged.

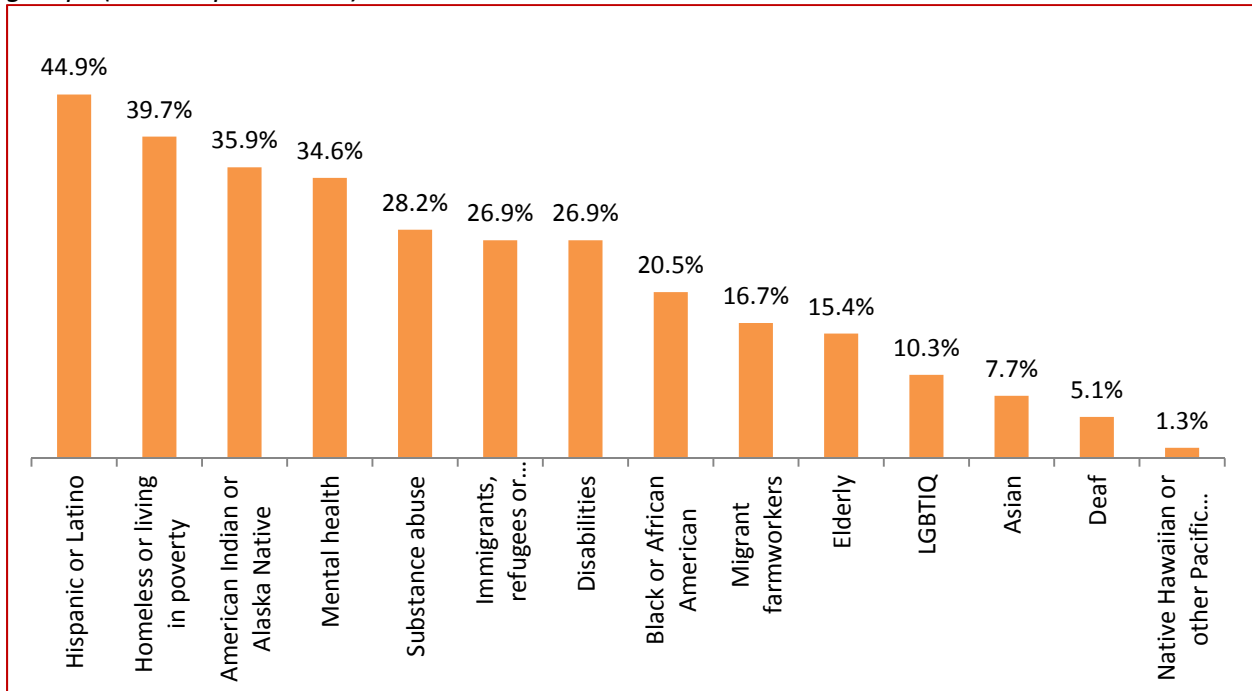
The on-line survey asked respondents to provide information about their programs and the communities they serve. Seventy-eight percent of the 94 respondents to this survey were from non-profit organizations/coalitions. Smaller percentages were split between state government (8%), city or county government (4%), Tribal government (5%) and Tribal related non-profits (3%). All respondents characterized their programs as serving rural communities or regions and further specified their geographical nature and specific populations served as captured Charts 1 and 2 below.



**Chart 1. Geographical nature of survey respondents (100% response rate).**



**Chart 2. In addition to “general rural”, percentage of Rural Grantees serving demographic groups (83% response rate).**

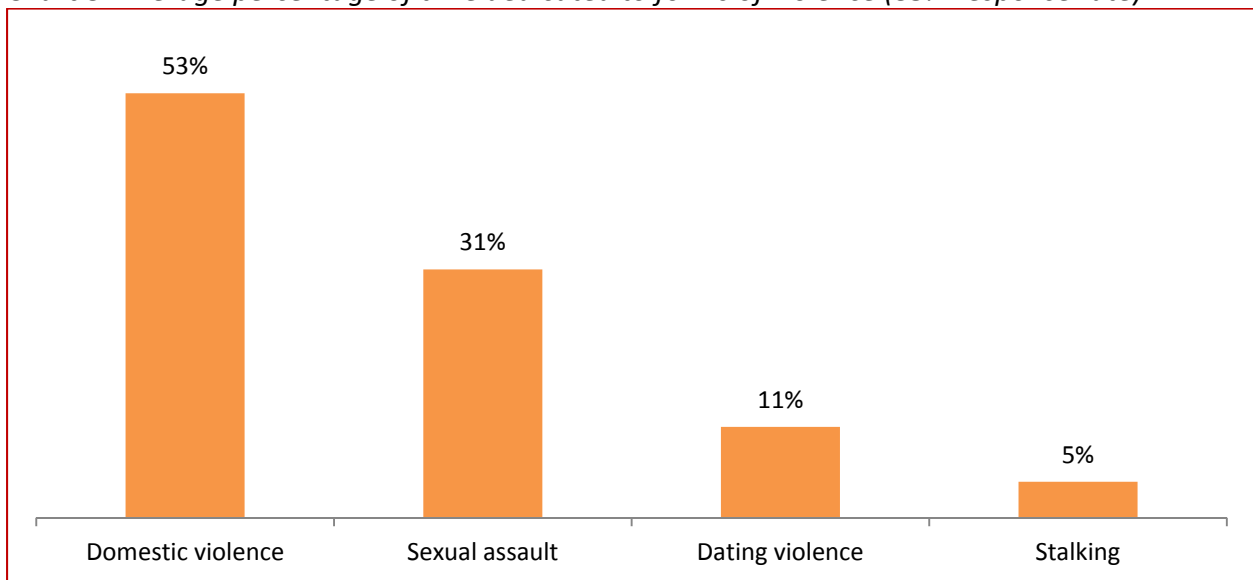




### ***Focus of Rural Grants***

Survey respondents were asked to identify the type(s) of violence against women on which their programs focused. Grantees focus on multiple forms of violence and reported more than one type in most cases. Sexual assault was reported the most frequently (94%), followed by domestic violence (91%), dating violence (76%), and stalking (65%). Respondents could choose to indicate additional types of violence in an open-ended response. One program reported addressing elder abuse, three reported child sexual abuse and one reported serving child witnesses, youth survivors, and non-offending parents. Respondents were also asked to estimate the percentage of time they spent addressing different forms of violence against women. While slightly more survey respondents reported providing sexual assault services, more overall time was spent in the area of domestic violence. The average percentage of time spent on different forms of violence against women is shown in Chart 3.

**Chart 3.** *Average percentage of time dedicated to forms of violence (83% response rate).*

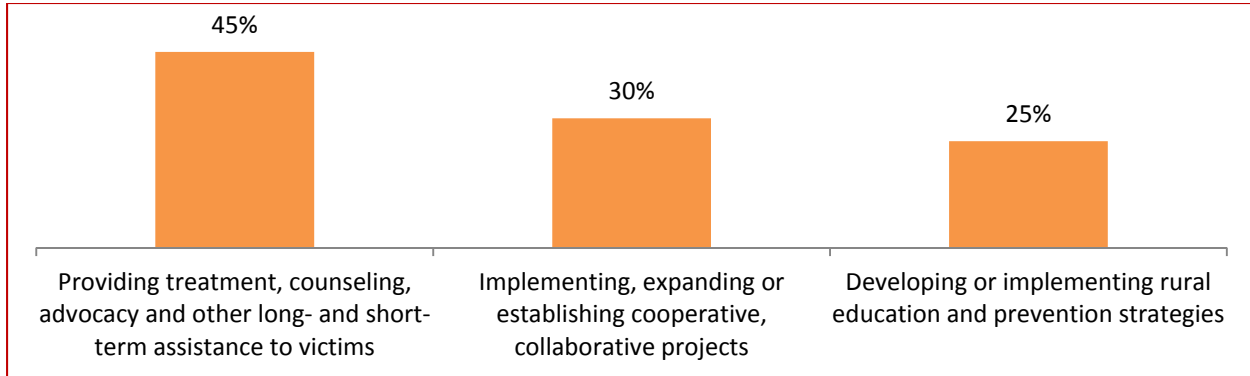


By statute, Rural Program funds can be used to support advocacy/short term assistance to victims, collaboration projects, and public education/prevention efforts, in addition to areas of special interest as defined by OVW. According to the 2011 OVW semiannual progress report<sup>6</sup>, 80% of grantees funded by the Rural Program provide a variety of services to victims/survivors in the form of advocacy, crisis intervention, and support/group counseling. Eighty-three percent of those receiving services were victims of domestic violence/dating violence, 9% of sexual assault, 4% of stalking and 4% of child sexual abuse. Sixty-six percent of grantees used funds to train other community professionals about violence against women and 70% used funds to provide community education. Grant funds are also used for law enforcement (9%), prosecution (5%), and probation and parole (5%) services. Most grantees (95%) use funds to support staff positions to deliver program services.<sup>7</sup>



Survey respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of time they focused on services to victims, collaboration projects, and prevention/education, the averages of which are indicated in Chart 4.

**Chart 4.** Average percentage of time devoted to grant-funded activities (84% response rate).



They were also asked to briefly describe, in order of priority, the types of work funded by their rural grant. Most survey respondents described services to victim/survivors as their first priority, followed by collaboration, and prevention/education. Descriptions of their work in each of these areas are provided below.

#### Advocacy and Direct Services to Victims

Services to ensure victims' safety and wellbeing encompassed a range of counseling, housing, support groups, case management, legal services/legal aid, emergency help/crisis intervention, and child advocacy services. Outreach efforts focused on short-term assistance to victims, immigrant services, language access or bilingual services, services to Native Americans, and legal services to immigrant, migrant, or Hispanic victims.

#### Collaboration Projects

The most common types of work undertaken by survey respondents in the area of collaboration projects were building or coordinating collaborations and supporting SART/SANE/SAFE projects. Specific collaborations included improving relationships with law enforcement, increasing prosecution and investigation, working closely with child protective services, and training law enforcement.

#### Education and Prevention Efforts

Education work included conducting awareness events and community education. Prevention work focused on presentations and work in schools, including curricula on healthy relationships and dating violence.

#### Innovative Programs

Survey respondents were also funded to undertake innovative programs, particularly around the needs of underserved populations (e.g., deaf communities, Tribes, homeless persons, and





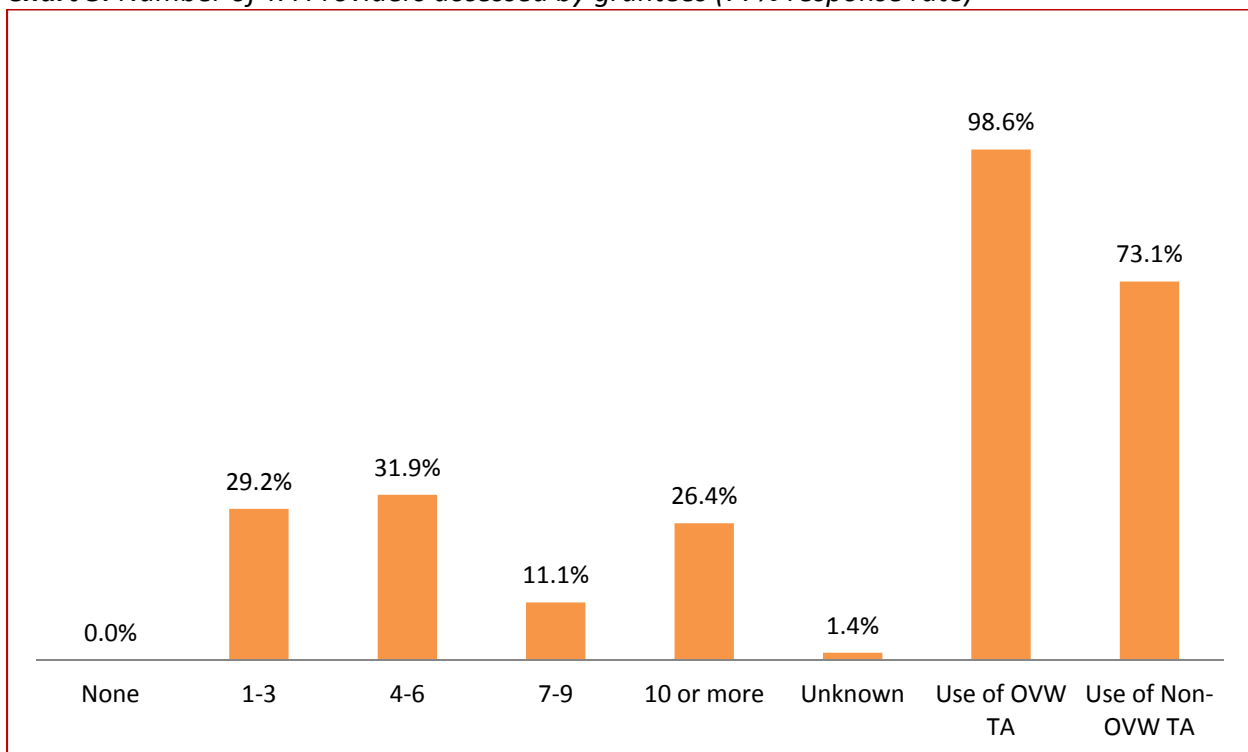
non-English speakers). Services to victims included: transportation assistance, post-separation services, financial literacy programs, and financial assistance for counseling and legal assistance. Collaborations were strengthened by multi-county work with medical facilities, video training for SANE nurses and sexual assault advocates, and social marketing strategies. Examples of innovative programming include the creation of a shelter for women with substance abuse, forming a rural economic justice task force, developing pilot projects for home visiting, and programs to serve the deaf community.

## ***Rural Grantees’ Experience of Technical Assistance***

### ***Grantees Use of Technical Assistance***

In the on-line survey, grantees were asked to indicate from how many separate OVW TA providers their organization had received assistance, resources, or training. Responses to this question were split fairly evenly across several categories (Chart 5). All of the respondents had used TA assistance from OVW TA providers. Seventy-three percent of the respondents had also used non-OVW TA providers. It should be noted, however, that, although a list of OVW TA providers preceded this question, it is unclear whether TA providers perceived by grantees as non-OVW-sponsored may have actually been providing TA under an OVW source with which assessment respondents were unfamiliar.

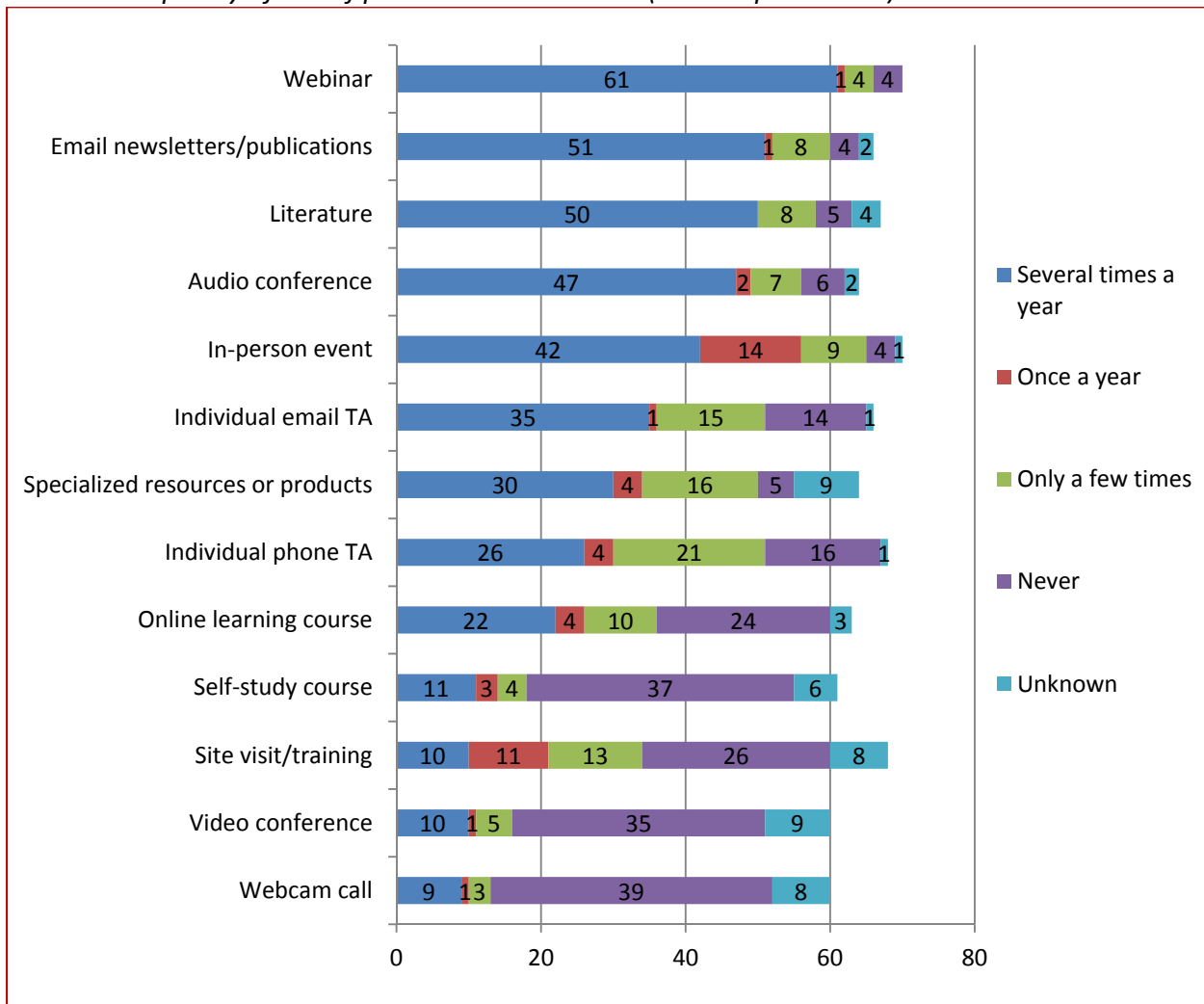
**Chart 5. Number of TA Providers accessed by grantees (77% response rate)**





Survey respondents were asked how frequently they used different methods of TA from OVW TA Providers. Seventy-two grantees responded to this question. As indicated in Chart 6, the type of TA most frequently used were “email/newsletters/publications”, “webinars”, “audio conferences”, “individual TA via email”, “literature”, and “in-person events”. Less frequently used TA included “individual TA over the phone”, “webcam calls”, “video conferences”, “on-line learning”, “self-study courses”, “site visits/training in community”, and “specialized resources or training”.

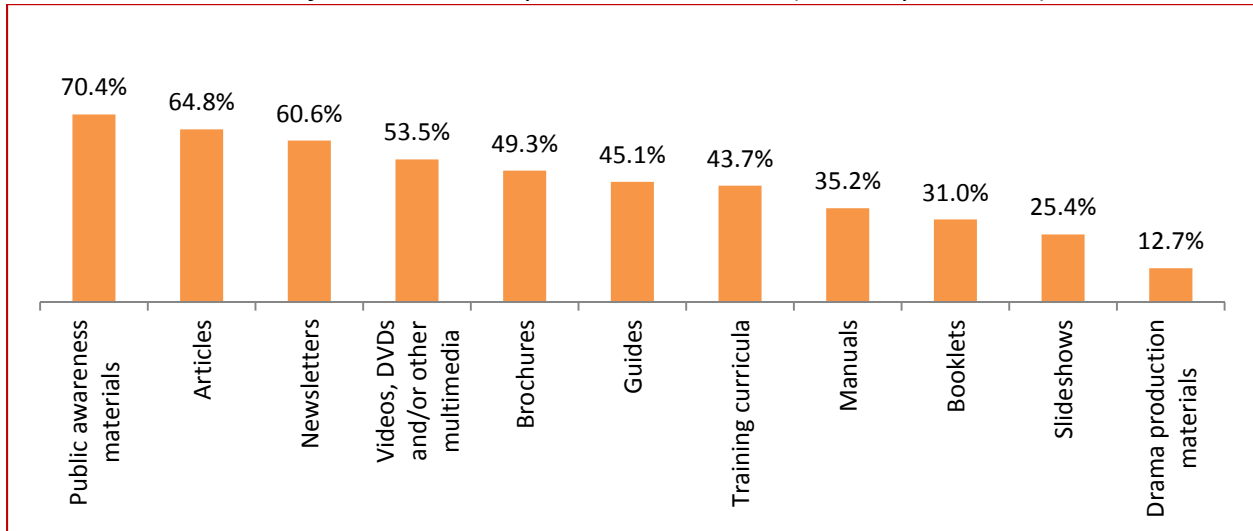
**Chart 6. Frequency of use of particular TA methods (77% response rate)**



Survey respondents reported receiving a wide variety of literature and specialized resources from OVW TA providers. The top three that were reported the most frequently were: public awareness materials (70.4%), articles (64.8%), and newsletters (60.6%). Chart 7 summarizes grantees use of specific types of literature and specialized resources.

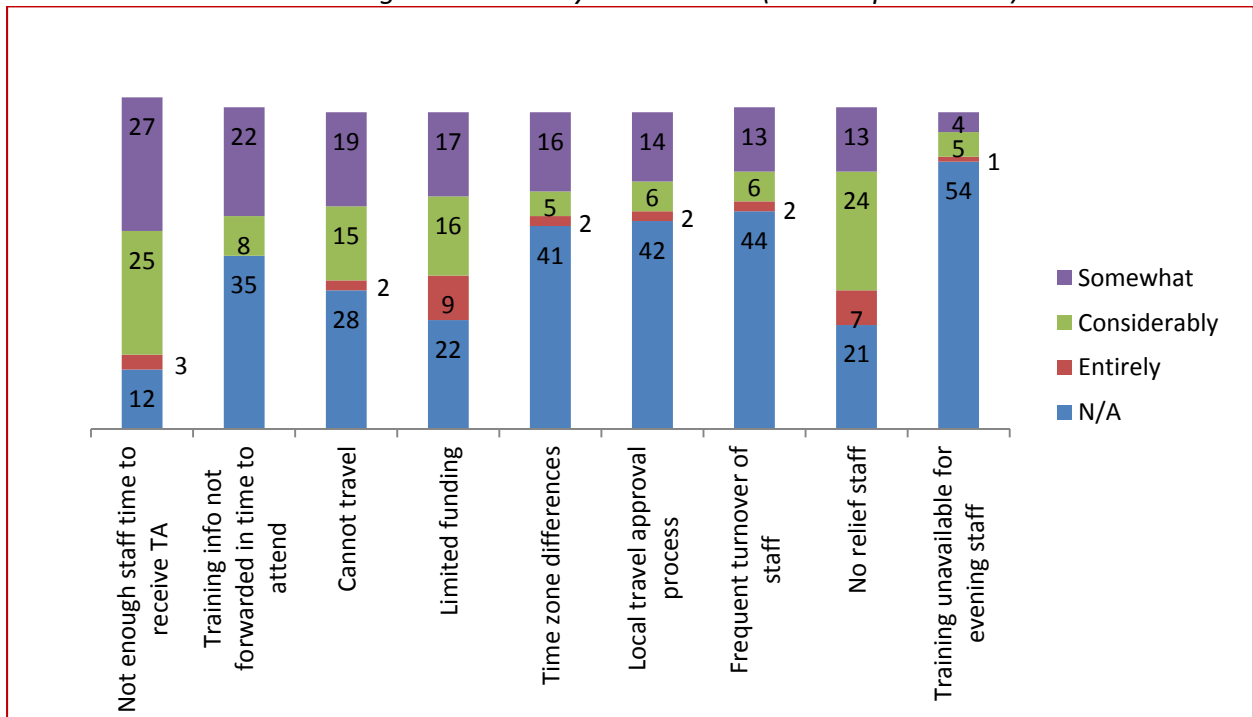


**Chart 7. Grantees use of literature and specialized resources (76% response rate).**



Another survey question asked respondents to rate factors that limited their agency’s ability to access TA as indicated in Chart 8. The most commonly reported factor was “No relief staff” rated as “considerably” limiting to access by 37% of respondents and “entirely” limiting to access by 11%. Another common response was “not enough staff time to receive TA” with 37% of staff rating this as “considerably” limiting and another 4% indicating that this “entirely” limited their access to TA. “Limited funding” was another common factor, with 25% rating this as “considerably” limiting and another 14% reporting that this “entirely” limited their access.

**Chart 8. Factors that limited grantees’ ability to access TA (74% response rate).**





Twenty-eight respondents offered additional factors that limited their access to TA. The most frequently reported factor was a **difficulty in finding OVW pre-approved training to attend**. Grantees involved in the focus groups reported that they were unclear about where to go to have a particular TA need met, suggesting that **it would be helpful to have one source to contact** about all the TA available to rural grantees. Other factors respondents listed that limited their access to TA included: training events were not applicable to their work (e.g., children’s advocates and serving the Deaf and hard of hearing communities), late start of grant award, and difficulties with and/or lack of clarity of federal and/or local travel approval process. This data suggests that there are quite a few programs that are not able to make adequate use of TA because of limited resources, including staff time, travel limitations, and funding limitations.

### ***Effectiveness of Different Methods of Technical Assistance***

#### Delivery Methods

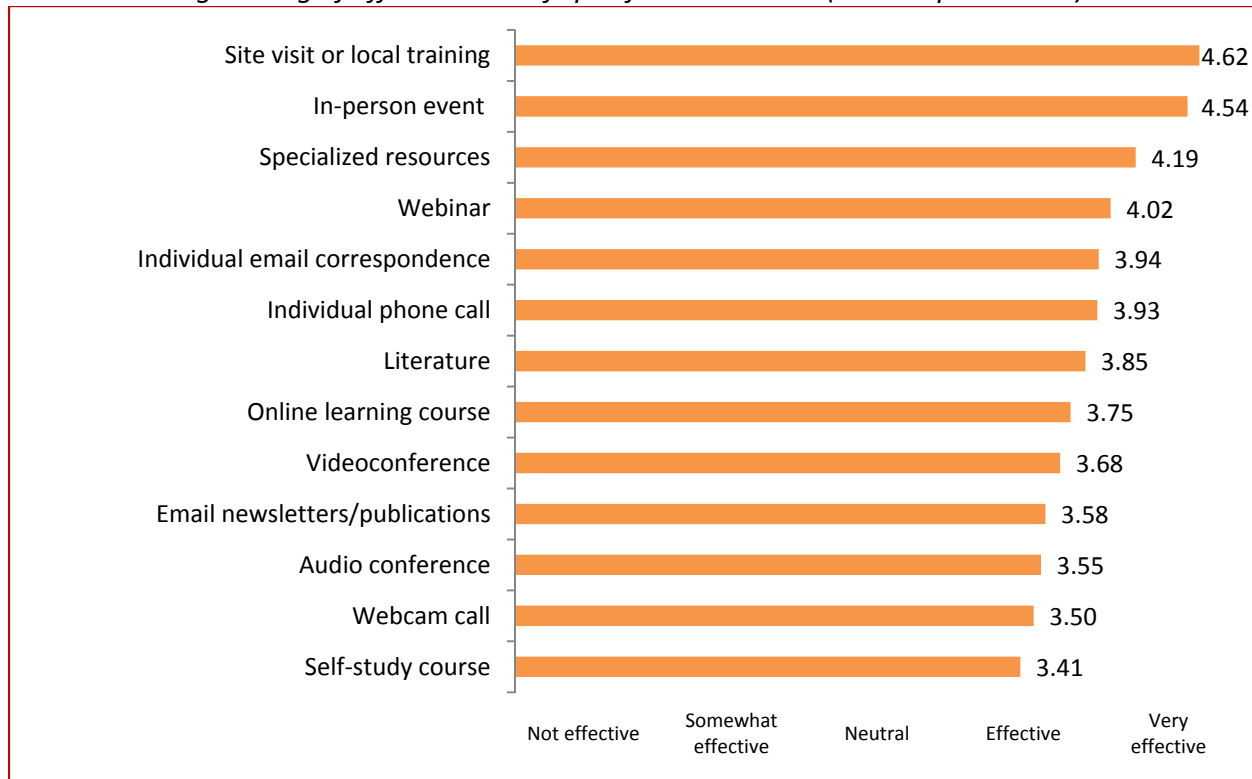
Sixty-eight survey respondents rated the effectiveness of different methods of TA delivery. The three types of TA rated as most effective were “in-person events”, “webinars”, and “individual email correspondence” as indicated in Table 1. Chart 9 captures how grantees rated the effectiveness of specific TA methods.

**Table 1.** *Percentage of respondents rating TA method as very/effective (72% response rate)*

<b>TA Type</b>	<b>Percent</b>
In-person event (roundtable, institute, conference)	91.2
Webinar	82.8
Individual email correspondence	78.8
Literature	70.9
Audio conference	68.6
Email/Newsletters/Publications	58.3



**Chart 9. Average rating of effectiveness of specific TA methods (72% response rate)**



Survey respondents provided open-ended comments about why a particular method was “effective” or “very effective” for them. “In person” events were considered effective because they allow for face-to-face contact and interaction between staff and TA providers and can be tailored to address the needs of local communities. It was noted that workshops and conferences rejuvenate participants and foster commitment and motivation. One respondent commented [from this point forward in this section of the report, *italicized* quotations are from rural grantees]:

*[Our work] can be so hectic that it unfortunately becomes a luxury to have time to reflect and think. I can't begin to tell you the value of in-person training. Participants come home truly rejuvenated, eager to incorporate what they have learned from the training itself, and from those they connected with while there.*

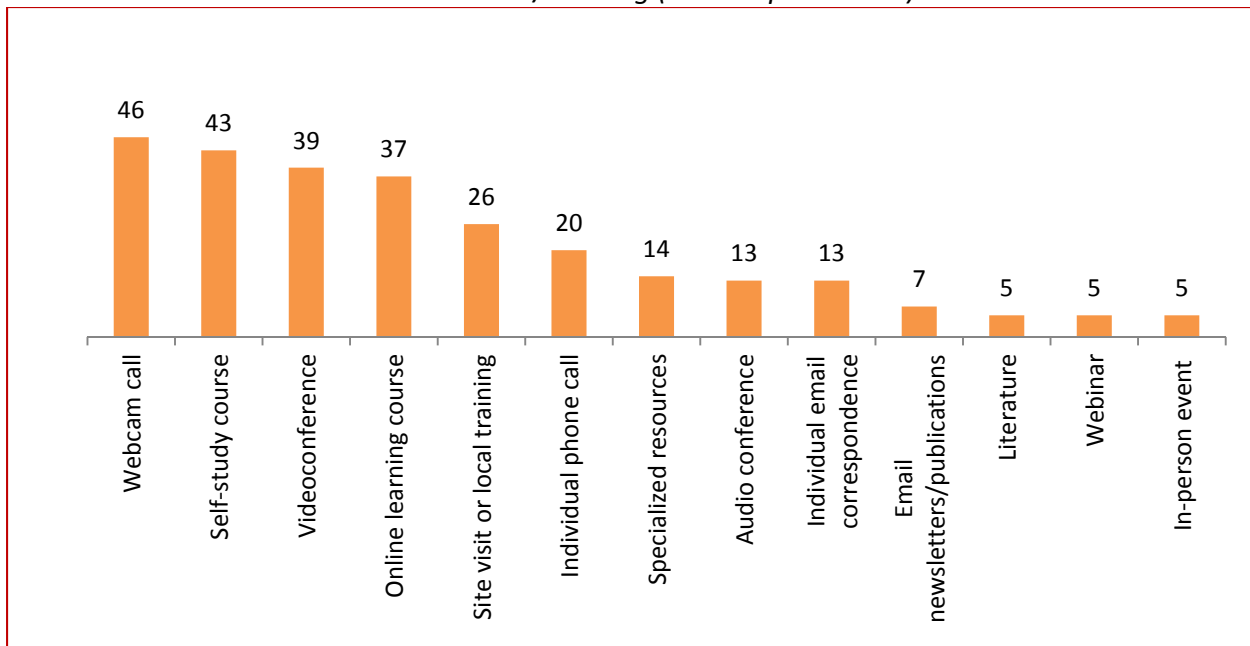
Webinars were considered to be effective by respondents because of low cost, small time commitment, and ease of access. One respondent commented, “*webinars open up the world to our isolated rural advocates and the conference calls help them feel less alone out there.*”

Individual emails are seen as being responsive to the unique needs of programs. Overall, respondents commented that they appreciated individualized attention so that assistance could



be directly tailored to the needs of their program. One commented, *“As project director, I appreciate and utilize the one-on-one phone calls and emails to gain project-specific information from my colleagues and bounce ideas on program components.”* Chart 10 details the TA methods that survey respondents indicated were not applicable to them; they did not access these types of TA.

**Chart 10.** TA methods that received an N/A rating (72% response rate)



It should be noted that “site visit or local training” was listed as “not applicable” by 41% of respondents, but when they did rate this item, 91% rated it as “effective or very effective”. Respondents appreciated the in-depth attention to their needs and the ability to have their entire local team involved, as reflected in the words of one respondent, *“Site visits and individualized assistance were specifically tailored for our needs and issues.”*

Similarly, 21% of respondents rated “specialized resources or products” as “n/a”, but for those for which it did apply, 83% rated it as “effective” or “very effective”. One respondent commented, *“Resources save time – we don’t have to reinvent the wheel.”* Thirty percent of respondents rated “individual phone call” as “n/a”, but 74% rated it as “effective” or “very effective” when it did apply to them. One respondent stated, *“1:1 contact is very effective because it gives you the opportunity to ask questions specific to your area and services.”*

Most of the delivery methods were seen as being effective for meeting different needs. Methods had relative strengths depending upon cost, ease of availability, and ability to individualize. Comments included: *“I feel all methods have merit, although it may be to varying degrees. You can always learn from each method”* and *“the availability of multiple options of receiving assistance made TA accessible.”*



During the audio focus groups and in-person think tank, grantees reported other ways that TA has been effective. Formats that allow grantees to share resources and ideas with each other are seen as helpful. In addition, when events are exclusively rural, attendees can relate to one another and share examples that make sense to rural programs.

Respondents were also asked what made TA methods ineffective. Some respondents commented that they received more written material than they could absorb. Audio conferences were sometimes viewed as impersonal, not engaging, and difficult to follow. The content of audio conferences and webinars could be overly broad or not relevant for a specific program. Interpretation for the Deaf in webinars can be inadequate. Others did not have access to webcams or resources to purchase special products.

#### Usefulness of Topics

In the survey, rural grantees were asked to list the most useful topics of TA for implementing their rural grants. In general, grantees listed training events that they had recently attended. The topics most frequently listed are as follows (in order of descending frequency):

- Coordinated community response (CCR) development and sustainability
- Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) development and sustainability
- Women’s use of violence
- Working with rural communities and victims/survivors
- Working with immigrant survivors of domestic and sexual violence
- Confidentiality
- Financial management
- Addressing trauma
- Promoting healthy teen relationships/teen dating violence

Grantees, in both the survey and focus groups, identified a wide range of topics about which they were interested in receiving more TA. The most frequently named are noted in Table 2.

#### ***Recommendations for TA delivery***

- Continue to offer a variety of delivery methods to meet a variety of grantee needs, including both long-distance and in-person learning opportunities.
- Enhance grantee networking opportunities within different delivery methods.
- Continue to provide and increase the frequency of individualized consultation in the form of phone calls, emails, and site visits.
- Offer various levels of training (e.g., beginning, intermediate, and advanced).
- Develop TA resources that are easily accessible at any time of the day.
- Provide regular updates to grantees on where to go to have specific TA needs met.
- Increase accessibility & frequency of onsite TA.



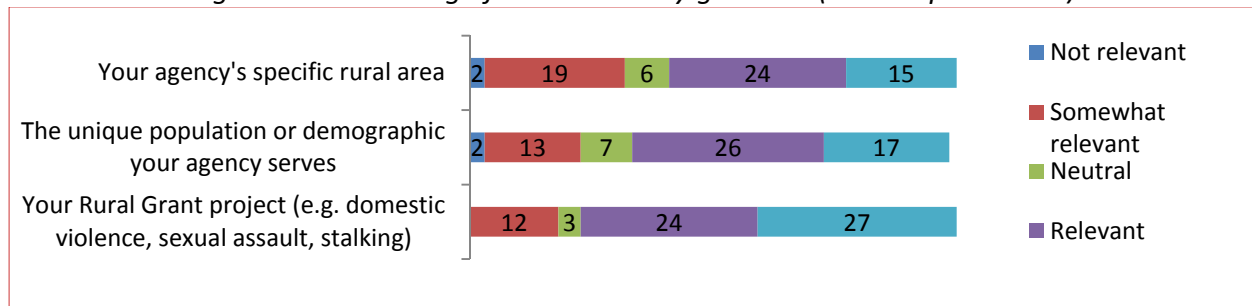
**Table 2.** Categories of TA topics requested by grantees.

Knowledge and Skills	Strategies	Best Practices	Program Capacity Building
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>rural culture</li> <li>substance abuse</li> <li>mental illness</li> <li>trauma</li> <li>child custody</li> <li>safe home visiting</li> <li>crisis intervention</li> <li>sex trafficking</li> <li>immigration law</li> <li>presentations</li> <li>the needs of children</li> <li>jurisdictional issues</li> <li>strengths of rural communities</li> <li>community engagement</li> <li>poverty and homelessness</li> <li>cultural competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working with child protection services</li> <li>working with mental health, and substance abuse programs</li> <li>working with law enforcement</li> <li>being part of a broader social movement</li> <li>engaging the faith communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>audits/assessments</li> <li>victim-centered approaches in advocacy, law enforcement response, child protection services, prosecution, etc.</li> <li>confidentiality</li> <li>Risk/lethality assessment</li> <li>advocate safety</li> <li>implementing MOUs, policies and protocols</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>leadership training</li> <li>effective use of technology and social media</li> <li>time management</li> <li>mission-driven orgs</li> <li>recruiting and training volunteers</li> <li>sustainability planning</li> </ul>

Relevance of TA

Overall, respondents viewed the TA they had received as being relevant to implementing their rural grants as indicated in Chart 11. Seventy-seven percent rated the TA they had received as “relevant” or “very relevant” to their program. Sixty-six percent rated it as “relevant” or “very relevant” to the unique population or demographic served by their agency and 59% thought this was the case for their agency- specific rural area.

**Chart 11.** Average relevance rating of TA received by grantees (70% response rate)







The survey asked grantees whether OVW TA provision affected the extent to which rural grant objectives were achieved. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents said this was “very much” or “completely” the case and 39% reported that this was “somewhat” the case. This question was explored further by asking respondents about ways that the TA helped them to achieve their objectives and ways that it had not; the following themes emerged:

- Helped to build community relationships with institutions by providing outside expertise to enhance credibility with partners and develop knowledge and skills
- Provided up to date information on best practices, tools, and resources
- Helped to focus on defining objectives, implementing them, and reporting progress
- Provided networking opportunities for grantees to exchange ideas and resources

The following themes emerged from comments about how TA *had not helped* programs:

- Training content is too general or not advanced enough and does not address the areas on which programs are focused (e.g. youth, teen dating violence, etc.)
- Training content is designed for different types of communities (e.g. urban)
- Not enough offerings are available or accessible

#### ***Recommendations for maintaining TA relevance***

*TA providers should continue to offer broad content related to:*

- Developing knowledge and skills in all areas related to violence against women
- Best practice approaches and strategies for addressing violence against women
- Program capacity building and leadership development

### ***Grantees Successes and Challenges***

Rural grantees were asked about the successes and challenges they experienced when implementing their grants (see Appendix A for a complete list of rural grantees that participated in the assessment). A preliminary analysis of survey and audio focus group data was conducted to identify initial themes that emerged relating to these successes and challenges and TA needs. The initial themes included the following: addressing diversity across rural communities, dealing with resource demands, working with project partners, reaching victims/survivors, increasing awareness, reducing stigma/ dispelling myths, and translating models to fit rural settings. These initial themes were explored during the video conferences and the grantee “Think Tank”.



The following rural realities emerged as key themes that impact all areas of work funded by the Rural Program and that TA providers must take into account when addressing violence against women in rural communities:

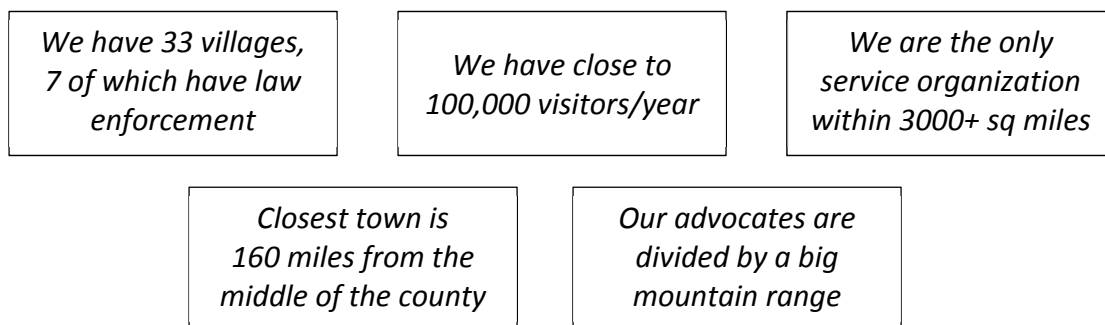
1. *No single “rural”*
2. *Connection and trust*
3. *Long-held traditions and customs*
4. *Expertise at “making do”*
5. *Vast and dynamic landscapes*
6. *A distinct voice*

Below is a description of each of the realities, followed by the impact these realities have on the activities and work funded by the Rural Program.

### ***Rural Realities***

#### **1. No single “rural”**

While there are commonalities, rural communities are also vastly different from one another in terms of their social, cultural, economic, and geographic make-up. Many Tribes have reservations that are in or near “rural” areas and are sovereign nations with vast diversity across nations. Further distinctions among definitions of “rural” include frontier, Alaskan, agricultural, small town, “deep south”, suburban rural, migrant, tourist, etc. Oil drilling in rural regions of North Dakota has led to rapid population growth and social change in contrast to other rural communities who are experiencing poverty, economic stagnation, and population loss. Differences in physical geography, such as mountain ranges or bodies of water that physically divide a county and render both sides inaccessible to the other, and extremes in climate and weather greatly impact the ability of programs to reach isolated victims. Cultural attitudes vary between rural regions, even within one state, and shape how communities respond to violence against women.





The need for TA to take into account this diversity while seeking to find commonality, is highlighted by this comment:

*What I am looking for is a lot more in-depth information on what the challenges are in rural communities. A lot of what I've seen is the how to stuff, but they are lacking the specificity to rural – here's what these communities will need that will be really different. There are so many different kinds of rural. Rural means something different in each community; even what rural means across our state is very different. What are those needs that are consistent throughout – and what are those that are different within rural [communities]?*

## 2. Connection and trust

The reality in rural communities that “*everybody knows everybody*” shapes the work of rural grantees in ways that are not experienced to the same degree by their urban counterparts. The lack of anonymity in rural communities can be both an advantage and a disadvantage in addressing violence against women. An advantage at the level of individual advocacy is that family and friends can readily provide support and “*watch out for each other*”. A disadvantage is that retribution can be directed toward victims because they did not keep silent and protect the status or reputation of offenders and their families. A challenge at the community level is that agency partners have relationships outside their professional roles that impact how they respond. One individual in a key decision-making role can have an enormous influence on the community response to violence against women, which can be both an advantage and disadvantage depending upon their level of support.

*...we had a [District Attorney's] office who was doing a great job arresting, but then some of our funders and supporters had friends or family members arrested and they got mad and didn't want to donate to us anymore.*

The need to build trust in rural communities was discussed by grantees as a common challenge they experienced. Staff members are often seen as outsiders if they did not grow up in the community. Staff turnover, due to short funding cycles and the loss of funding streams, affects the ability of programs to build community trust.

*[A challenge] is creating long-term relationships within the time frame of secure funding. Our small and isolated communities do not readily trust staff and will ensure that they are "going to stick around" before building relationships.*

Grantees experience successes when they can informally build relationships over time. “*It's about having coffee to build relationships – not just a formal meeting. Let them get to know you and trust you. And just have some small talk.*”



### 3. Long-held traditions and customs

A slower pace and honoring tradition are common values across rural communities. Long-held traditions can sustain a community and bring people together for the good of the community, particularly in times of adversity. Cultural and social norms that perpetuate violence against women can be slower to change in rural communities. Belief systems that tolerate the use of violence against women, deny the extent of the problem, and resist change can be firmly entrenched in rural communities. Rural programs must find ways to address resistance by increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and dispelling myths.

*Our challenges are how to respond to resistance to the information we're sharing. For example, if we present research numbers, people still think it doesn't happen in our community even though the numbers say otherwise.*

*Sexual assault continues to be too taboo an issue to discuss openly and therefore the response remains inadequate and stagnant.*

### 4. Expertise at “making do”

Rural grantees report that funding sources are shrinking while the demand and types of problems they are addressing are becoming more complex. Women experiencing violence in rural communities often do not have access to supportive services, such as public transportation, affordable housing, healthcare, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, and language interpreters. Rural advocacy programs often try to fill the void. This requires them to have training and TA in areas beyond their core mission.

*Our service numbers in our DV resource center have gone up 30% since 2008, funding has remained the same; all of the services around us, that we depend on [are being cut], GA, housing, TANF; there is no safety net; we don't normally provide these kinds of services, but the community is looking to us to fill these niches.*

### 5. Vast and dynamic landscapes

Reaching victims/survivors involves *bridging the distance*: overcoming geographic distance, but also cultural, relational, and political distance. Advocates are challenged to bridge these distances in rural communities to promote the safety and well-being of victims/survivors.

*In Alaska, the physical distance is a huge problem – for example we have 8,000 people in an area the size of Ohio and no roads. And we have 33 villages. Of those, we have law enforcement in 7 of the villages. So you're talking about the middle of nowhere with no cop.*

*We talked about isolation meaning a lot of things: geographic or cultural. One success was putting professionals in those areas especially if they are*



*local and people know them. One challenge is trying to figure out why people do not seek services when they are so isolated that you can't just go ask at their door.*

Grantees report that their communities are undergoing change and facing increasingly difficult social problems, such as, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse and mental illness. Problems that have been considered urban issues are rural concerns as well, but must be addressed with many fewer resources.

*In my state, I think the classic battered woman that showed up at a shelter 10-15 years ago now goes somewhere else – because back then nobody believed her, but now there are family members and professionals that do – people don't go into shelter if they can avoid it. So the people we see increasingly in our shelter, on the crisis-line, and even in drop in are people with persistent mental health and substance abuse problems – people that can't get housing any other way.*

*[The] entire western part of the state is under siege from the energy development – oil and coal drilling – thousands of men pouring into the state from all over the U.S. to get jobs as rough necks, oil drillers, truck drivers. These are men who have so many of the risk factors of violence against women or they are coming in with past domestic violence/sexual assault background. The number of sexual assaults and rapes have doubled and tripled, [so have] aggravated assaults. Law enforcement is extremely overworked and understaffed.*

Another type of *shifting landscape* that rural programs must address goes beyond change in local communities to shifts in policies and funding priorities at the state and national levels.

*[Challenges involve the] difficulties of negotiating relationships, even between advocacy organizations, let alone the systems themselves. This is an impact of one of OVW's policy initiatives through the funding structure; for example, creating an emphasis on sexual assault and raising it to the same status as domestic violence and this has created tensions at the local level. And there hasn't been TA that helps address those kinds of impacts. This is certainly a challenge on the ground where I sit.*

Finally, *jurisdictional issues* present particular challenges in working with project partners. Programs must be familiar with local, state, federal, and Tribal regulations depending upon the nature of their community. In addition, it is necessary to work with agencies dealing with child custody, child welfare, and divorce issues that have their own complex set of policies and regulations. The complexities of jurisdictional issues place victims/survivors at risk when there are disputes, and rural grantees do not have the expertise or resources to deal with them.



*Our main challenge is addressing cross-jurisdictional issues, i.e. “turf wars.” Our service area encompasses three counties and three Tribal jurisdictions in which we attempt to serve six municipalities. Our citizens are served by two state judicial districts and twenty-one law enforcement agencies, federal, Tribal, state, county, municipal, and university.*

## 6. A distinct voice

While there is no single *rural*, there is a distinct rural voice that is grounded in all of these realities and that frequently gets lost in translation when ideas and strategies for responding to violence against women are introduced. Many national models to address violence against women have been developed in urban communities. Rural grantees adapt what they have learned from TA providers and what is required of them by funding sources to the unique dynamics of their rural communities.

*There were only three [evidenced-based models] – and they were totally urban. So we’ve spent the last many years reworking that and are now finally [piloting] a new curriculum.*

*... we go to a legal training, for example, and they say ‘and this is when you would engage a lawyer’ – which isn’t always possible in all rural communities.*

### **Recommendations**

*To better address the rural realities, grantees recommended that TA providers seek to:*

- Recognize differences across rural communities, seek to address commonalities
- Utilize a range of examples in training events that reflect rural realities
- Offer networking opportunities for grantees from similar geographic regions
- Highlight the practical ways to navigate through “everybody knows everybody”
- Offer strategies for building trust and support in rural communities
- Present strategies to address rural values that perpetuate violence against women
- Help grantees develop alternative plans for sustaining and stabilizing resources
- Bring the training to rural communities (i.e., to rural states or regions)
- Focus on building individual and long term relationships with rural programs
- “Speak Rural”: translate liberal ideas for a conservative audience
- Incorporate issues related to: rural models, servicing isolated and remote areas, rural social networks, handling small town politics and power dynamics



### **Impact of “Rural Realities” on the Types of Work Funded & Related TA Needs**

“Rural realities” impact the ability of rural grantees to achieve their goals in each of the primary areas of work funded by OVW’s Rural Program: advocacy, collaboration, education and prevention, sexual assault, services to underserved populations, and services to Tribal populations. The following section discusses the impact of these rural realities on each of the primary areas of work and the TA needs that were identified by rural grantees.

#### Advocacy

Advocates struggle to **bridge distances** in rural communities with **limited resources**. Extreme isolation characterizes the experience of many rural programs and the victim/survivors they serve. Advocates report tremendous distances between victims and population centers where services are available and long response times from law enforcement officials spread thin across broad geographical areas. Additional challenges include recruiting sufficient volunteers, lack of public transportation, poor or non-existent cell phone and internet service, and higher costs because of mileage expenses or limited options for emergency housing (e.g. one motel in town). Advocates must address their own safety issues, as well as those of victims:

*In our rural area, tromping out into the wilderness into a home where you don’t know what’s going on or there is no signage that says where you are makes some advocates pretty nervous. We did a partnership project with one of our rural sheriff’s departments to mark houses in rural areas so they had a better way to find the place, to avoid getting lost.*

Satellite offices have been one approach for **bridging the distance**. The development of satellite offices have led to concerns about adequate staffing, community acceptance, staff isolation, resource allocation, and staff supervision.

*A big challenge is supervising the off-site staff, especially when this staff is shared staff. The success is that we’re reaching victims – very often victims do not want to travel outside their area. TA would be helpful on supervising staff in off-site locations and just sharing the different models that everyone uses would be helpful.*

**Everybody knows everybody** presents challenges for maintaining privacy and confidentiality for victims/survivors. Women are visible in the community when they access services and word travels quickly. Grantees find that community partners, staff and board members, victims, and offenders know one another in different contexts, requiring rural advocates to employ creative strategies to protect victim’s confidentiality.

*Everyone is related to each other – literally in some smaller communities. They are related to the victims and survivors – so there is a perceived lack of confidentiality, because there is a lack of confidentiality.*



**Navigating jurisdictional issues** can require specialized knowledge that many advocates do not have. Grantees expressed the need for more training on federal, state, and Tribal regulations and how to deal with interstate issues.

*Child custody across state lines, divorce across state lines, domestic violence charges across state lines, no contact orders, intimate partners – all the different terms and trying to figure out the commonalities and speaking to another system in another state.*

**Resource limitations** and **shifting landscapes** demand that advocates have increased knowledge and skills in areas such as substance abuse, mental illness, poverty, homelessness, and immigration issues. As funding in related human service areas decreases or becomes absent in rural communities, advocacy programs and shelters are experiencing pressure to provide services to address these needs. Most rural advocacy programs do not have the capacity, skills, or resources to do so, nor is it part of their mission.

*Even if our funds are not directly being cut, the women we serve are directly affected by other cuts to mental health, substance abuse, housing. As the services around us are being cut, we are perceived as the only safety net. People ask me what the hardest part of my job is, and it's not hearing about the abuse, even though it's horrific. The hardest part is saying "no" to the woman who has been evicted, living in her car, 6 months pregnant, has a 2 year old and a 1 year old. She doesn't meet the criteria for immediate danger for shelter.*

**Shifting landscapes** are impacting the core of advocacy. Like advocacy programs across the nation, rural programs are responding to overwhelming numbers and needs of victims, combined with limited program resources, causing an erosion of the advocacy-for-change agenda that has guided the anti-violence against women's movement since its inception. Increasingly domestic violence and sexual assault programs have become "professionalized" social service organizations. There are different perspectives among rural advocates about the purpose of advocacy:

*...along the way, our movement has become over-professionalized and now we're at a place of deciding if we are social services or social change? ...when a woman walks through the door we immediately start thinking about all the things we can do, how we can fix her, and what resources can we refer her to. But we fail to tap into...those women's groups...I think that violence against women could end tomorrow if women banded together and said that this isn't going to happen to us anymore.*





This grantee’s perspective stands in stark contrast with the following exchange between two grantees at the in-person grantee “Think Tank”, and highlights a challenge to TA providers to effectively train on advocacy as the specialized practice of facilitating victim’s safety, rights, and autonomy *while also working to reform social institutions, public policy, and community norms.*

*Grantee 1: That relates with the professionalism and the grassroots movement idea: well we’re serving working women now, we’re not “sitting around the kitchen table” anymore, because women these days aren’t necessarily doing that.*

*Grantee 2: Yes, and it’s not grassroots anymore....I don’t think we need to be grassroots necessarily; it’s a great history, but that’s not where we are.*

*Grantee 1: But I feel like some of the TA is still there. Some is still very much promoting the “movement”.*

*Grantee 2: and you have to honor that history, but if we don’t do business planning, then ...*

### **Recommendations for rural advocacy TA**

*Grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Effective models for satellite office related to supervision, maintaining connections, adherence to a social change approach to advocacy provision, etc.
- Strategies for enhancing the safety of advocates in remote rural locations
- Increasing skills for working with specific populations
- Strategies for reaching extremely isolated victims
- Working with victims/survivors who are experiencing multiple issues (e.g., substance abuse, mental illness, poverty, homelessness, immigration difficulties, etc.)
- Promoting dialogue about the changing role of advocacy
- Integrating survivors into the work as a sustainability strategy
- Self-care for advocates (i.e., *how to keep staff happy and healthy*)
- Self-directed training for volunteers and new staff



### Collaboration

Rural grantees have had various degrees of success in establishing effective Coordinated Community Response Teams (CCRs) and Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs). Collaboration, in general, with community partners is greatly impacted by the rural realities described above.

Technical assistance has helped communities to successfully build CCRs and SARTs from the ground up. However, rural grantees reported ongoing challenges in work with project partners, with comments, such as, “*leadership is not really championing the cause*”, supporters “*aren’t on the team*”, and key decision makers “*make excuses and don’t attend the meetings.*” Rural realities, such as, **trust issues, everybody knows everybody, bridging the distance, long-held traditions and customs, and jurisdictional issues** can create challenges in developing effective partnerships. Getting everyone on board and educating members of the team can be slow and hampered by rural community dynamics, leadership turnover, and changes in funding priorities.

*Our greatest challenge in implementing our rural grant is the change that we have in leadership among the CCR partners. A new prosecutor comes on and doesn’t care about [domestic violence]. They take the policies and practices and put them through the shredder and it feels like we’re starting all over again....Sheriff and prosecutors [are] elected every four years. A new person comes in and literally burns the file. No organizational memory. Start over with trust-building and education.*

Building relationships, dealing with leadership turnover, and addressing **resistance** requires much patience, commitment, and **time**. This groundwork needs to be established before there will be a dedicated commitment to new policies and protocols that will improve outcomes for victims/survivors of violence against women, especially in rural communities.

Grantees discussed some of the challenges of working with partners within the criminal legal system’s response to violence against women. In particular, the judiciary, prosecutors, and law enforcement in rural areas are in need of adequate training and commitment to addressing violence against women.

*Lack of judicial oversight, training, and accountability is particularly problematic in rural areas, because the one local judge hears every sort of case, and if they have a poor response to domestic violence, all victims will suffer without alternatives available.*

*We experience the good ole boy system. In one area, we have the support of the sheriff. He goes to trainings, but he goes back and does what he wants to do. In another area, we have the verbal support of the sheriff, but no one from the law enforcement will come to the table to talk to us.*



Rural communities are particularly challenged to find people to participate on CCR/SART teams because potential participants are engaged in multiple community groups. Rural grantees have come up with creative ways to make their teams more effective and boost participation.

*We've had issues with the high number of meetings. So we've decided to do SARTs at regions within the state instead of having so many individualized [areas]. This is a good thing, less meetings that just pull people away.*

*There aren't many agencies in our area, so we thought that we'd connect with the go-to people in the community. And we're building an informal group; some are business owners, some are ranchers. They are invested in the issue and it's not tied to funding; it's tied to their care for the community.*

The rural reality that **everybody knows everybody** can sometimes be a hindrance to community collaboration. The complexity of relationship dynamics and how they impact programs is captured in the following comment:

*This person [investigator] has a family network that is involved in many layers of the community. The rest of the people on the SART and other players in the community know they have to get along with him. They respond to it by doing the best they can to work within his level of commitment to this project. Because if they were to get into conflict with this person...it goes beyond just this one project. They have to balance out all of the interactions they'd have with this person and his family.*

However, small community networks can be an advantage when community leaders are able to positively influence systems change, either because of their status in the community or the relationships that they have with others. Programs have successfully worked with key community leaders to achieve their goals.

*On the positive side, we have the mayor in one county; she is the SART coordinator and is putting the whole project together. She is very well respected; lots of relationships that have been established, people all want to get along well with the mayor.*

*Especially in law enforcement – they are all friends. If you can get an officer who has a buddy or a friend – that is how we've made our way into their office or their system – if they have a buddy who is volunteering to come and participate.*

Rural community relationships can be both helpful and a hindrance, but knowing how these



dynamics work is important. Grantees noted the need for training to understand rural politics/community power dynamics and how to respond effectively to achieve program goals.

*We all have small town politics. That’s a characteristic of every small town and in my area it’s exacerbated by the Tribal aspect. One person can make everything succeed, or make it all fail. I haven’t had TA or training that’s specific to small town politics. Also, the reality that everybody in my small town is related – and the challenges that presents.*

*In rural communities we know people, so we can either make the best of those relationships or we can screw up them in a heartbeat.*

### ***Recommendations for rural collaboration TA***

*Grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Strategies for long-term development and sustainability of community partnerships
- Influencing and addressing leadership turnover to maintain gains
- Working effectively within rural community political/power dynamics
- Individualized assistance in strategizing and brainstorming to help work through obstacles
- The art of telling/selling your story: Using research and data to support your cause
- Strategies for advocates to gain respect and trust of project partners
- Defining a “CCR/SART” as distinguished from general collaboration work
- Growing new leaders to champion the cause
- Strengthening the will of the community to create change



### Public Education/Prevention

Rural grantees are involved in a wide range of community education and prevention programs, many of which take place in schools. Rural realities that impact this area are the **limited resources** available for doing this kind of work, **long-held traditions and customs**, **navigating jurisdictional issues**, and existing models for education and prevention are **lost in translation**.

*Prevention has been lost for most of our programs – they are doing awareness and education, they are not doing prevention. It’s just a luxury that can’t be afforded.*

*We never seem to have enough staff to handle both the education and prevention nature of our programs, as well as the crisis intervention that becomes evident through our groups and classes. Often as students become familiar with the dynamics of dating violence and sexual assault, they begin to disclose their own victimization.*

*Our tertiary challenge has been establishing consistent lines of communication between project partners and the educational administrators serving the teen and young adult demographic. We have 15 school districts with 67 different points of contact necessary to reach all 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in our service area...Our population is disbursed over 4,000 square miles making physical travel to each of the school districts costly and time-consuming.*

*The schools seem to be in denial about the level of dating violence that occurs in the community.*

However, grantees do report many successful efforts to provide education in the schools because of state mandates and positive relationships with schools.

*One of the biggest successes has been in our own outreach and prevention work. We were able to get a staff member full-time to do outreach – she is literally in every high school and elementary school several times a semester in our county.*

Effective use of social media and other forms of technology is a challenge in work related to community awareness and education. Grantees discussed concerns about how to respond to backlash or harassment, particularly when it is online. These concerns are reflected in the following comments.

*I heard from our programs [across the state] that generally they felt that their community awareness and education goes very well. The community*



*sees them as a viable and vibrant part of the community. The part that they most struggle with is the online stuff – and [staff] have emailed me some of the most horrific responses from community members [on] blogs and stuff which are very personally aimed at individuals who people know.*

*...we're all in the middle of changing times – communication, the difference between the newspaper and an online presence, and some negative counter-awareness especially online with blogs and [social media sites] – I think that indicates that we're in a changing time – and that is a gap for all of us. So I don't think a handout will be sufficient.*

### ***Recommendations for rural public education and prevention TA***

*Grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Effective use of technology and social media in a rural community
- Developing marketing strategies
- Developing program evaluation skills geared toward prevention and education
- Building collaborations with school systems around prevention
- Rural specific law enforcement training
- Train-the-trainer courses for varied audiences: doctors, clinics, law enforcement, probation, etc.
- Current research trends, particularly research related to rural communities
- Training curricula
- Responding to backlash/resistance



### Sexual Assault

Sexual assault has received greater priority in recent Rural Program solicitations. Rural grantees are increasingly funded to develop SART (Sexual Assault Response Teams) and SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) programs, as well as education, prevention, and advocacy services. Implementing sexual assault initiatives can be a challenge for rural grantees because of **long-held traditions and customs** exhibited in communities by denial and minimization of the problem or refusing to take action because of lack of knowledge.

*Data collection is spotty at best. In fact, the Sheriff stated in a stakeholders meeting that there were no sexual assaults in his county. It just so happened that two survivors were present at this very meeting.*

*A dual program was applying to the city council for sexual assault funding and the closest the mayor could come to saying sexual assault was “bothered”, like, you know, when women are “bothered in that way.” You can imagine the tone that this set for the community.*

Grantees discussed the challenge of developing SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) services in rural areas with **limited resources**. They reported a lack of training resources and not enough Registered Nurses interested or who have employers who will allow them to take the time to complete training. Hospitals and/or clinics may have few identified victims and often lack the commitment to provide care. *“When a SANE does become trained, they may have a large service area to cover or assist with, and therefore may become strained.”*

**Dynamic landscapes** related to funding and policy priorities play a role here as well. The dual focus on domestic violence and sexual assault that programs have adopted because of OVW’s increased emphasis on sexual assault has created tension in rural communities that have separate programs dedicated to each form of violence. Grantees discussed some of the problems they are encountering in terms of philosophical differences between agencies about how services should be delivered and incorporating sexual assault services in agencies that previously focused on domestic violence issues.

*Some of it is who gets the money; but it’s more complicated than that. It’s really about the way that domestic violence and sexual assault services have evolved over time. For example, here we are doing domestic violence services as a non-profit. We intend to provide woman-informed, comprehensive kinds of work, both in terms of the community response and the service aspect. Sexual assault services have been housed in a large mental health service organization and are fairly invisible.*

*The tension between free-standing sexual assault agencies and domestic violence agencies competing for funding, attention to their issues, and*



*authority over "the work" negatively impacts efforts to foster a coordinated community response and provide victims and survivors with the best possible comprehensive services.*

*Difficult to bring sexual assault to the forefront of the work because it seems that domestic violence takes precedence and a lot of small rural program staff are not comfortable with it because, even though we know this is going on, women are not coming to the program for help.*

In addition to challenges, rural grantees report success in being able to bring what they have learned in domestic violence work to their collaborative work in the area of sexual assault.

*You don't bring everybody to the table until everybody is ready to be at the table. We're still developing relationships and trying to be proactive. The reason I think we're there is that because the [domestic violence] work we've done has created enough change in our systems partners, so about 5 years ago it began to feel safe to start the SART. We've had an attitude that if you're going to do system change, you need to be ready for the system to change.*

### **Recommendations for rural sexual assault TA**

*Rural Program grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Incorporating a dual program focus on sexual assault and domestic violence
- Overviews and updates on laws related to sexual assault
- Advocacy for sexual assault survivors from more vulnerable populations (elder, disabilities, mental health, substance abuse, children, etc.)
- Developing community and criminal justice system responses to sexual assault survivors
- Strategies to engage men in efforts to end sexual assault
- Advocacy on behalf of children who are sexually abused by the abusive partner of the non-offending parent
- Strategies to increase the prosecution of sexual assault
- Addressing barriers to implementing SANE programs
- Addressing community resistance and resource limitations





### Addressing Violence Against Women in Underserved Populations

OVW has funded innovative projects in rural communities to “enhance the capacity of organizations to provide services to populations that have historically been underrepresented within rural areas and communities, such as serving individuals in communities of color; gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning individuals; individuals with disabilities; and individuals experiencing abuse in later life.”<sup>8</sup> In particular, grantees reported fear, distrust, extreme isolation, limited resources, and language barriers as obstacles to overcome.

*[There is a] cultural divide - so many different kinds of people living in rural areas. Majority are whites and pockets of communities that are culturally diverse. [Programs are] not equipped to reach those communities in ways that are effective or ... don't have the capacity or resources to reach them.*

*[It is a challenge] reaching out to the deaf community in rural areas – they are more isolated because of communication barriers. Many do not have the technology to obtain information.*

*[A challenge] is the isolation of migrant farm workers, who sometimes have little access to the community and services and little or no support on the farm.*

Many underserved communities are distrustful of service providers from outside their community. Grantees have tried outreach strategies to **build trust and bridge cultural and language differences** that have not always been as successful as they hoped.

*We have had a position in our grant the last couple rounds [for] a liaison/outreach coordinator. But we had a lot of difficulty finding someone from the community to take a position in advocacy. We were able to find a few advocates who spoke Spanish, but because they were not from that community, it didn't work for them.*

Grantees that have been funded for longer periods of time to develop outreach strategies for underserved populations have a high level of investment, commitment, and knowledge about how to work across cultures, and are continually exploring methods to establish multi-cultural programs. Many have developed more effective approaches over time.

*Relationships that are built aren't carried through with programs. So when there is program turnover, when that advocate leaves, that relationship is dissolved and we're back to where we started. So we are trying to work with programs to support a more formal relationship that isn't so dependent on one person.*



*It's really hard in rural communities for a dominant culture group reaching out to marginalized communities. On a state coalition level, we've tried to become more organized; we have our community organizing specialist, [and] an advocate of color network. We're trying to pull in more volunteers of color and providing leadership opportunities for communities of color so that the specific outreach is more effective.*

*...we have an advocate who is specifically reaching out to our migrant worker population. We were not being effective in reaching this community. We had to gain some trust with this community, and have had some great inroads recently. We've been able to take it one step at a time – and we are getting more and more calls.*

Grantees also identified anti-immigration attitudes and racism as barriers for victims accessing services.

*Fear of immigration enforcement has affected our immigrant community regardless of their documentation status, making them less likely to call law enforcement, seek protective orders, or even come to us for services.*

Grantees described successful outreach programs to immigrants, but also identified TA around immigration issues and undocumented workers as a significant need.

*We have a project that focuses on outreach with rural programs, we find and secure interpreters, language access, and we have an immigration attorney on staff to provide relief for immigrant victims.*

*A big challenge is working with undocumented survivors – perhaps translation, or TA for legal providers. This is a deep need.*

### ***Recommendations for TA related to reaching underserved populations***

*Grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Outreach strategies for rural settings
- Establishing long term, trusting relationships in the midst of constant turnover of staff and changing populations
- Strategies for programs that represent the dominant culture to meaningfully engage with marginalized communities
- Use of interpreters in community and criminal justice responses
- Foundational legal training on issues related to immigration
- Recruiting staff from diverse backgrounds who are embedded in the community



### Addressing Violence Against Women in Native Communities

Compared to women of other races, Native women have the highest rate of intimate partner violence, the highest rate of stalking, and suffer from the highest rate of rape and sexual assault.<sup>9</sup> The rape and sexual assault of Native people during colonization, coupled with the limitation of the full authority of Tribes to impose culturally-defined sanctions against those who committed crimes of violence against women, have contributed to the extreme rates of violence against Native women today.<sup>10</sup>

*The most extreme violence that we see is happening on the reservation. So, a key challenge is the extent and prevalence of the violence; it's almost in every family, or extended family group.*

This history impacts all areas of work to address violence against Native women in rural communities. **Trust issues**, stemming from the history of colonization, were at the forefront of discussions related to non-Native and Native programs working together to better serve Native women.

*We have had 200 years of mistrust between Native and non-Native, the "haves" and the "have not's," the "us" and "them's." We have had [only] two years to open the dialogue for community members to first admit interpersonal violence is a problem within our communities; second, to realize that interpersonal violence is intertwined with other social issues currently being addressed within the communities; and third, to understand that collaborating with others within the community creates a stronger, more efficient means of providing services to victims.*

*Challenges stemming from Native American historical trauma. The "old ones" have hidden it for so long, they don't want to see/hear anything that reminds them of their past experiences because it hurts too much.*

Collaboration work between non-Native and Native communities is particularly challenging for a variety of reasons. Historical trauma and longstanding **trust issues** coupled with a dominant culture program unprepared to meaningfully engage with nearby Tribal reservations or Alaskan villages create challenging conditions within which to attempt collaboration.

*The [non-Tribal] CCR is planning a law enforcement conference....No Native people can present. It's just a bunch of white people. We're polite, nice – but our advocates and attorneys can't handle it.*

*Even though [the community is] only 40% white and 60% Native and Hispanic, all the practitioners are white.*



Non-Native programs that have had a longstanding presence in a community adjacent to a Tribal reservation or Alaskan village reported the greatest success in leveraging **communication and trust** and **bridging the distance**. These grantees reported that humility, openness, and a willingness to address racism were at the heart of their success.

*There is a Tribal council, and we have support from them....We have bridged the “outsider” gap – they do see us as part of their community response. We have a lot of community support (Tribal council, chief of police, prosecutors, etc.)...but we are a non-profit agency [that has been] providing services there for many, many years.*

*I say this because I’m Caucasian because I make a lot of mistakes relating to cultures. So I think that within a CCR – being respectful to other cultures and practices. So I learned to check in ahead of time to learn what the cultural norm is – to be respectful. [To learn about] those subtle interactions that can cause a bad rapport right off the bat.*

*Another thing that we do is that we work hard and I think successfully – I’m white and 70% of my staff is Alaskan Native. In my village: about 60% Native and 40% non-Native because it’s the service hub where the University is and the Indian Hospital is, but 85% of those I serve are Alaskan Native. So in all our job descriptions, we have a line that says, “willingness and ability to effectively confront issues of gender and race.”*

An innovative strategy one grantee shared was a forum to educate and unite the communities around the history of colonization and issues of abuse and violence.

*We just last week had [people from the local reservation] come in and present about connecting with Native Americans. The whole presentation was in a circle. No tables or anything. All in a circle. It was interesting because I think the mostly non-Native attendees were uncomfortable. Especially how comfortable the presenter was talking about his own abuse. Nobody could hide in a circle. And it was interesting to be in the circle. And at the end, when we were able to talk about how we felt or what we learned – we got some really interesting feedback. It was quite the learning experience.*

Native and non-Native programs reported many challenges related to the complexities of **jurisdictional issues** between sovereign Tribal governments and city, county, state, and federal governments. Even more nuanced jurisdictional issues, however, were reported including challenges of Tribes without a federally or state-designated land base and crimes against Native women committed off reservation. The example below from a grantee captures the impact of



**vast and dynamic landscapes, everyone knows everyone, and expertise at “making do”.**

*A woman from a Tribe in [state A] was awarded custody, but her kids are in [state B]. We’re having a heck of a time trying to help her actually get the kids because of the jurisdictional issues. The abuser’s family works in that court system in [state B]. We’re working to find attorneys in [state B] that will take on her case.*

Rural realities can be exacerbated for Native American and Alaskan Native advocacy programs as a result of **extreme isolation, even scarcer resources**, and greater levels of violence. Given these challenges, however, many programs reported success in developing and providing traditional and culturally-specific services for Native victims of violence against women.

*When we do training, or serve clients, Navajo is spoken.*

*It’s very complex, because of different cultures [we serve]. Having the traditional practitioner on staff has been very helpful. We created a shelter. We were able to design the programs and shelter with that cultural sensitivity in mind.*

*We have part-time paid advocates in villages – they have weekly women’s circles in steam baths.*

*[We offer] circle of youth groups for Native American children...[with] side conversations about what is going on in their homes....*

***Recommendations for TA related to addressing violence against Native women***

*Grantees seek more assistance related to:*

- Culturally appropriate intervention models developed by and for Native populations
- Impact of historical trauma and oppression
- Strategies for effective collaborations between Native and non-Native programs
- Strategies and resources for addressing complex jurisdictional issues
- Networking and information-sharing opportunities among Tribal grantees



## ***Technical Assistance Provider Successes and Challenges***

### ***Description of TA Providers and Services***

Early on in this project, an invitation was sent to all OVW TA providers currently funded at the time of the assessment. The invitation asked TA providers to self-select involvement based on the amount and level of TA they provided specifically to Rural Program grantees. Twenty-five TA providers responded, and in the end, 18 of those were able to participate in the assessment, either through audio focus groups, individual interviews, or a video conference think tank (see Appendix C for a complete list of TA providers funded at the time of the assessment, those who self-selected as serving Rural grantees, and those who participated in the assessment).

Of the 25 TA providers that indicated they provided a substantial amount of TA to Rural Program grantees, many address multiple issues that relate to the Rural Program, such as individual advocacy, systems advocacy, community advocacy, collaboration (or CCRs/SARTs), Tribal advocacy and systems responses. Some TA providers we talked with specialized in responses to specific forms of violence against women, such as stalking, sexual assault, intimate partner sexual assault, domestic violence, abuse in later life, and violence against native women. A handful of providers specialized in particular areas, such as law enforcement practice, prosecution response, legal advocacy on behalf of immigrant victims, and tribal coalitions.

TA providers we spoke with utilized a range of methods to provide TA to Rural Program grantees. All offered some form of literature and/or specialized resources, all offered varying degrees of individual TA through email and phone support, most offered long-distance learning opportunities through audio conference and/or webinars, and a small handful were funded to conduct in-person training opportunities for multiple grantees, onsite training and TA to specific grantee communities, and online learning courses.

Our conversations with OVW-funded TA providers focused on the challenges and successes they experienced related to training and TA provision to rural communities. Generally, OVW-funded TA providers described their role as bringing new information, research, and resources to rural grantees and helping to build a critical mass of support to engage in activities across the country to end violence against women. They also see their role as helping rural grantees, their project partners, and system practitioners understand their positions within a larger community response to promote victim safety and offender accountability.

### ***Challenges to TA Provision for Rural Grantees***

There are many challenges that TA providers reported, however, in successfully fulfilling those roles. TA providers are challenged to **develop training that addresses the diverse needs and diverse populations** across rural communities, as well as, creating greater awareness in rural communities about the need to address diversity and oppression (from this point forward in



this section of the report, *italicized* quotations are from OVW-funded TA Providers):

*We're working with 172 tribes, but that's still 172 different, separate governments, with different traditions, and practices.*

*When you talk about African American community in a small town, you might be talking about 25 people. What it means to engage with that community is very different than doing work on the south side of Chicago.*

It is challenging for TA providers to find **staff and trainers who have both an expertise in a particular area related to violence against women and recent experience** with the realities of doing this work in rural communities. One TA provider discussed their infrastructure for TA provision when their project had previously received fuller funding:

*It was hugely helpful to have a big group of rural practitioners spread out across the country with many different rural experiences. We all grew and learned from this network of expert rural practitioners. We could have a greater perspective, more diversity, and we actually had rural people that were doing rural intervention work providing the TA.*

But with cuts in TA funds, this type of infrastructure could no longer be supported. Further, TA providers **may not have the resources to fund their efforts to adequately address rural realities** and therefore meet rural needs.

*We aren't specifically funded to do rural work, so every time we are asked to go to a rural place, we have to spend extra staff time to tailor our curriculum so it's appropriate for the rural area. But we don't really have the budget or staff for this time.*

TA providers offer training on specific content areas that is designed for a large audience, both urban and rural. Trainers often come from urban areas without a full grasp of rural issues. Making this type of **training specifically relevant to rural communities** is an ongoing challenge.

*It is hard to find trainers to make adaptations – hard to explain to urban people how that works and just how deep it goes – the way rural communities need to cobble together different services.*

*[We] consider rural as one of many factors when planning training delivery and content. We don't offer training that is specifically and only about rural. To some extent we are trying to meet people half way, but to a great extent, they end up translating for themselves. Particularly if there isn't any presenter that is from a smaller jurisdiction. We don't pretend*



*that we know [the rural factor] – we do have some people on staff who have worked in rural communities, but most of us haven't.*

TA providers discussed the **difficulties of teaching social change work**, rooted in feminism, with a more conservative, rural demographic.

*Rural advocates are generally more conservative than their urban counterparts. It's not that unusual for me to talk with an [advocate who opposes abortion]. Or someone who offers to pray with clients. You just don't see this as much in urban communities. Many urban advocates took women's studies classes in college. You don't see this in rural communities. Presents some challenges as a TA provider; but it also changes the work that we have to do – there are some assumptions that I can't make about their political orientation to the work. So, we talk a lot about respecting survivor's choices no matter what they are. We have to take into account who it is that is available to do the work.*

*The need to provide TA and training around issues of anti-oppression; whether or not rural communities want it. Constantly offering TA around oppressed communities and marginalized groups. Bringing up some uncomfortable conversations. A big part of responsible TA is challenging rural grantees about why they aren't serving the tribal community or the gay community or why gay people never come to their center...it's often very delicate work we do, but very important work.*

*We have had trouble finding the right speakers to our conferences that can speak to issues of oppression in rural communities and some of the unique issues there. Like the population explosion of immigrants in rural communities. I think rural communities that want to do good anti-oppression work are really battling the larger societal forces. Even if your programs want to do good work around immigration in Alabama, that is a challenge, in terms of finding statewide resources. There isn't a lot out there for them and coalitions can't afford to do as much anti-oppression work as they want to do. Some of the issues in diversity and oppression are different in rural communities.*

*I was thinking that when we start each class, we focus on oppression, we focus on diversity, building movement, connecting local to the global, focus on the principles of advocacy. The focus of our curriculum attempts to negate the typical barriers that exist from urban to rural to tribal to different cultural groups. With that being said, and having done TA for a while now – having all this diversity in the room, whether it's*





*programmatic or cultural – there's this lack of understanding, focus, definition of advocacy and all that it means. Because so many programs have integrated social services or focus on the individual instead of changing social norms, changing attitudes, systems, etc. So that becomes a real challenge in terms of the TA that we provide.*

Some **rural programs lack the technology infrastructure** needed to access electronic resources and trainings offered by TA providers. Further, programs may not have the **administrative resources and staffing levels** needed to implement strategies that TA providers have to offer. **Staff turnover** can leave programs without experienced workers who are grounded in the mission, values, and work of the organization.

*Staffing levels don't allow for that work to happen – so many cuts, now there might be a part time staff person and program expects them to be reaching new audiences.*

Inherent in working with rural communities is the need to build relationships and develop programs over the long term. **Short-term grants do not allow grantees to fully make use of the TA** they receive and sustain the gains they have made.

*You just get something started that's going really good, and then bam, the funding is cut off. You get a CCR up and rolling; you have a coordinator trained up; and then the funding is cut.*

*Having longer grants is really important. It's really hard to sustain the work when we're continually trapped in these 18 month grants.*

*A broad challenge for us right now is around the [local] infrastructure that is available to support [the TA they receive]. Most of TA we provide is longer term, usually people looking to make large enhancements/changes and our approach is always to help people grow their local support. In rural communities, [the] infrastructure [has been] weakening over last couple of years, which is a challenge for sustaining change.*

A final challenge for TA providers is **accessing and maintaining current and relevant contact information** that allows them to reach out to rural grantees about the TA they have available. It is challenging to secure an accurate and complete contact list for rural grantees from OVW. Even more challenging is to maintain a correct and complete contact list with frequent grantee staff turnover and change in project partners.



### ***Recommendations: Successful Strategies for TA Provision to Rural Grantees***

TA providers described success as occurring when grantees are comfortable seeking out TA, expand their use of resources, offer each other knowledge, and adopt practices that increase safety for women and children. TA providers believe they are successful when what they offer is what a community needs, they balance information that is broad with specific applicability to meet a grantee's particular needs, and when they share new approaches and research that are helpful to rural areas. To address some of the challenges listed above, TA providers have found the following strategies, in particular, to be effective:

- *Using rural examples in training sessions*
- *Sharing success stories from other rural communities*
- *Recruiting and mentoring rural trainers*
- *Tailoring assistance to specific communities*
- *Finding intersections between the expertise of the TA provider and the grantee*
- *Promoting networking opportunities*
- *Using research driven content*
- *Lending support as outside experts*
- *Using technology*

**Using examples from rural communities** during training sessions is a common strategy for tailoring TA to meet the needs of rural communities. While training content may be general in nature, small group activities and rural case examples allow the content to be applicable to rural communities. A related practice is to **share success stories, or highlight promising approaches, from specific rural communities** during training and TA events. Hearing these stories, such as the one that follows, assists grantees in applying what they have learned.

*A community youth organization that does work on healthy relationships received a rural grant to develop school policies. They hit the right spot [and had the] momentum in their community. The two individuals are so well connected, they knew everyone, [and utilized] the best of a rural dynamic. They worked with school board to adapt policies, got it passed, and this year are implementing it.*

Most TA providers, based in urban settings, have made a point to actively **recruit and mentor rural trainers** to expand their rural relevance.

*I recently found out about a sexual assault shelter [in a rural community]; the only shelter in the country that is just for sexual assault survivors. We*



*were fascinated by the idea of the program, so we invited the director to present to our national meeting a couple months ago. I've been working with the director to help guide her to [become] a presenter/consultant.*

TA providers also recognize that there is **no single set of characteristics that define rural** and that tailoring TA to specific communities is crucial. Before providing individualized TA or making site visits, TA providers get to know the communities with whom they are working, and then **tailor their TA provision to community's specific dynamics and needs.**

*Before I do a TA visit, I want them to help me understand their community. Tell me about where you're from? What's the population density? Just demographics about the community itself – who has power, who doesn't? Who's the 'in' group; who's the 'out' group? Tell me some about your police force?*

*I try to reach out and talk individually and build relationships with the Tribal programs...I just spend time on the phone talking about the concepts and putting it in a language, because I know where they're coming from.*

*We are hoping that service providers and faith communities will work together, but as diverse as the rural communities are, the faith communities are equally diverse. So we started out calling rural grantees and talked to them about what was going on with them in their communities with regard to outreach and partnerships with faith-based organizations in their communities*

TA providers tailor resource materials to fit community needs by working closely with grantees and their local partners. One TA provider noted that their products “*always start from the rural perspective.*” Methods for co-designing new materials include: initiating dialogue and building common ground with community members through small group interaction, exchanging information with rural community members, spending time on-site observing community dynamics, and using those observations to specifically tailor content and tools, field-test locally, and evaluate. **Finding intersections between the expertise of the TA provider and the grantee** ensures that tailoring is appropriate and meaningful.

*Some of what faith leaders bring to the table, and by this I mean clergy and lay, and across the entire diversity, is that intimate knowledge of a particular community, so we believe that that is a strength that faith communities bring that service providers can tap into once they build those relationships with faith communities.*



*We try to create a lot of long-term relationships. Because why should a tribe, especially for new grantees, even though they come to an orientation, why should they trust that you know what's best for them or that you know or you have something to give them – something to offer them? It becomes even more difficult with politics ... because elections are every two to four years, depending on the community. That means that the leadership, administration, and staff of some programs changes every two to four years, so how can you have sustainability with that?*

TA providers seek to address the unique challenges of rural communities by **promoting networking opportunities** that encourage grantees to share their experiences with each other. TA providers spoke of "*creating other spaces for conversation*" at conferences or in person events where grantees can meet face to face with no agenda, through audio calls where rural grantees present their experience in interviews or fishbowl formats, affinity groups, or facilitated conversations on specific topics, and sponsoring rural conferences that allow opportunities for peer interaction.

*One of the things that we find on sexual assault issues is that rural advocates really doubt themselves and their abilities. If you are the only one out there doing this by yourself, it's hard to know how you are doing, so building those peer networks to reduce the isolation and share ideas has been critically important. We have done this largely through the conferences and webinars – we always try to have some good time for just talking. When I go out and do statewide work, I'll talk to the coalition about creating space for rural advocates to be together and to talk.*

*[We talked] about really creating a network of allies, because sometimes there's not the critical mass within the local community. So to be able to connect people with other people, like-minded people in other communities, to create that network and give support for change and so forth, I think that's important. Who's going to be someone that that person in a local community can relate to...A chief of police in a rural community, for instance, who's going to be able to talk to another chief and help him recognize the importance of domestic violence.*

For some TA providers, research is the foundation that drives their work with grantees. Sharing new practices that are supported by research can help promote change in communities. One TA provider views it as their "*ethical obligation to provide correct information and see how information closes gaps*". **Integrating research findings into technical assistance** helps legitimize new approaches. Some TA providers serve as conduits for disseminating research and providing updates about policy changes and new programs by writing monographs, briefing papers, newsletters, and/or research summaries for practitioners.



Another strategy for supporting the work of rural grantees is for TA providers to serve as **outside experts who support new initiatives and help facilitate change**. Isolation and long-standing traditions may be overcome by bringing TA providers into the community to share what has been tried elsewhere. This can occur through site visits, providing training locally, or having community partners participate in training outside of the community.

*We have this experience that simply by the nature of us being from the outside...people see us as experts. We try to communicate that the local workers are the experts in their community, and how can we partner with these local experts. So the challenge is trying to draw out their own expertise and facilitate it.*

*Having an expert come in from another area can help them with issues that are going on. In rural communities, people have long memories. Stories can go on for years. There can be challenges to communication between law enforcement and advocates. Sometimes having someone come in and start talking about those issues can be useful. Having someone else facilitate this conversation, talk about it like it is a normal, common occurrence can alleviate the stress between agencies and keep them moving in a successful direction. It does make a difference being there in person.*

Rural grantees sometimes find it difficult to motivate partners to go to trainings. Providing opportunities for agencies and professionals to meet licensure or accreditation requirements by attending trainings is one incentive that TA providers can offer. Grantees were often enthusiastic about the transformative learning that has taken place when training has been effective. **Sending teams together to training, cross-discipline training, and on-site community training has been shown to have good results** as illustrated by the following grantee comments.

*We sent our county attorney to a couple trainings, [and now we have] the first prosecutions of sexual assaults in our counties in twenty years – and convictions. They come back from the trainings fired up. That’s directly related to TA.*

*Our successes include cross-training; sending folks as teams to trainings – to help build relationships and trust.*

*Going into the rural communities has been the most beneficial – 12-15 people from outlying rural communities coming to one rural area, having it be local, no hotel cost except for trainers, etc. this worked really well.*



*Where this happened, in 2 communities, the teams are the strongest.*

*[TA] gave us funding to send our partners to some of the best training in the country, which opened their eyes, they travelled, got them out of their rural areas, and reaped huge benefits for their rural programs. They looked at us as a partner, who had valuable things to offer.*

As noted in the grantee on-line survey results, the **use of technology** to bring TA to rural communities has helped to make TA more accessible and affordable. Webinars, on-line training, audio conferences, and email are a few of the ways that TA providers make training available to rural grantees who are often unable to travel due to a lack of time and resources. TA providers house web libraries of violence against women-related content and resources, including downloadable webinars and recordings of audio calls, toolkits, flow charts, and materials that provide rural staff step-by-step 'how to' guides. Web libraries provide information to grantees as they have time to access it. While not all rural grantees have access to multiple sources of technology, many of them do, and find it a vital resource.



## ***Lessons Learned from Rural Educators***

Rural educators from outside the field of violence against women provided important insights about their experiences offering TA in rural and remote communities on a range of issues, such as health care, poverty, child sexual abuse, and community development (see Appendix B for a list of rural educators and organizations that are discussed here). Each organization we interviewed shared innovative strategies, processes, and insights for delivering TA to rural communities. We found clues for new ways to approach many of the needs identified by rural grantees (see section on grantees successes and challenges above).

### ***Community and Program Capacity Building and Development***

One of the biggest lessons learned from discussions with rural educators relates to the community and program capacity building models used by the five rural TA and training programs interviewed in the assessment. Each of these rural educators articulated a defined mission and model and used consistent and clear TA approaches and pedagogies. For some, TA content and design focuses on completing **specified criteria from defined standards of excellence or national standards** for membership accreditation. Each program articulated a specific approach they use in their work, for instance *Appreciative Inquiry* or asset-based model (approaches that are particularly sensitive to rural community cultures and dynamics); peer networking and cohort building; cooperative learning model; or comprehensive (holistic) systems. Most of the rural educators agreed that: *the need for **frameworks** is absolutely essential [for TA] and without them, you're going to have this sporadic approach that isn't sustainable over time* (from this point forward in this section of the report, italicized quotations are from rural educators):

To **increase the local capacity to promote change**, three rural educators that we interviewed specifically focus on TA to **strengthen community leadership**.

*If there was to be a differentiating factor that would result in successful organization, successful networks, etc., it's always about leadership. Leadership is the greatest determinant of sustainability, of outcomes. It's a broad concept that people think is not teachable. But it very definitely can be developed in rural communities and it needs to be supported.*

*We keep saying that, contrary to the old vision, we think that leaders are made, not born. And the more we can do to make more and more leaders, the better off our communities will be from a variety of perspectives – social services, domestic violence perspective.*

Leadership development covers a range of skills, from the basics of how to facilitate meetings or build an agenda, to education on business management principles of finance or quality improvement.



**The Heartland Center for Leadership Development** works with citizens building coalitions in communities of less than 5,000 people to strengthen their leadership and strategic planning skills. On-site they conduct stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and town meetings to design a specific curriculum to **develop leadership** for that particular community and a fairly detailed scope of work on how that curriculum can be delivered. Working with an identified training organization in the area, they produce a combination of in person workshops and webinars to deliver the curriculum. The outcome is a core of individual community leaders with an increased capacity to help their community thrive.

An approach two rural educators use to handle shifting landscapes and pressures of rural realities is **using identified frameworks** to strengthen organization business practices and principles for agency management. One grant that **The Community Action Partnership (CAP)** received was to serve as a national quality improvement TA center focusing on risk mitigation and quality improvement for administrators, managers, and organizational leadership. They use a 9-month self-study of predetermined excellence standards\* that covers boards, fiscal officers, audit preparation, succession planning, insurance coverage, developing sound policies, building sustainability, etc. CAP's TA includes building a national cohort of leaders through a leadership institute for training in excellence; housing online toolkits on management practices; supporting emerging leaders from within local organizations; and promoting specific leadership skills in areas such as Knowledge Management†. Training and TA provided by **The National Rural Health Resource Center** focuses on the same standards of excellence to help leadership develop skills in business practices. They use basic tools to simplify business principles so that everyone can implement and monitor the strategic path of the group.

### ***Building Relationships in Rural Communities***

**Trust and relationship**-building between TA Providers and rural communities was a common theme among rural educators, grantees, and TA providers. Rural educators discussed ways they approach relationship and trust building and the following key points emerged:

- Approach rural communities with humility: Avoid the role of having all the answers
- Find a credible person or program to vouch for you
- Bridge through state, tribal, or territory coalitions or associations
- Establish credibility (who you are and how you know what you know)
- Attend to rural culture and social norms
- Find out how they get things done: time of day to meet, food, dress, language, etc.

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\* Baldridge Standards in America are standards of excellence in program administration used by some federal agencies as requirements to secure funding. Includes capacity building in 7 areas: leadership, strategic planning, customer focus, performance management, human resources, administrative and results.

† Knowledge Management, as used here, is the identification, integration, and management of seminal resources in the field (readings, databases, articles, journals) that are essential to effective leadership.





- Approach the community as a cultural anthropologist; be intentional about your choice of words, how you dress, cultural and political references, etc.
- Respect their time (content and ending times)
- Use a strengths-based approach; ask rural communities: What do you feel really good about what happens here?
- Do not assume any particular level of community readiness
- Listen carefully to what people say will work for them
- Practice nonpartisanship
- Build on “social capital”: demonstrate and operate with an authentic interest in helping communities improve and providing tools that will help them succeed
- Leave with everyone clear about what they are talking about, future outcomes, and what they want to achieve

In particular, the rural educators were aware of the importance of attending to community culture. *“Meet at 5:30, offer a light supper, and get them back home by 8 or 8:30. If we cross the social barrier, then nobody shows up.”*

*The lives of the rural community people that we work with are full of community activities, work activities, kid activities, grandkid activities – tugs and pulls – and so I think we need to be flexible and creative about how we get people together – whether in person or online. And we need to listen carefully to what people say will work for them.*

*We have an Alaskan Native elder in every classroom – we open and close each day with the elder giving a blessing. Our elders are a very interactive part of the instructional team – it’s a great blend of Western academics blended with traditional knowledge from the elders.*

They acknowledged that TA providers can build relationships, establish that trust, arrive with a predetermined agenda, but ultimately, *“the community takes your information and turns it into its own thing.”*

### ***Outreach to Extremely Isolated Areas of Rural Regions***

As reported in the section of grantees successes and challenges, rural programs struggle with outreach to remote and isolated communities. **The Rural Human Services Program** was created in response to failed attempts to transplant counselors into isolated Alaska villages. This program reaches out to villagers who are already natural helpers in their community and pays these villagers to attend a two-year, 32-credit behavioral health course. Participants come into the University for a two-week intensive course, go back home for four to five weeks with homework on course content, and then come back to campus for another week or two. As a partnership between the state and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, nonprofits are eligible for grants to hire and supervise a participant. Participants leave the program with basic skills sets,



knowledge of resources on a range of topics, a university certificate, and a network of peers for support. The program is designed around a cooperative learning model and built on traditional Alaska Native values.

*The training is bidirectional – it's me as a faculty member teaching about a specific concept or issue and then the student saying here's what we're facing, and then us having a dialogue as to the strengths and how to overcome that. I don't think that any of us can provide the answers – there's always going to be barriers and different niches within a niche and it's going to be what are the strengths that exist there and that communication and dialogue brings the answer to the challenges.*

### **Community Collaboration**

One theme of the work rural educators discussed was partnering and collaborations across community agencies. As one rural educator said, "*We can no longer tolerate turf (wars); we need to reach out beyond comfortable agency partners.*" Collaborations maximize resources, promote cross-field exchange of information, and counterbalance silo-ing. Community Action Partnership encourages building partnerships to find solutions to gaps in community services. They promote pooling resources and volunteers; **using existing state-specific resource networks** and nonprofit associations; and finding free training and peer-to-peer resource sharing.

The National Rural Health Resource Center builds networks to strengthen communities using health care providers and hospitals. Recognizing that there are silos within rural communities they bring together traditionally unconnected service programs such as health care agencies, schools, businesses, senior services, and social service providers through community councils. The goal of these councils is to look at the economic health of the community and identify the most important things they could be doing together.

*We can no longer afford to do our TA as an island unto ourselves. We have to reach out and connect with each other. And there are only so many resources out there – social services and healthcare have got to work together. We've got to use leadership. We've got to build that.*

#### **To make change and bring groups together, rural educators recommend:**

- Bridging distance between community groups
- Stand on solid principles
- Establish common ground early on in the process
- Be creative and willing to explore alternatives



### **Strategic Use of Technology**

A challenge facing rural educators was pressure to move away from in-person and onsite training and TA and towards long-distance learning opportunities. While some are being pushed to offer 100% of their training on-line or through video conferencing, the use of technology is still an "evolving science." We found rural educators using technology for self-paced certification coursework, case reviews, regional meetings, and a continuing education program. **Funding, equipment, skill levels, and access** to broadband can be challenges for the use of technology in rural TA and training. Rural educators provide staff skills development, adapt web applications for their work, have installed high end video technology, and work on improving rural access.

Most of these rural educators **combine in-person and online delivery methods**, but the **Midwest Regional Children’s Advocacy Center (MRCAC)** has developed a specialty in the use of technology. First, recognizing that staff in local offices may not be comfortable or familiar with using new technologies, they have dedicated staff available to provide individualized support and basic training for participants. Several of their online programs demonstrate the potential of using technology for complex, interactive TA. Their **TeleHealth Institute for Child Maltreatment**, for example, is a medical peer review program built around a web application that allows a local provider to upload all the files and images from a closed case. The case is then assigned to a panel of expert reviewers who anonymously review all of the information and send their feedback to the provider. This web application is HIPPA compliant and confidential for the victim, child advocacy center, and reviewers. They also offer an online conference room for real-time peer case review and multidisciplinary team collaborations.

*So maybe ten people are coming on, they are uploading a forensic interview video directly to the web application, and then they’re able to connect on conference line with everybody else while viewing that video or the images simultaneously.*

This approach has promising value for rural programs who struggle with reaching victims and service providers in the far reaching, remote areas of the region they serve. OVW TA providers would benefit from further discussions with organizations like MRCAC to find out the costs to establish and maintain this type of technology.

### **Centralized Resource Centers**

We found several models for centralized TA resource centers among the rural educators that were interviewed. All offered training, education, webinars, online tools, and resources. Two unique approaches are highlighted below.

Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) are organized through a national membership organization, state coordinators, and multidisciplinary teams in local communities. All TA and training for the



CACs is offered through four regional resource centers. The Midwest Regional Children's Advocacy Center is one of these regional offices and serves 12 states. In addition to TA delivered with the technology described above, they offer a listserv, national continuing education program, onsite work, and customized training for multidisciplinary teams. CAC and other rural educators we interviewed operate with the model of specific organizations designated to regions across the nation in order to gain knowledge of local issues and develop local networks of experts to better assess for needs and make more meaningful referrals.

The Community Action Partnership national office offers membership services, an online clearinghouse, and discussion forum for peer learning. Because they are funded to help agencies create a problem-solving plan and then identify resources to implement that plan, they maintain a consultant bank of prescreened professionals. Their vetting process includes reference checks, review of materials applicants have produced, samples of their work, and materials or websites they recommend. A local Community Action Program can then be matched with the appropriate local consultants to help them implement their action plan.

In short, each of the rural educators saw themselves as a conduit for the latest information about research, practice, and public policy and they use a variety of formats to make this information available (providing short research briefs, organizing national meetings with experts, offering quarterly conference calls to discuss and review the latest research, etc.): *Our job is to sift through all the noise and information and pick out what's relevant for our network.*

### ***Summary of Lessons Learned from Rural Educators***

*Emphasize the strengthening of community leadership by:*

- Developing strategic planning skills
- Supporting development of values-driven organizational management
- Advocating for longer-term funding streams

*In TA provision to individual communities:*

- Emphasize trust and relationship-building
- Make connections with state, tribal, and territory coalitions and/or associations
- Attend to the unique aspects of rural culture and social norms
- Approach the community as a cultural anthropologist: Be intentional about your choice of words, how you dress, cultural references, etc.
- Use a strengths-based approach
- Do not assume any particular level of community readiness

*Continued...*



*Continued...*

***Summary of Lessons Learned from Rural Educators***

*In TA provision to individual communities:*

- Build on “social capital”: Demonstrate an authentic interest in helping communities improve and providing tools that will help them succeed
- Reach out to natural helpers
- Rely on local consultants from regional offices, state, tribal and territory coalitions, and others to help communities implement their action plan

*In TA provision to rural communities across the country:*

- Build concrete tools and templates with clear directions
- Leave everyone with clarity regarding current goals and desired outcomes
- Emphasize collaborations to maximize resources, promote cross-field exchange of information, and counterbalance silo-ing
- Use of technology is still an "evolving science": Consider having dedicated staff available to provide IT support to communities
- Be a conduit for current information re: research, practice, and policy
- Use a variety of formats to make information available



## ***Dream Big***

At the end of the in-depth discussions with grantees, OVW TA providers, and rural educators, participants were asked to “dream big”, assuming no limits to resources or time, regarding assistance that would be helpful to their programs. They identified a number of suggestions:

<b>Rural specific...</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategies to end violence against ALL women</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• On-site, tailored TA</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Orientation training resources</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advanced training</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership development</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information and referral resource</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peer networking opportunities</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Baseline of technology for all grantees</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Regional training</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategies to engage men in prevention efforts</li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Media campaigns</li></ul>



## ***Conclusion***

Programs seeking to address violence against women in rural communities simultaneously experience similar and unique challenges relating to culture, geography, resources, and demographics. Regardless of the unique histories of the communities, or the broad range of geographical settings across the nation, rural grantees share many of the same challenges when organizing responses to violence against women in rural communities: long held beliefs and attitudes that resist change, limited agency and financial resources to draw from, the need to build trust, the lack of anonymity and privacy, environmental and cultural isolation, growing social problems, complex jurisdictional issues, the need to travel long distances through extreme weather conditions and geography to reach victims, and a lack of rural intervention models, to name a few. Despite these challenges, rural grantees have drawn on their ingenuity and resourcefulness, found creative approaches to this work, and have successfully leveraged features of rural life to benefit their projects. OVW and TA providers have much to learn about the successful strategies grantees are employing to address the sometimes controversial and politicized issues of ending violence against women in their rural communities. We also have to listen carefully to the challenges they are facing and create learning and networking opportunities that meaningfully address those challenges. As captured in the **Summary of Findings and Recommendations**, the key findings of the assessment include:

### ***Technical assistance is highly useful, yet sometimes difficult to access***

TA to rural grantees has been vital for supporting efforts to violence against women in their communities. An important role for TA providers is reducing isolation and enhancing networking opportunities among rural grantees. TA providers are also crucial to disseminating information to isolated rural communities about new and emerging research and intervention strategies. Currently, TA provision is a patchwork of offerings and providers that allow for a wealth of opportunities. This model, however, does not always lend itself to a careful assessment of individual grantees needs and provision of TA tailored to meet those needs.

### **Communication**

OVW and TA providers need to develop more effective, meaningful forms of communication to alert rural grantees of training and TA that is available to them. While most TA providers are able to respond to grantees specific needs and requests, not all grantees are aware of this.

### **Delivery Methods**

Grantees viewed delivery methods such as in person training events, webinar trainings, etc., as having different strengths depending upon the need, cost, ease of access, and ability to tailor to the needs of their programs. Networking opportunities are highly valued by rural grantees. More tailored and customized TA is necessary to support programs in creating meaningful change. Working with programs to assess their individual needs and developing strategies based upon these can enhance the impact of TA.



### ***TA must recognize and account for rural realities to be fully relevant and effective***

TA providers seek to tailor their TA for rural grantees by using examples from rural communities in their trainings, using rural trainers, and sharing information about what rural programs are doing across the country. TA providers also recognize that there is diversity across rural communities and the importance of individualized TA to address unique needs. On-site TA, with opportunities for follow-up, is seen as an effectively tailored comprehensive approach.

### ***TA for continuing needs***

In analyzing the responses, stories, challenges, and successes shared by grantees, TA providers, rural educators, and OVW Program Specialists, the following primary areas of continuing need in training and TA stand out:

- There is a critical need for **increased TA related to basic and advanced advocacy services** for all forms of violence against women
- Enhanced TA efforts to **strengthen advocacy leadership skills and capacity** would improve outcomes and create long-term change
- TA is needed to **promote and support implementation of best practice models** for sustainable institutional reform to move communities beyond general collaboration

### ***Recommendations***

As a result of this TA needs assessment, Praxis recommends that rural program TA focus its efforts to enhance comprehensive change-oriented efforts to end violence against women in rural communities, strengthen foundational advocacy services, focus collaboration efforts on replicable models of institutional reform, and emphasize advocacy leadership to encourage sustained, long-term change. Elements of an enhanced, change-oriented TA that accounts for rural realities would include:

- Emphasis on adapting and implementing replicable models, frameworks, and strategies
- Thorough grantee needs assessments to inform support offered by TA providers
- Increased customized TA for adaptation and implementation of replicable models
- Develop clearly defined goals for implementing a specific replicable model or approach
- Core and advanced training and orientation tools on individual and institutional advocacy
- Preparation of TA providers on addressing violence against women in rural communities, including attending to rural realities, building relationships and trust, incorporating peer-to-peer networking, and utilizing rural case examples and trainers
- A central point of contact for grantees and coordination that will help them navigate available TA





## Endnotes

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1. U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women (2011). OVW Fiscal Year 2011 Rural Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, Dating Violence and Stalking Assistance Program. OMB Number: 1122-1120.
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