The Blueprint for Safety: Interagency Accountability Check

# Dimensions of Accountability

Implementing the Blueprint for Safety is ultimately a process of accountability. “Holding offenders accountable” is a familiar phrase when talking about domestic violence cases. But that individual focus is only one dimension of accountability under the Blueprint. The Blueprint expands the scope of accountability from a focus on individual offenders in domestic violence cases to a focus on establishing a system of interagency accountability for intervening in crimes related to battering.[[1]](#footnote-2) As a unified, collective policy, the Blueprint seeks to strengthen accountability in five dimensions:

* 1. **Accountability by the individual batterer to the victim(s) of battering**.

This means that: a) a batterer is unable to manipulate the system and use it against a victim; b) the actions, language, assumptions, and theories operating in the case place the responsibility for the use of violence with the batterer, not the victim of ongoing abuse; and c) the batterer has been given a just consequence for the use of violence and coercion. While a conviction might be a part of this consequence, accountability and conviction are not the same thing. In this dimension, accountability focuses on recognizing, differentiating, and responding to battering as distinct from other forms of domestic violence.

* 1. **Accountability by the criminal legal system to victims of battering**.

Interagency accountability to victims requires a well-integrated system of advocacy and attention to the possible effects of various state actions on victim safety—it requires a unified, collective policy and practice. A victim’s safety is multi-faceted. It is shaped not only by what a specific offender is willing and capable of doing, but by his family, friends, and social group. It is shaped by her family’s actions and her economic vulnerabilities. It is shaped by the way institutional actions affect her life. It is shaped by whether her community is overrepresented or underserved in the criminal legal system. A system that is accountable to victims is one that anticipates unintended consequences and designs interventions to avoid them and to reduce the disparity of impact on people of differing life circumstances and social standing.

* 1. **Accountability to fair and respectful treatment and due process for the offender**.

This dimension of accountability helps avoid introducing biases that can undermine the effort to establish the Blueprint’s essential elements as standard policy and practice and reinforce its foundational principles. Messages of help and accountability are poorly-served by dismissing the significance of due process and respect. Fair and respectful treatment and due process—at all points of intervention—are fundamental to reducing unintended consequences of intervention and disparity of impact.

* 1. **Accountability by practitioners intervening in the case to each other**.

The Blueprint is organized to link each intervening practitioner with those who proceed and those who follow at each step in case processing. Police officers rely on the information gathered and transferred to them by dispatchers. Prosecutors count on the thoroughness and accuracy of the patrol officer’s investigation and report. Probation officers make recommendations and judges make decisions on sentencing and supervision to address risk based on the thoroughness of history and context established by those involved throughout the entire case process, beginning with the call to 911.The Blueprint is in many respects a system of accountability designed from the ground up, with an understanding of the ways in which practitioners can be linked and supported to intervene most effectively.

* 1. **Accountability to the Blueprint and its essential elements as a standard of practice**.

Each agency must carry out its specific function in case processing to an acceptable standard: in this case, the standards of the Blueprint for Safety, as defined in its essential elements. Each area of practice (e.g., responding to emergency calls, making arrest decisions, charging cases, conducting pre-sentence investigations, sentencing offenders) has articulated criteria that each practitioner is expected to meet and that other intervening agencies can rely on.

# Approach

Each agency, and a Blueprint community overall, uses three core methods to establish an overall approach to accountability.

1. Supervision of individual workers
2. Regularly scheduled interagency meetings
3. Consistent guidelines and frameworks

The Blueprint adaptation guide, *Becoming a Blueprint Community,* includes specific tools that support and structure these methods of accountability. They include the following:

* Blueprint for Safety Monitoring – Key Activities Grid (Appendix 27)
* Implementing the Blueprint for Safety: Supervisory Roles and Responsibilities (Appendix 28)
* Blueprint for Safety Essential Elements – Annotated (Appendix 10)

# Accountability template and a “state of the Blueprint” report

One of the core tasks in monitoring Blueprint implementation is to update the community on the impact of the Blueprint collective policy. Sources of information for such a report include:

* Statistical data
* Information from community consultations
* Information and analysis from the Blueprint advocate
* Internal and interagency monitoring activities, including case reviews
* Analysis of accountability strengths, gaps, and obstacles

The accountability template helps organize and sum up accomplishments and obstacles in fulfilling each dimension of accountability. As an *internal* tool, the accountability template provides a framework for the Blueprint coordinator and agency liaisons to use in reviewing and tracking each agency’s experience in implementing the Blueprint. As an *interagency* tool, the template assists the coordinator and implementation team in summing up the state of the Blueprint as a collective policy.

Preparation by the Blueprint coordinator:

1. Adapt the template for each agency.

Prepare a worksheet or set of discussion prompts using the headings from the template. For example:

How has Blueprint policy and practice in [911 agency] strengthened accountability in the response to domestic violence-related crimes? Summarize and provide examples of strengths, gaps, and obstacles related to the dimensions of accountability.

1. By the individual batterer to the victim(s) of battering
2. By the criminal legal system to victims of battering
3. To fair and respectful treatment and due process for the offender
4. By practitioners intervening in the case to each other
5. To the Blueprint and its essential elements as a standard of practice

1. Adapt the template for discussions with the implementation team.

Use the template headings to guide small group and team discussions. Use or adapt the template format to take notes or otherwise summarize the conclusions.

1. Provide a reference handout for internal and interagency discussions that includes the “dimensions of accountability” definitions.

**Accountability Template**

Summarize and provide examples of strengths, gaps, and obstacles related to the dimensions of accountability.

|  | **Accountability by/to . . .** | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Agency** | **Offender to victim(s)** | **Criminal legal system to victims** | **Offender due process; fair & respectful treatment** | **Practitioner**  **to practitioner** | **Blueprint**  **essential elements as standard of practice** |
| **911** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Law Enforcement Patrol** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Law Enforcement Investigation** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Pretrial Release / Bail** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Sheriff’s Office – Jail** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Sheriff’s Office - Warrants** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Sheriff’s Office – Court Security** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Prosecution** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Victim**  **Witness** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Probation** |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Bench & Court Admin.** |  |  |  |  |  |

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1. Adapted from ***(In)Visible Workings: A change-agent's guide to closing the gap between what people need and what legal and human service institutions do*, Ellen Pence, Praxis International, 2009.** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)