# Approaches to Evaluating Practice

Excerpted from *Planning and Conducting a Best Practice Assessment*

*of Community Response to Domestic Violence[[1]](#footnote-1)*

A CCR or individual agency responding to domestic violence crimes can use various methods to evaluate and inform its intervention practices. The Best Practice assessment presented in this guide is an approach at one end of a continuum of complexity. While the three different forms of evaluating practice described in the following section have much in common, they vary significantly in the depth and breadth of their attention and inquiry. Each has different features and different limitations as a tool for evaluating a CCR.

The ***Best Practice Assessment*** presented here is a relatively quick review of the response to domestic violence–related cases, using checklists of core practices. These core practices have been identified after working closely with Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) grantees and other communities, particularly those that have established coordinated intervention practices and many that have completed Safety Audits. The assessment has been developed to assist communities where a Safety Audit is currently not viable because of inadequate resources, limited organizational capacity, or challenging local conditions, such as interagency tensions or lack of trust. The process involves a relatively narrow scope, small number of participants, limited data collection, and little direct consultation with victims of abuse. It relies heavily on a guided review of the official records, such as 911 calls and patrol officers’ incident and arrest reports.

The ***Safety and Accountability Audit*** is an in-depth examination of how work routines and ways of doing business strengthen or impede safety for victims and accountability of offenders and intervening systems. A trained interagency team conducts interviews and observations with practitioners who are skilled and well-versed in their jobs. The team also analyzes case files, policies, and other documents. A Safety Audit is grounded in focus group discussions or other interviews with victims of battering. It seeks to uncover the gaps between what people need to craft safety and strengthen accountability, and what intervening systems provide in their responses. The Safety Audit also introduces and reinforces new ways for interveners to work together. A Safety Audit examines one or more points of intervention in depth and seeks to make visible any contradictions between the assumed response and the actual response. To be successful, this approach requires sound working relationships and a high level of trust between community partners. A Safety Audit is a tool for exploring more complex questions that go beyond matters of routine practice, such as examining assumptions and theories about domestic violence or disparities in intervention based on social standing.

The ***Blueprint for Safety*** is an approach to evaluating and revamping an existing coordinated community response by examining and subsequently rewriting existing policies and protocols using the Blueprint standards. The Blueprint is essentially a set of plans, but plans drawn with meticulous attention to the details of interagency case processing in domestic violence–related cases. To become a “Blueprint Community,” requires a large measure of political will among criminal justice system agencies and advocacy organizations. Agency leaders, practitioners, and victim advocates must be able to collaborate in assessing, revising, and writing each agency’s policies and protocols. They must be positioned to evaluate and resolve differences according the Blueprint’s foundational principles: (1) adhere to an interagency approach and collective intervention goals; (2) build attention to the context and severity of abuse into each intervention; (3) recognize that most domestic violence is a patterned crime requiring continuing engagement with victims and offenders; (4) ensure sure and swift consequences for continued abuse; (5) use the power of the criminal justice system to send messages of help and accountability; and (6) act in ways that reduce unintended consequences and the disparity of impact on victims and offenders.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The following grid provides a snapshot of each approach and considerations in determining which might be the best choice for a particular community and its local conditions. In deciding which approach is the best fit for your community, first determine what level of coordination exists in the overall response to domestic violence. Use Introduction – Attachment 1, Three Levels of Interagency Response to Domestic Violence, to guide that review and conduct an appraisal of the capabilities in place, as well as likely challenges. The Best Practice Assessment can be useful to a community at any level of interagency response. For the Safety Audit or the Blueprint to be successful, however, the features of coordination described in levels two and three need to be largely in place.

| Which Approach is the Best Fit for Your Community? | | |
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| **Method** | **Features** | **Best Fit When…** |
| Best Practice Assessment | * Quick; completed over a series of 3 to 5 meetings * Conducted by a small team * Limited data collection: review of reports or case files against a checklist of recommended practices * Focus on one or two agencies versus system * Little direct consultation with victims of abuse * May not need or result in a written product, such a report | * Limited time * Limited personnel available to participate * Challenging local conditions, e.g., mistrust, lack of solid partnerships and working relationships between key criminal justice system agencies * A single agency (e.g., 911 center or police department) wants to examine its own practices, regardless of the extent of existing coordination or the willingness or ability of other agencies to join in an assessment * Examining a narrow scope of intervention, e.g., only 911 calls or police patrol response * The skill, ability, or time is not available to conduct a group analysis of information or produce reports or other products of such an analysis * Agency or CCR seeks a “tune up” following a previous Safety Audit |
| Safety & Accountability Audit | * Conducted over a period of months; typically,  6 to 12 * Trained interagency multidisciplinary team of practitioners * Wide data collection, including focus groups, individual interviews, observations, and text/file analysis * Guided by a coordinator * Examines multiple points of intervention, agencies, and systems * More complex level of analysis that examines how features of institutions shape practices * Anchored in consultation with victims of abuse | * Sufficient time to plan and conduct the Safety Audit * An interagency multidisciplinary team can be readily assembled and trained * Trust, skills, and abilities exist within the team to critically analyze information, identify and articulate safety and accountability issues, and make recommendations to address those issues * Strong working relationships and trust between key players and between criminal justice system agencies and community advocates * Following an initial review of practices using the self-assessment * As a prelude to establishing a Blueprint Community * To explore more complex questions that go beyond routine practice |

| **Which Approach is the Best Fit for Your Community?** | | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Method** | **Features** | **Best Fit When…** |
| Blueprint for Safety | * Long-term commitment to evaluation & implementation * Commitment from all key criminal justice system agencies * Central role for community advocates in shaping criminal justice system policies and protocols * Multi-agency process * Agreed-upon agency and designate person organizes the work * Rests on previous examination of the community response * Data collection activities * Focus on evaluation and revision of existing policies and protocols * Meaningful consultation with community members who are most impacted by criminal justice system and public policies | * Prepared to review and write policy and procedure for each step of case processing * Way of implementing Safety Audit findings and recommendations * Key criminal justice system leaders are committed to a cohesive approach * Key leaders agree that the Blueprint Principles will guide intervention at each step * Agreed-upon central role for advocates to comment on and help shape criminal justice system policies and protocols * At least one agency and designated person will act as overall coordinator * Can establish a working committee with representation from each agency * Willing to make a long-term commitment to ongoing monitoring and evaluation * A designated entity has sufficient authority and resources to monitor and actively sustain the Blueprint |

1. https://praxisinternational.org/institutional-analysiscommunity-assessment-2/best-practice-assessment-guides/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Information about the Safety and Accountability Audit and the Blueprint for Safety can be found at www.praxisinternational.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)