

**An Introduction to the Domestic Violence Best Practice Assessment Guide**

*Olga Trujillo and Maren Woods, Praxis International*

*with Courtney Chasse, Hope & Justice Project, Suzie Kramer-Brenna, NDCAWS  
Trish Meyer, Saving Grace, Katie Nash, Billings Police Department*

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(jazz music)

**-[Olga]** Great, hello everybody and welcome to this webinar on best practice assessments presented by Praxis International, in partnership with the office on violence against women. Today's topic is an introduction to the domestic violence best practice assessment guides. My name is Olga Trujillo, and I'm a Senior Training and Program Specialist here at Praxis. We have a number of people on the call today. And we have a number of people that are helping us present this material today. First we have other Praxis staff other than me. There's Maren Woods who will be monitoring the chat during today's webinar, and Liz Carlson who will manage the technical details of your participation. So before we get going I'll pass this to her to go over some important participation tips. Liz.

**-[Liz]** Thank you Olga. Hello everyone, welcome, we're so glad that you could be with us today. So I will touch briefly on just a couple of details that should hopefully give you a good webinar experience today. The first thing I want to mention is you may occasionally hear a little bit of a buzz, kind of some buzzing feedback. And so we believe that's coming from Olga's line, it should not be too distracting to you, but if you hear that on occasion that's what that's coming from. If there is anyone who is participating in our session today by telephone only, the best way in which you are going to be able to communicate between and amongst all of us on this session today will be by email.

So the phone lines will be muted, but you could send an email to Maren, [Maren@PraxisInternational.org](mailto:Maren@PraxisInternational.org) If you have a question or a technical issue to take up with her. And for the rest of us who are participating in the webinar platform itself, I just would remind you that the way in which you will be able to engage with Olga and our panelists today will be through that public chat box in the lower lefthand portion of your screen. And so let's just take a moment, if there is any of you who perhaps haven't used that chat function before or haven't said hello yet during this session, go ahead and just chat in a quick, quick little hello, tell us where you might be calling from. Or if you have coworkers who are joining you today, take an opportunity to practice using that chat. Thank you. There's a few of you that are chiming in now. That's great, thank you. You are welcome to use that chat at any point during our session today.

And as Maren said, she will keep an eye on it and integrate your questions and your comments into the presentation. I would like to also call to your attention that there is a tab that says private in that chat box in the lefthand corner of your screen. If you open that tab and double click on one of the names or the presenters there, it will open a just a private feed for you and that individual if there's something you would like to connect on just individually. That's available to you at any time. Just two more things

and that is to say if you happen to get disconnected through either the telephone or the webinar platform, you should be able to simply rejoin through your original process, and this session is being recorded and will be posted to the IATA archive recording page of the website shortly tomorrow, or the next day or two. And you will, you know, be able to share it with your colleagues who perhaps are not able to attend with us today. So Olga I think that's all I have, we can turn it back to you.

**-[Olga]** Great, thanks so much Liz. All right, so a goal of many OVW grantees is to change institutional practices that give rise to poor outcomes for survivors of violence against women. The Domestic Violence Best Practice Assessment is a tool developed by Praxis International to assist communities to do just that, and enables you to examine your community's responses to domestic violence, from , to patrol, to investigations and on through charging decisions. Today's webinar will examine this tool through the work of four communities, Presque Isle, Maine, North Dakota, Billings, Montana, and Bend, Oregon. We'll spend the next hour or so talking with folks from each of these communities and hearing about their experience with the domestic violence practice assessment. So we're really fortunate to have with us today a team of people to share their experience. We have Courtney Chasse of Hope & Justice Project, and she's the Advocacy Coordinator and has been for the past 14 years. She also coordinates their best practice assessments.

We also have Suzie Kramer-Brenna from CAWS North Dakota, which is the state coalition office in Bismarck, and it provides leadership and support to local domestic violence and sexual assault crisis interventions centers around North Dakota. Her work focuses on strengthening victim advocacy services and enhancing community response collaborations, and increasing education and awareness in rural and oil development impacted areas.

We have Katie Nash who is an officer at Billings Police Department. She also became the domestic violence investigator in , and is full time now as the DV investigations program. She has also worked as an advocate at a shelter in Great Falls, Montana.

And last but not least is Trish Meyer who's the Assistant Executive Director with Saving Grace, a tri-county domestic violence and sexual assault intervention program based in Bend, Oregon. Trisha's primary role with Saving Grace has been to develop and strengthen the coordinated response to domestic and sexual violence. So now before I have our panelists introduce themselves a little bit more around their assessments, you should have received an email reminder about today's webinar, and with the powerpoint and a link to a video on the Praxis website. If you haven't had a chance to view it you may want to review it after our webinar today. It's a great introduction to the best practice assessment and it's about 16 minutes. So if you get a chance to take a look at that, that would be great. So let me talk a little bit, just kind of frame for those of you who haven't ever, who didn't get a chance to view it, and for those of you who it's a new tool for. The Best Practice Assessment Guide has been designed to assist emergency communications.

So 911, police patrol services, investigations, and prosecution charging decisions. It draws on the accumulated experience of many communities, particularly those that have completed a safety and accountability audit, or the safety audit as a lot of people refer to, have referred to it. And these are audits that were done of 911 and patrol responses over the last 15 years or so. It reflects an analysis of criminal justice system reforms related to domestic violence. And the sometimes unintended negative consequences of those reforms. The assessment distills that information, it's a specific guideline for practice and the crucial first steps in the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence related crimes. So 911 calls and the on scene patrol response. The assessment guide is built around best practices, and this was also pulled out of the, that many of you might of heard of the blueprint for safety that Praxis also has developed. So the assessment guides have also been influenced quite a bit by the blueprint for safety. And it's, the guide is built around the best practices that reinforce the essential characteristics of intervention and domestic violence that maximizes safety for victims and holds offenders accountable, while offering opportunities to change, and sets expectations of agency and practitioner accountability to one another and to victims and offenders.

So these characteristics include, they adhere to an agency approach and collective intervention goals. It builds attention to the context and severity of abuse into each intervention. It recognizes that most domestic violence is a patterned crime requiring continuing engagement with victims and offenders. And sure and swift consequences for continued abuse, and use the power of the criminal justice system to send messages of help and accountability.

And finally act in ways that reduce unintended consequences and the disparity of impact on victims and offenders. The core practices focuses on ways to structure , law enforcement, prosecution to best enhance safety for victims and strengthen offender accountability. So and basically the way that you would, these are the steps in which there would be involved in conducting an assessment. And you pull together a small interagency team, you'd meet several times over a period of months to conduct the assessment. And the activities would include mapping the steps involved in the processing of domestic violence cases, analyzing 911 calls, law enforcement patrol, and investigation reports and prosecution files. And then analyzing agency policies specific to domestic violence.

And finally develop findings and recommendations. A local coordinator is usually involved in organizing and facilitating the team meetings and assemble the necessary documents and related information. And today we're going to hear from four communities who have, who have conducted the Domestic Violence Best Practice Assessment, and some of which who have done more than one. So I wonder if we could go through Courtney, if you could just tell us your you know, who you are, your program, and what was going on in your community, and the focus of your assessment.

**-[ Courtney]** Okay. Hello everybody. I work for our Hope & Justice Project, which is domestic violence agency in Aroostook County, Maine. Aroostook County is the most Northern county in Maine, it's made up about , people, but we're a large county. The size of our county is bigger than a lot of New England's states. And we have no major highway in our county, so it could take two hours to get from one end to the other end. Some of the demographics are in the Northern portion of the county, it's mostly French speaking community, because it's right on the Canadian border, into the middle of the county which is

all English speaking. When we did our assessment, the first assessment we did, we focused on patrol and investigation, and currently we're working on another assessment and we're doing prosecution charging decisions.

-**[Olga]** Great, thanks so much Courtney. And Suzie, could you do the same in your community?

-**[Suzie]** Sure, hi everyone. My name is Suzie Kramer-Brenna and I am the outreach specialist for CAWS North Dakota here in Bismarck. And on the project that I coordinated had three different sites in Northwestern North Dakota. The site I will be talking about today was a combined site located in the most heavily affected area of the Bakken oil fracking range, and it consisted of a larger community population, approximately , people. That's Williston and Williams County, and then the smaller rural community, Watford City in McKenzie County. And as the coordinator of this project we really focused on creating what the grant called community enhancement teams, and then with these teams conducting an assessment of individual law enforcement agencies and how they were responding to domestic violence. Then out of that assessment developed domestic violence response protocols for each of the law enforcement members of the team.

-**[Olga]** Great, thanks so much Suzie. And I think, and so Trish.

-**[Trish]** Yes. Hi, my name is Trish Meyer and I'm the Assistant Executive Director with Saving Grace. We're a domestic violence, sexual assault program located in Bend, Oregon. We're in Central Oregon on the East Side of the Cascades. And our program serves a tri-county area, today we're talking about the best practice assessment that was done in the Deschutes County, which is where Bend is located. Deschutes County's population is about , people. Bend, the county seat has about , folks. So for the assessment we had two city PD's taking part and a Sheriff's office, and as well as other partners. And the focus that we did was 911 and patrol, and we also did police follow up investigations and prosecution charging decisions.

-**[Olga]** Great, thanks, and Katie.

-**[Katie]** Hi, this is Katie Nash. I am the domestic violence investigator for the Billings Police Department in Montana. We are about as urban as it gets for Montana, Billings has just over , people. We think Montana just hit the million resident mark a few years ago. Billings sits pretty near two different Native American reservations, but the majority of our population is white. And so our, the focus of our assessment went from the 911 call taking and dispatching side to the police patrol response, just to see what we could learn to start things off. I acted as the patrol officer and the coordinator on the team. We had a 911 dispatcher and a system based victim witness specialist on our team.

-**[Olga]** Great. All right, so if you're listening and you're in the middle of a best practice assessment, or you're considering whether to conduct one or not, or you're just new to the guide altogether, so you know, please feel free to type any questions that you have. This is your opportunity to hear from people who have conducted these in their communities, and we have a pretty good array of different communities involved. And we'll keep an eye on your chat and Maren will jump in if there's something

to follow up on. If not, we'll be taking breaks as well for questions. So with that, let's get started. So Trish, what made you decide to conduct a Domestic Violence Best Practice Assessment?

**-[Trish]** So I had mentioned that our DV program works in three different counties. So in the two smaller counties a few years ago we had already been partners on, and working on the best, or excuse me, the safety audit, those were done in the two other counties. And those counties are approximately , people, where as Deschutes County is , people, and it just has essentially taken us more time to get the buy in and to get the partners together in agreement on what type of a coordinated community response assessment we could do together. And we felt that the Best Practice Assessment would be a method that we could just quickly and independently move through an assessment on a number of DV practices together.

**-[Olga]** Great. And you know, and I think that's come up for other folks as well. Katie, how about you guys? Is that something that you all were looking at too, and under CCR or? What you made you all decide?

**-[Katie]** We were familiar with the concept of the blueprint for safety and the CCR. Honestly it came out of frustration because my job involves following up, doing investigations on domestic violence cases from the patrol division, and myself and the city attorney's office victim witness specialist basically are in a constant state of reviewing police reports, and then it comes down to me to get any additional information. And we would just see the same mistakes over and over. We would see good things happening as well, but the mistakes that were being made just seemed like they were consistently being made. And so we decided instead of just being frustrated every day about why can't we get through this, we decided to do this Best Practice Assessment, find out what was happening, why it was happening, what we were doing good, and how to fix what was going wrong.

**-[Olga]** Great, and I know Suzie you are part of a state wide effort, right? So how did that happen, how did that come about?

**-[Suzie]** Well CAWS North Dakota was chosen as a contractor under a grant, a GTEA grant that the North Dakota Department of Health and Crime and Justice Center at State University received. And there were actually three different pilot sites in the Northwestern region of the state. And this region was chosen because it was really being affected by all the people moving in for jobs in fracking and oil. And as booming oil development and this huge surge in population created much higher rates of domestic violence for local advocacy programs in that area, some of them only had two or three full time staff for dealing with anywhere from three to four times the number of victims that were seeking services before this oil boom. And then law enforcement was just overwhelmed with the challenges of responding nonstop to some really violent domestic violence situations, as well as all kinds of criminal activity like bar fights and aggravated assault. So as the coordinator for the CAWS North Dakota GTEA activities, I knew about the Praxis Blueprint Model because I heard Ellen talk about it, Ellen Tan talk about it at a rural conference in New Orleans, and I had participated in some practice webinars. But the Blueprint Model was just going to be way too much work for the timeline, for the grant and for the communities involved in the project. So I went to the Praxis website to see if there was any other information on DV

response assessment and found the information on Best Practice Assessment, which I knew would be a much better fit for the community of Williston and Watford city, it would be more manageable, and it really could be adapted to suit the teams and the project needs.

-**[Olga]** That's great. Thanks so much Suzie. And then Courtney what was going on for you all?

-**[Courtney]** Well as a project we had decided that we wanted to do some type of assessment and we were unsure what would be the best fit for our community. So like Suzie we had looked into safety audits and we had review the blueprints. And then after learning about the best practice assessment and thinking about doing it in our community, that was the best fit for what was going on in our community and seemed to be able to work the best.

-**[Olga]** Great. And then did you, Courtney did you have, like how did you end up with your team? How did you select who?

-**[Courtney]** For our team originally we had a meeting. I scheduled a meeting with all the practitioners from 911 through the judges, just to see who would be on board with doing the assessment. And at the meeting it was brought up by three different police departments, the state police, the Sheriff's department, and a local police department, that they were all interested in doing the assessment. So instead of doing separate assessments we did that one assessment. And so the chiefs from all the departments picked which officer represented their department, and then the district attorney picked which district attorney he wanted to represent the prosecutor's office. And then seeing how we were assessing three different departments at the same time, the Hope & Justice Project, we picked three advocates that had experience to participate in it. So there was one advocate per police department.

-**[Olga]** Wow. So that's quite a bit. How about Katie, how about you all, how did you select your team?

-**[Katie]** Because we wanted to start with the assessment project from the beginning, from the 911 call taking side, we knew that we wanted a dispatcher. And so I contacted the, our communication center supervisor and she actually was the one who selected which dispatcher it would be, she gave us one of her most experienced dispatchers through that center. And then I acted as the coordinator and because I had just come off of the patrol division into this investigation position, it fit that I could still act as the patrol officer on the team as well for police patrol response. And because our victim witness specialist, our victim witness program director had been going through discussing which assessment, what kind of assessment to do, it only fit that she would sit in on the meetings as well and kind of have an eye towards victim safety and effects on victims. So those were the three that we chose.

-**[Liz]** I just got a message from Olga that she got cut off, so I'm going to hop in here. Was that, was that Courtney just talking?

-**[Olga]** Katie.

-**[Liz]** Oh Katie, that was Katie. So I think Trish you're on board, you're up next, right?

-**[Katie]** Right.

-[Liz] Go ahead Trish.

-[Trish] So in terms of selecting our team, we just after the many years of working together on coordinated community response, one of the things that we wanted to be mindful of was having members on the team who either had capacity to help with decision making or affecting change when the outcomes came down the pike. Or who could, essentially we're a part of the management team within their agencies. So we had three law enforcement folks, two city PD folks, and a Sheriff's office person who were at either at Lieutenant or Captain level. I was the coordinator, again work for the DVSA program, and we had a district attorney's office prosecutor as a part of the team, and we also had somebody from the victim's assistance program which is part of the district attorney's system based victims assistance program. So we just decided to have that whole group run through the four different aspects of the assessment for consistency sake, and so that everybody knew what everybody else was doing. I missed one agency and that was 911 that was a part of the assessment.

-[Olga] Great, can you all hear me now?

-[Voiceover] You're back!

-[Katie] Yeah, so sorry. Okay.

-[Liz] So Olga that was just Trish summarizing who was on her team.

-[Olga] Great. Okay, so then Suzie how did you guys get buy-in?

-[Suzie] And I'm sorry Olga, this is Suzie, I was unmuting my line and it cut out what you were just saying, can you repeat that?

-[Olga] Oh sure. How did you guys get buy-in in the community that you worked with?

-[Suzie] Well the Family Crisis Shelter in Williston has just an amazing program director Lana Bonnet who's been doing this work for a really long time, and she was very eager to be involved in this project. They've been experiencing some issues with law enforcement response and investigation of domestic violence. The GTEA grant did specify that the focus was to be on law enforcement response and to also include state attorney's offices so the prosecutor's office in Williams County was a part of the team. The victim witness coordinator was there. Stephanie was very enthusiastic about taking part in the Practice Assessment. The Williston Police Department and the Williams County Sheriff's Office agreed to send someone to team meetings, but they made it clear they would want to review any findings of the team's Best Practice Assessment before making a decision on any best practice or protocols that they would implement. And then Watford City Police Department had a new Chief who stepped into the position when the previous Chief resigned. He agreed to be on the team while acknowledging he didn't have a lot of experience in best practice for DV response. So we have three law enforcement agencies that were really overworked and understaffed out in the North Dakota oil patch, saying they didn't have a lot of time to spend on a team process for best practice. So the way I got buy-in was to really talk to the chiefs and sheriffs about how best practice and establishing best practice for response could ultimately lessen

the number of calls they would respond to, and how more victim centered response would create more investments from victims who are involved in the criminal justice system and the legal system, so that hopefully more perpetrators would be arrested and convicted.

-[Olga] Wow, and so Suzie this was the grant that you received was a grant that came to the coalition, right? So then you kind of had to work with communities to get them to buy-in. So they weren't necessarily getting funding to do this, is that right?

-[Suzie] That's correct. The grant was through the North Dakota Department of Health, CAWS was a contractor for the grant. So these communities were getting a small amount of funding to help with some data collection, but there was not any direct funding to the communities with the team.

-[Olga] And Katie then for you all, did you, did your department receive funding? And is that part of the way that you got buy-in?

-[Suzie] We actually have received a grant through our Montana Board of Crime Control for years and years. And so now that I am, and it used, used to fund officers coming in to do follow up investigations on domestic violence cases. Now that I'm the full time investigator we still receive the grant, and I like to have a proactive project each year to utilize that grant money. So we did get funding, but it was me applying for that grant saying here is the project that we're going to do with the funding. And it paid for, for over time for our dispatcher and myself, and the victim witness coordinator did this project as part of our workload. So we did receive funding only to pay for one of the team members to come in to the meetings and to review the cases. But similar to what Suzie was saying, I had to sit down with some of the command staff in the department and say this ultimately, this will guide us to doing our job better. And it will cut back on the amount of calls we have hopefully, and it will definitely affect my workload because if the officers can ask the right questions, get the right information on the front side of things, that's less that I have to do on the other side of things, on the investigation side. So it was a win-win, and basically as long as I felt that I could fit it in to my 40 hour workweek, my command staff said go ahead and do what you think you need to do.

-[Olga] Wow, that's great.

-[Suzie] Yeah.

-[Olga] So I'm going turn to outcomes to see what you all found. But before I do that, I want to just check in and see if we have questions. Maren do you have any questions that are coming up in the chat?

-[Maren] Yeah, there was a question about assessments, particularly looking at assessments that would incorporate or focus our attention to how the system is responding to non English speaking clients. And I think this person in particular is working within a healthcare setting in connection to a hospital. So there's some distinctions there, and she's trying to make the translation into looking at a criminal legal system assessment process, but I think the question is still a good one. I would love to hear from the panelists about if they were, if in their assessment process design outline, if you found anything related to how your system was responding to non English speaking survivors.



**-[Olga]** Yeah, so Trish was that an issue for you all at all?

**-[Trish]** What that brings up for me, what I am remember from that is that we did, we reviewed 15 cases at 911, and patrol, and then for investigations and prosecution charging another 15 cases, and there was a lot of overlap between those cases. Meaning we followed them from 911 to you know what the final charges were. And there were some Spanish speaking victims and perpetrators whom what we found was that a language line is an option for police officers if there's not a bilingual officer on call during that time, but a language line was not used at that time, and so that was something that we had a conversation about for officers in order to get the most, or the best information at the time of the incident, it can be helpful to utilize that language line even though it takes a little bit more time because what was happening was instead of using the language line, they were doing their best to talk with native Spanish speakers in you know, the best English they had which wasn't necessarily sufficient to get all of the, you know, information for the case.

**-[Olga]** Yeah, you know and I've seen that as well in other kinds of assessments where the language access, you can see in the analysis of text for example whether language access is provided or not. And then Courtney did you all have the issue of language access?

**-[Trish]** Well we're a multilingual community up especially where my office is located, and so we have bilingual advocates that work with the French speaking population. And so when doing the assessment it was good to have a bilingual advocate to represent the French speaking community, because our advocates also do focus groups so they can represent the thoughts and the needs of the French speaking population.

**-[Olga]** Cool. And then anybody else that came up with that?

**-[Suzie]** This is Suzie, not, we didn't come up with it in our case review, but it has now become an issue in the areas that we're working on the Best Practice Assessment with the thousands of people that have moved to the area, we have now a lot of Spanish speaking victims and other languages as well who are seeking services from the program and also involved with law enforcement. And so there, the use as someone mentioned, the use of the language line has become really important for translation purposes.

**-[Olga]** Thanks okay. Yeah, you know that's what I've heard recently about North Dakota and particularly those areas in North Dakota because the population is so much more diverse and the challenges around providing language access.

**-[Voiceover]** And I'll just add too in terms of what's detailed in the Best Practice Assessment Guide includes specific practices for 911 to prosecution charging decisions around making sure that language access is available and some specific practices for those intervening agencies to employ in addressing language accessibility issues, but I'd also say that you could use the community assessment process or the safety accountability audit to look, to dive in a little bit deeper to see how your community is responding to survivors who have language access issues. And that's kind of a topic for another time so we can move on to another question if you don't mind Olga.

-[Olga] No, no problem.

-[Voiceover] I know we're just a little bit behind schedule but it was a point of question about what for one of our panelists about getting the buy-in from the Sheriffs and the Chiefs of the police departments and selling this process to them as reducing the number of calls that they would receive, and the person's asking did that happen? As a result of doing the Best Practice Assessment Guide, I think that was Suzie.

-[Suzie] Hi this is Suzie, it was one of the ways to get the buy-in and what we found is that we haven't done a formal evaluation of the protocols or the assessment that we did, but from the the non-formal or the qualitative evidence that I'm getting from the folks out in that area is that the best practice assessment really helped with getting the victims hooked up with an advocate as soon as possible, and it also helped with the victims working with law enforcement on arrest and charges for the perpetrator. However the number of calls have not been reduced only because of all the number of new victims that have moved into the area. So I think the repeat calls or the return calls have been reduced, but the overall amount of calls have not.

-[Voiceover] Sure, that makes sense Suzie, thanks.

-[Olga] Great, any other questions Maren?

-[Maren] Oh no, that's it for now.

-[Olga] Great, okay so let's go to outcomes then. All right, so Katie, why don't you start us off with what you all found and what did you do about it?

-[Katie] Okay so from our assessment of the 911 call taking and dispatch to patrol response we really found that our 911 center was doing a great job, we didn't have a lot of issues, and certainly not repeated issues that we saw with them. The one thing that sticks out in my mind where we made some suggestions was that they should attend some trainings. And I'm talking about follow up questions to ask about why it's important to get past history of violence, paying attention to indicators of strangulation and know why that's important, and addressing when children are present. Frequently the officers were able to get dispatched and get on scene before the 911 call lasted any great length of time, but when there was some down time, rather than sitting on an open line waiting for the officers to get there, we felt like if the 911 call takers could go to trainings and figure out how to ask these questions, just any additional follow up information would be a great asset for the case. So that was one suggestion that we made, we ended up with a booklet of our findings and suggestions which was given to the 911 center supervisor. I believe it was well received. I have not unfortunately gotten to sit down and talk with her about anything that was actually changed as a result of our findings. On the patrol side we found the same consistent arrows that led us to do the best practice assessment in the first place, and most of those had to do with training, and related to the blueprint of safety model. Understanding our role in the process and then the next stage in the process for victims and offenders going through the criminal justice system. And it seemed like the officers weren't asking the right questions or weren't building a rapport with victims because they didn't understand how that would then affect the

prosecutor's job, or advocate's job. So again it came down to making suggestions for training that the officers can go through. I actually ended up with a block of training that's been certified by the state so that officers can receive some continuing education credits when they take the training. Just kind of domestic violence, understanding the dynamics of it, and going through and talking about how patrol response really affects the next stage, and affects how this victim and offender will go through the system. So those are our findings that really came down to training, training, training, and then we made suggestions from there.

**-[Olga]** Great. And Trish, what about you guys, how did that, what did you find?

**-[Trish]** Yeah, we had a few findings and one of the most important ones I think that stuck out for us was that we really have a need for a domestic violence investigator in Deschutes County. Right now what's happening is patrol officers are pretty much completing the reportings and such at the time of the incident and handing the case on to the DA's office. And we found that there was quite a bit of follow up that could've been helpful that wasn't happening. Follow up photos, follow up interviews with the victims, or with other witnesses or such. So that's significant finding that we're working on in our community how to address. So what we are hoping to do is to have the three law enforcement agencies and the DA's office go in together and share costs on a DV investigator, and we're hoping to kick that off with a grant to kind of ramp up our sustainability by starting with grant funding and some shared cost. Another piece that was significant for us was just risk assessment which ranged from the 911 calls, and getting risk pieces in place so that 911 and dispatch could convey that to the patrol officers. So that would be items related to weapons, whether there were weapons at the scene, intoxication, premise history, any background check type information it conveyed a patrol. And then on the patrol's part with regards to risk the legality assessment program is something that we had instituted in, and at the time of the assessments we found not all of the LAP's is the acronym, those screens were being done, so we, that was something again that was a reminder back to patrol to take care of. Another significant outcome was around the crime of strangulation and how that was being communicated from 911 to patrol. And then how patrol was assessing for the signs of strangulation at the scene, and also strangulation as a charge when that went as a charge to the DA's office. The question of whether that charge was sticking or not. So it just resulted in a lot of good discussion for us. Some items were easier to resolve than others, like for 911 to convey strangulation, that's a bit of a no brainer and easy to institute. For patrol we're working on more kind of beefed up training, the possibility of bringing a trainer in to talk more about strangulation. And finally the yeah, I think that's good. I'll end there.

**-[Olga]** Okay. Thanks. And Suzie, how about you guys? What did you find and what did you do?

**-[Suzie]** Well as Trish and Katie said, there were so much similarity also in our outcomes to some of it, the important outcomes or primary outcomes that they found. One of the outcomes, one of the what we found in the assessment was that really none of the law enforcement were consistently on scene or afterwards assessing for indicators of strangulation. And most of the law enforcement were not calling for medical assistance when a victim indicated she had been strangled. One rural community law enforcement officer said he didn't want to piss off the county EMTs that they had to drive all the way out to a farm in the middle of winter only to have the victim say she didn't want to be examined by any

medical personnel. None of the law enforcement were consistently doing lethality assessment at the scene either, in spite of the level of seriousness or danger of so many of the domestic violence incidents. And then there really was not consistent use of a specific DV incident report that included the kinds of questions for indicators of shocking or strangulation, or of danger or lethality. So I did some research and created a specific DV incident report for these law enforcement team members based on another North Dakota city's report that had much more detailed questions for information from victims, including information on strangulation. And the new MOU is created that included a protocol for use of this report. And then also because of the lack of lethality assessment there was another protocol created in the MOU stating that the Maryland lethality assessment tool will be used on scene. And then based on the triggering through that assessment a call would be made to the Family Crisis Shelter hotline for the victim to speak to an advocate when indicated by that tool or when the responding officer believed the victim was in a dangerous or potentially lethal situation. An MOU protocol was also created for the Family Crisis Shelter information be given to all victims on scene and then so noted in the DV incident report. And then there was a protocol through a verbal agreement that when a victim reports strangulation or it was noted in the lethality assessment that medical personnel would be called to the scene.

**-[Olga]** Wow. And so, and with the buy-in you were able to implement all that, after that assessment. That's amazing.

**-[Suzie]** We were, again we have not done any formal evaluation of the process to know if that is still being consistently used. I know that it is for sure that it is still being consistently used in the Watford City Police Department. We haven't assessed the Williston Police Department or the Sheriff's Office.

**-[Olga]** Wow. So I'm going to skip the next question which was about other outcomes. I know that all of you have told me that the relationships that you have built in doing going through the assessment process was a little bit of an unexpected outcome. And I wanted to check Maren and see if there were questions. We're a little bit behind, but I wanted to check and see before we got how they might've adapted the process.

**-[Maren]** Well I think people are being kind to me because they offered to take notes about the outcomes and so they weren't chatting in questions. (laughter)

**-[Olga]** Okay, well then on that I'll go ahead and move us along. Thanks Maren. So let's start with you Courtney. Did you have to adapt the process and if so, how did you?

**-[Courtney]** Yes, we had to adapt. When we did the first assessment on best practice assessment for patrol and investigation, because we are such a rural community, our patrol officers are the same officers that do the investigations. And in the assessment there were two different assessments for, one for patrol, and one for investigation, so what I did was I reorganized the assessment questions to create one assessment form, instead of having the two forms. And where I had three departments that were willing to do it, I did one large assessment at one time, instead of doing three separate assessments. So for this assessment that we did, I had the departments assess other department's police reports, instead

of their own police reports. Because all of the departments are such small departments, I didn't want anybody finger pointing that somebody was doing something wrong. So I blacked out all the officers names so nobody knew what officer had written a report. And it worked out better because it also gave the departments an opportunity to visualize how other people were writing reports. And through the first assessment that I conducted I had Jane Sadusky from Praxis by my side willing to give me lots of advice. I called her all the time to ask questions on how to present things and do things a little bit differently, and she was wonderful about helping me. For the assessment I'm doing right now on prosecution and charging, when I first sat down with the district attorney and the police officer for the team, we realized that part of the prosecutions reports only consisted of police reports. Their cases didn't have any information about what prosecution had made for decisions, why they made certain decisions. So instead of doing just the assessment I had to conduct a series of interviews in order to complete the assessment. So I had to interview the district attorney, the deputy district attorney, assistant district attorney, and the victim witness advocate in order to see step by step what they do, and why they make the decisions day in and day out. Plus when we did the policy and procedure review for charging, there wasn't any written policy. That policy was an email that a district attorney had sent out to the other assistant district attorneys and so it wasn't a real policy. So I had to sit down with a district attorney and ask questions about, about what their policy really is made of, and how they made those decisions.

**-[Olga]** And Courtney, is there a reason that you did that rather than assigning that to other members of the team?

**-[Courtney]** I did that because I'm the person that writes the report first of all, so it was just easier for me to have that information, and also I, when I did the interviews I also invited the team members to be there as well. So when I met with the district attorney my deputy district attorney who was part of the team was also present in the questions, and the officer just wasn't available at those times. So we tried to do it as a team to try to get everybody's perspective in it.

**-[Olga]** Yeah, and then went okay?

**-[Courtney]** Yeah.

**-[Olga]** That's good, okay. Then Trish, tell us how you all had to adapt the process.

**-[Trish]** Right. Our primary issue was for the follow up investigations assessment. We just didn't have a lot of information by which to you know assess our response since we don't have an investigator. So what we were doing was essentially we were toggling back and forth between patrol reports and prosecutors information to get the best possible answer, or to get some information. So sometimes the DA's office would be asking you know the patrol officer to do some follow up, and we could make an assessment there, but we had to assume that those practices weren't in place for follow up if there was no documentation or if nobody at the table knew whether it had happened or not.

**-[Olga]** Yeah, and did that work out OK for you? To make those assumptions.

**-[Trish]** It was tough because there were times when people at the table would say well I'm sure that would've happened or must have happened, but since we didn't have the documentation there's it wouldn't be fair really to our community and the outcomes to say that it did happen, just based on an assumption.

**-[Olga]** Yeah.

**-[Trish]** Yeah.

**-[Olga]** And Katie, how about you all?

**-[Katie]** We did not have to adapt anything really for the first assessment. We just used the 911 call taking and dispatching worksheets from Praxis and the police patrol response worksheets. And the first assessment went very well, the second assessment that we are doing currently is focused only on police patrol response. We brought in a commander from a police department and a community based victim advocate, and we really wanted to know not only are we following national best practice standards, but how are we, what are we doing to our victims specifically in Billings. And so we had our domestic violence shelter do an anonymous survey with their victims who had called the police or who had dealt with the police for some kind of domestic violence incident, whether it was the one that got them into the shelter, or just anywhere at any point in time. And then we adapted those survey answers into a similar worksheet, similar to the best practice assessment worksheets. And we noticed that a lot of the victims their answers to questions like did you feel safe, why or why not, after officers responded, did you feel like you were treated with respect? Why or why not? And what would you tell the Billings Police Department for how we can improve, how we handle these cases?

A lot of their answers were similar to the 911 call taking worksheet, as far as treating them with respect, getting officers to the scene right away, letting them know their call is a priority and building a rapport to lead into the next step in the process. So we really just put their answers into a format that was very similar to that 911 call taking worksheet by Praxis, only using it to analyze the patrol officer's, their actions on scene. So we did, we did kind of create our own worksheet and that was really the only adaptation that we made.

**-[Olga]** That's great. And Suzie what about you all?

**-[Suzie]** Well one of the first adaptations was the because of the time limit on the project and because everyone involved was coming from a heavy oil impacted area and they were so busy and so understaffed, I decided to have the team not do a specific 911 assessment or a prosecution case review assessment. We focused on doing a law enforcement patrol response and investigation assessment simultaneously using the patrol assessment sheets and the Best Practice Assessment materials then with any investigation coming into the questions or the answer that were there. And also then any 911 or prosecution information being included as part of that. The victim witness coordinator from Williams County was very involved in this process. She was the one to pull those files from the prosecutor's office. So she was also really helpful when the files we were reviewing, if there wasn't enough information about what happened in prosecution, she would go back to the files or to the computer and

look that up and make copies and bring it to the team. Which was a really good thing but sometimes a very disheartening thing to see. As I'm sure many of you know, all the work that was put in by law enforcement and then to have certain perpetrators get charged with time served and a fine for some pretty severe domestic violence.

**-[Olga]** And was that, was it, I mean it's got to be hard to keep people motivated when they're seeing that.

**-[Suzie]** You know we, there were times when it turned into a kind of venting session in a way for talking about the issues and the problems and I think that it would be really important if we were to do this again, that we would do more of a prosecution response assessment and have if possible more buy-in from the prosecutor's offices so that we could take a look at some of those issues and why they're happening. But that being said, the legal system out in Western North Dakota is so many systems completely overwhelmed and it has been forced to do some triaging of cases, only because of the huge backup.

**-[Olga]** Yeah.

**-[Suzie]** Of criminals waiting to go in front of the judge, so.

**-[Olga]** Wow. You know and because, I think you and Courtney are both from really small communities. There's a number of questions about that. And wonder if Suzie you can take a minute, and Courtney I will come to you with this question. To highlight tips for folks for doing this in a small community.

**-[Courtney]** Well I think that one of the first tips I would have would be to know that it's going to be a long and involved process, so the team members, because you've got people that are wearing so many hats, that they're prepared for the amount of work it's going to take and the amount of time in meetings. We also adapted the best practice assessment. I made the adaptation so that they weren't doing any of the work outside of the meetings. So we created longer meetings that were working meetings where everyone got a copy of the case we were going to review. We spent some time reading through it and answering questions, and then everyone did their assessment as part of that working group in the meeting. I think it's also really important to have that buy-in from chiefs and sheriffs especially in small rural communities. When they are sending a representative officer for example to sit on the team, 'cause there might be some pushback or some defensiveness going on when you're talking about issues of law enforcement response, so it's nice to be able to have the backing from the heads of the departments. Especially when they say to you and then you can use that kind of as a gentle reminder to a law enforcement on a team that your chief does want to know what isn't working and they want to know what they're not doing, or what they're doing really well. So that they can do whatever it takes to fix the problem or to increase that what is going really well so that victims are better served.

**-[Olga]** And Suzie you had to modify an MOU with the heads of departments too, didn't you?

**-[Suzie]** We did, at the end of the project I set up a meeting with all of the team members and then the chiefs and sheriffs to look over the recommendations for us and revise protocols. To be implemented particularly that protocol for the on scene lethality assessment and that triggered 911 call for the victim to the Family Crisis Shelter hotline. And there was some pushback from the chief and sheriff on the language in the MOU, they felt it was too mandatory, to will or to shall language for the specific lethality assessment tool, they weren't going to find the MOU at the meeting. So rather than having them walk away from that meeting without this very important step in place, the family crisis shelter director talked to the chiefs and the sheriffs about the importance of the protocol. And then I, with my pen, I took the MOU and I quickly made revisions to the language so we did this kind of negotiation right there at the table for the language in the MOU, and they agreed to a revision that consistently use a lethality tool on scene without a specific name to one. They agreed to that and then the MOU's got signed.

**-[Olga]** Great. Thank Suzie. And Courtney, what tips would you have for folks who are conducting a best practice assessment in a small community?

**-[Courtney]** You know, I would do a lot of what Suzie just said. I had a lot of similar experiences as she did. The one thing that I did find is using the small community to my benefit. Where a lot of the chiefs, they have community meetings with the chief, and so when after the assessment was done, and the chiefs had good experiences with doing the assessments, they talked about it at a chiefs meeting. And so a lot of the chiefs are now saying well how come are you doing it with them and not doing it with us. So now there's a lot other departments now that are kind of jealous of the other departments, and now they want to do the same thing. So I tried to use it to our benefit in a small community.

**-[Olga]** That's great. Cool. Okay so let me just check in with Maren. And Maren are there any other questions before I turn?

**-[Maren]** No there aren't any questions coming up, but Courtney that's just brilliant. And both you and Suzie shared some really good strategies. I know a lot of communities who've used the guides have been from small communities, relatively small communities, and have found the tools quite adaptable, like you said Suzie. And like people said on the front end too you know it's template and you can work with it to make it fit, you know the size and the nature of the buy-in and whatnot at your community. But no other questions are in the chat.

**-[Olga]** Great. Well so ask you all, in preparing for this I asked our presenters to kind of be ready to give the audience some advice on how if they're considers doing this, what would you recommend. And I feel like the whole thing was really a lot of advice. But let me just go ahead and check in with you all. Courtney, what advice would you give?

**-[Courtney]** Well as a coordinator of the Best Practice Assessment, before I did anything I took the coordinator community response E-Learning course through Praxis, and I found it helpful. It helped me work on my skills for interviewing, in coordinating different systems, and I found it extremely helpful when I was posed with a lot of loaded questions from other agencies that I'm not familiar with because I don't work in those agencies. So I found it extremely helpful for that.



-[Olga] And that can be found on Praxis's website. And Maren I don't know if you want to give people a link to that, or a website address in the chat.

-[Maren] I just did.

-[Olga] Great. And Suzie, what advice would you give folks?

-[Suzie] Well I think as you said Olga, this really has been a lot of advice throughout what we've been talking about, but I think one important piece to remember is that especially in a rural community, that as a result of a team's work and the Best Practice Assessment that relationships between advocacy and law enforcement are going to become much stronger and more victim centered. And law enforcement is going to be counting on the advocacy program for the needed victims services, and that you will find that your advocacy program is going to be much more busy, because there will be more victims calling and more victims working with both your agency and law enforcement. We found after this best practice assessment that they became so busy, I mean law enforcement and the advocacy program in Watford City, had a tremendous working relationship. So we used our current grant funding to Family Crisis Shelter in place to full time advocate in Watford city, and because of those increased number of calls to the program from law enforcement, and now from victims, Family Crisis Shelter has placed a second advocate there.

-[Olga] Oh that's great. Yea so, it is, it's kind of if you build it people will come. So if you're doing these assessments and you're improving the response to be ready basically for the advocacy organization to respond.

-[Suzie] Yes, absolutely.

-[Olga] And Trish.

-[Trish] We found it important when our team was selected and we were looking at the assessments, we found it important just to drop any expectations we might have on what we would find to be the outcomes. It's easy to go down that road and think we're going to know what's going to come out at the end. And in fact what really happened was we were nicely surprised on some aspects and other points surprised us that we weren't doing as well as we thought we were. So the assessment really walks you through and you don't have to come through with any notions at the front end. We also made a point to focus on what was happening well in our community, and that just it really added to the good will within our coordinated response to act on the places where we weren't doing as well. And one other item I would add is that it's important to focus on where you see trends happening. And not just one incident where something didn't happen. You know, we wouldn't want agencies to feel picked on or individuals to feel picked on, so we really wanted to focus on the trends.

-[Olga] That's great. Yeah, you know that's the thing I like about the assessments period, whether they're the Best Practice ones or the institutional assessment the audit is that you're not, it's not a blame game, and you'll see the things that people are doing well. So it's a really good point Trish. And I

think that's particularly valuable I think in any community, but especially in smaller communities. And then Katie I'll go to you now. What's your advice for folks listening in?

**-[Katie]** My advice would be that it's a very worthwhile process. And similar to what you were just saying, as long as everybody coming to the table understands that no one agency is getting blamed for doing something or and this is not an effort to prove that an agency is doing something right, or doing something wrong. As long as everyone comes to the table understanding that this is to improve the system so that victims and offenders can get the help that they need, I don't think that there can be a bad outcome to one of these assessments as long as everybody goes in with the same goal. So I would definitely recommend that people do it. We were very happy with our outcomes and very excited to be continuing with the second stage of the Best Practice Assessment.

**-[Olga]** That's great. Thanks Katie. Well Maren so let me just check back with you and make sure there aren't any other questions before I start closing us out.

**-[Maren]** Close us out, I mean unless someone has a final question they want to type in real quick to get in before we wrap, I think we're good.

**-[Olga]** Okay. Well so to find out more about the Domestic Violence Best Practice Assessment, you can go to the Praxis website, there's a lot of information there under the, if you go into the institutional analysis as community assessment area. There's also going to be two additional, this is part one of three part series on the assessment. The next one is on August th, and it's part two, the official record of violence. It's going to be looking at, I think that's the police and investigation. Is that right Maren? Well I think it is.

**-[Maren]** Oh I'm sorry, I muted and then unmuted. This is Maren. First it was focusing on the case file review, so that case file review is essential feature of the best practice assessment guides for each point of the system. But sometimes communities have a hard time accessing those case records, or figuring out how to use the checklists with the case records. So we're going to kind of dive deep into case files with you on the part two.

**-[Olga]** Okay, and then the part three is on September first. And that one is using the guides to analyze prosecution response, so focusing more on the prosecution guides. You can download the Domestic Violence Best Practice Guides also on the website, on Praxis website. And if you're looking for funding, you can fund, most funding I think comes from either the rural grant or the grants to encourage arrest, which you heard folks talking about. And those are through OVW. And so, so with that I'd like to thank our panelists today. You guys were really amazing. And I have to say, I think they were under more duress than probably anybody else would be usually, because this is my first time hosting a webinar, and I was extremely nervous. And I think the worst thing could happen did happen, which is you know, that I got cut off. So that's a good, I guess that's a good way to start off. So thank you to Courtney, to Suzie, to Trish and to Katie for your time and all your information. We really appreciate it. And thank you all for listening. And for chatting and the asking questions and being involved in it. And Liz is there any other information that I need to give folks.

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**-[Maren]** I just chatted in a quick message to say that when you get disconnected from this webinar today, when you do disconnect you will be routed to an evaluation of this session. And I know we ask this of you over and over, but we really do value the feedback that we get from you. And so if you can spare just two or three minutes to tell us your thoughts, we will be ever so grateful. So thank you Olga, Trish, Courtney, and Suzie, and Katie, and Maren.

**-[Olga]** Yup, thank you Maren.

**-[Liz]** All of our presenters today, and of course all of you for joining us. For this session, we hope that it was valuable to you and certainly if you have any questions or follow up considerations, don't hesitate to contact Olga Trujillo, her contact information is on the powerpoint that is available either through the website for download, or on the screen right now. So don't hesitate to connect with us if you have any questions, and have a good rest of the day everybody. We'll talk to you again for part two.

**-[Voiceover]** Thanks.

**-[Voiceover]** Bye, thanks.

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