

BLUEPRINT FOR SAFETY ADVOCATE – ROLE, RESPONSIBILITIES AND SKILLS

The Blueprint for Safety ensures that each agency and each practitioner—from 911 operators and patrol officers on through to courts and probation—is “on the same page” in maximizing safety and well-being for victims and accountability for offenders. The Blueprint replaces a fragmented response with a common foundation, collective policy, and consistent attention to risk and danger. It is grounded in the experiences of victims of battering and an understanding of how criminal legal system intervention affects their lives.

A Blueprint community engages with a range of community members, from victims and survivors to populations overrepresented and/or underserved in the system. Securing and maintaining that engagement is the primary role of the Blueprint for Safety Advocate (Blueprint Advocate). The Blueprint Advocate ensures that the voices and experiences of battered women are represented at all stages of the process. In collaboration with the coordinator and the adaptation team, the Blueprint Advocate also plays a lead role in establishing the Advocacy-Initiated Response emphasized throughout the Blueprint.

The Blueprint Advocate is not a crisis advocate; that is, does not act on behalf of and provide support to individual victims of battering. Rather, the Blueprint Advocate is a systems change advocate, identifying problems and seeking new ways for the criminal legal system to produce better outcomes for all battered women.

The following broad summary illustrates the type of work and kinds of knowledge and skills related to the role of Blueprint Advocate.

BLUEPRINT ADVOCATE RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Represent the experiences of battered women through all phases of becoming a Blueprint community:
 - a. Participate in practice assessment activities for all points of intervention in the criminal justice system’s response to domestic violence (* Steps in coordinating an assessment of current practice).
 - b. Participate in policy analysis and adaptation discussions for all agencies.
 - c. Contribute to policy adaptation and writing for all agencies, as appropriate.
 - d. As part of a Blueprint training team, conduct training on new Blueprint policies and practices, where relevant and appropriate.
 - e. Participate in monitoring of Blueprint policies and practices.
2. Engage with survivors of battering to contribute to the Blueprint development:

- a. Recruit, establish, and maintain a survivor’s advisory group.
 - b. Facilitate communication between the survivor advisory group and the Blueprint Coordinator and the Blueprint Adaptation Team.
 - c. Recruit, facilitate, and report on focus groups with survivors about their experiences with the criminal justice system’s response to domestic violence.
 - d. Maintain knowledge of the broadest range of survivors’ experiences in the community.
 - e. Collect and maintain knowledge of the full scope and scale of violence against women in the community.
3. Engage with other community-based organizations representing populations overrepresented and/or underserved in the criminal legal system.
 - a. In collaboration with the Blueprint Coordinator, brief community organizations on the Blueprint for Safety.
 - b. Gather and convey information about the experiences of victims of battering from overrepresented and/or underserved communities in seeking help from the criminal legal system.
 - c. Include members from overrepresented and/or underserved communities in survivor focus groups and the survivor advisory board.
 4. Regularly meet with and advise the Blueprint Coordinator and the Blueprint Adaptation Team.
 5. Coordinate, establish, and implement an Advocacy-Initiated Response across the criminal legal system (** Overview of Advocacy-Initiated Response).

BLUEPRINT ADVOCATE QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

- Knowledge of battered women’s experiences and the dynamics of battering and other forms of domestic violence
- Experience working with diverse groups of people toward common goals
- Connections with diverse community-based organizations, particularly those representing underserved and marginalized people
- Group facilitation and negotiation skills
- Ability to analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources
- Knowledge of the local criminal legal system process or a comparable complex system

***STEPS IN COORDINATING AN ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PRACTICE**

The Blueprint Adaptation Team or a designated work group(s) conducts the assessment, with facilitation and organization provided by the Blueprint Coordinator and participation of the Blueprint Advocate.

1. Produce a current case processing map of steps involved in processing a domestic violence case in the criminal legal system. The map begins with 911 and carries through to probation monitoring. The goal is to develop a clear picture of whether and how practitioners are linked between each step; the forms and documentation used; whether and how victims are linked with community-based advocacy; and assessment of risk and danger.
2. Create a source book of local policies, administrative forms and protocols for current case processing of criminal cases, from 911 through probation monitoring.
3. Compile basic statistical information on domestic violence-related cases: e.g., 911 calls, arrests, crimes charged, disposition, sentencing, demographics.
4. Conduct focus groups with victims/survivors about their experiences with the criminal legal system.
5. Compile a policy and procedure comparison chart that analyzes local practices alongside recommended Blueprint polices and protocols.
6. Analyze case records (e.g., 911 calls, patrol reports, prosecution files, probation records, etc.) to compare current practice with recommended practice.
7. Observe current practices via patrol ride-alongs, 911 “sit-alongs,” court observations, and other practitioner observations.
8. Interview agency directors, supervisors, and practitioners about current practice.
9. Coordinate and facilitate meetings to review, interpret, and analyze assessment data throughout the process.
10. Maintain a written record of all discussions, conclusions, and recommendations related to the current-practice assessment.

****OVERVIEW OF ADVOCACY-INITIATED RESPONSE**

We know that victims experience better outcomes when linked with confidential advocacy: psychological distress is reduced and court outcomes are enhanced. Just knowing a resource is available, though, doesn't guarantee that a person will actually access it. Not knowing what an advocate is, or not wanting to bother anyone, most victims will also refuse an offer from law enforcement to have an advocate contact them.

However, when an advocate calls a victim and offers confidential services, although they have the right to refuse, most are willing to talk, at least once, to an advocate. This opportunity can lay the foundation for continued involvement and support as a victim processes her experiences; thereby increasing safety for more victims. Because of this, communities across the country are moving toward implementing an

advocacy-initiated response (AIR) to increase the connections between victims and community-based advocates.

The AIR involves a working agreement between the law enforcement agency and the community-based advocacy program. The arresting officer contacts the community-based advocacy program to let them know an arrest has been made and lets the victim know that an advocate will be calling. An advocate then calls the victim, and after receiving permission from the victim to proceed, the advocate provides confidential services to:

- Assess and plan for her immediate safety needs.
- Provide information regarding the court process.
- Determine what she wants to have happen in court and her wishes regarding contact with her partner.

One of the riskiest and most stressful times in a victim's life is when the criminal justice system gets involved. Using the advocacy-initiated response model, more victims receive crucial information to reduce stress and anxiety and enhance safety.

Additional information: http://praxisinternational.org/library_advocacy.aspx

This project is supported by Grant No. 2010-TA-AX-K008 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Justice.