

BLUEPRINT FOR SAFETY: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Read below for answers to frequently asked questions about the Blueprint for Safety...

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1. WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE BLUEPRINT?

The Blueprint is a coordinated community response (CCR), fully articulated. It builds on the groundbreaking work of two Minnesota communities, Duluth and St. Paul, to present the first comprehensive, written interagency plan in the nation for the criminal legal system response to domestic violence crimes, from 911 through sentencing and probation. It unites each step in the process around consistent identification and communication of risk. The Blueprint is grounded in the experiences of victims of battering and understanding of how intervention by the criminal legal system affects their lives. It is distinctive in its emphasis on leadership by community-based advocacy and community consultation as ways to accomplish that grounding in victims' lived experience.

It establishes an ongoing process of reviewing, monitoring, and adjusting policy and practice to ensure the most protective and accountable response possible, from an emergency call for help through to sentencing and probation. The Blueprint organizes case processing around: 1) what victims need to be safe; 2) what practitioners need from each other to do their jobs and enhance safety; and 3) what is required by each worker and agency to hold offenders accountable. The Blueprint provides direction for each worker on how to identify, document, act upon, and communicate information about risk and danger. It provides direction on how to engage with victims to form partnerships and promote safety.

The Blueprint requires adjusting interventions in ways that avoid and correct unintended harmful consequences and disparity of impact.

2. DO WE HAVE TO HAVE A CCR IN PLACE?

The Blueprint is an interagency response, guided by community-based advocacy: i.e., it is fundamentally a coordinated community response, but a fully articulated and actualized CCR. A functioning interagency group that includes community-based advocacy and key agencies in the criminal legal system response—as characteristic of any CCR—is necessary to adapt and sustain the Blueprint. Starting out to develop a local Blueprint does not necessarily mean that every criminal legal system agency has to be fully on board and engaged. The Blueprint is unlikely to get far, however, without the early and continuous involvement of emergency communications/911, police, and prosecution. A community with a longstanding, well-functioning CCR will be able to move from adaptation to implementation more readily. If agreement among key players is in place, a community without an established CCR can also be successful in using the process of adapting the Blueprint to create a coordinated community response in the criminal legal system.

3. WHAT ARE THE KEY STEPS?

Adapting the Blueprint for Safety proceeds in five phases involving the following key steps:

- 1. Explore and prepare**

Secure community will to initiate the Blueprint development process and establish an adaptation team.

- 2. Assess practice and identify problems**

Conduct an assessment of current policy and practice to identify gaps that the Blueprint will address.

- 3. Adapt policy and adjust practice**

Use the Blueprint policy and protocol templates and training memos to revise and write policies and protocols for each agency and produce a collective policy.

- 4. Implement and institutionalize the Blueprint changes**

Secure policy approvals, hold a community Launch event, conduct agency-specific and interagency training, initiate new documentation and administrative procedures, and establish a process for ongoing monitoring.

- 5. Monitor and revise**

Conduct the on-going data collection, assessment, and case-by-case and systemic problem-solving needed to ensure that the Blueprint functions as a “living,” sustainable response to battering and domestic violence crimes.

While certain steps are required in a certain sequence—e.g., hire a coordinator and select and adaptation team before adapting and implementing new policy and practice—the Blueprint is fundamentally an approach to intervening in domestic violence crimes in a specific way with specific goals. That approach does not end when the last task is checked off, but continues as a new, unified way of working together to identify and solve problems on behalf of victims of battering and the community.

4. WHO DOES THE WORK—AND DO WE NEED A COORDINATOR?

Adapting the Blueprint requires community-based advocates, agency administrators, practitioners who handle cases in their everyday jobs, a local Blueprint coordinator, and various community partners. Those involved come together in different ways, depending on the needs at different steps in the process. Champions get involved early on and at key points in launching, promoting, and sustaining the Blueprint. Champions might include agency administrators, such as the chief of police or prosecutor; elected officials such as the sheriff or mayor or tribal chair; and influential community members, such as members of the tribal council or the United Way or YWCA director. Except in small communities, Blueprint champions typically do not do the day-to-day work of adapting and implementing the Blueprint. Blueprint champions are key to securing the community and political will necessary to proceed and to securing the memorandum of understanding that defines each agency's participation.

The Blueprint team provides ongoing guidance and participates in activities related to assessing practice, adapting policies, launching and implementing the Blueprint, and establishing and managing a monitoring process. The Blueprint team includes practitioners who are decision-makers or otherwise influential in their agencies. Once the policies and protocols have been adapted and launched, many of the same individuals who were involved in the first phase are likely to participate on the implementation team. Ad hoc work groups come together as needed to collect data about current practice, review and revise policies and protocols, and monitor Blueprint changes. The Blueprint coordinator manages the day-to-day tasks of adapting the Blueprint and links everyone involved to the overall process. The coordinator keeps the focus on managing the parts and advancing the Blueprint from design to implementation. Do you need a coordinator? Yes.

5. HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

Salary and fringe benefits for the participation of one or more community-based advocates and the Blueprint coordinator are the main costs in adapting the Blueprint. Other expenses include: office space and equipment; costs involved in recruiting and facilitating a survivor's advisory group and community focus groups; training and launch events; printing and distributing Blueprint documents; developing and maintaining databases, web-site, revised forms, and other tools. The Blueprint approach includes compensation for community-based advocates because of the critical role that advocacy plays in the essential partnerships and leadership.

6. HOW DO WE SUSTAIN THE BLUEPRINT?

Sustaining the Blueprint requires ongoing coordination and an ongoing process of institutionalizing the Blueprint. That process includes integrating Blueprint policies and protocols into each agency's practice; training personnel; establishing an interagency communication strategy for sharing information about risk, history, context, and severity of violence; monitoring implementation and compliance; and adapting the Blueprint to address unforeseen and new problems. Sustaining the Blueprint requires commitments from agency administrators to develop and activate internal and interagency compliance and monitoring plans.

7. HOW DO WE KNOW IF THE BLUEPRINT IS THE BEST STEP FOR OUR COMMUNITY?

If you can answer "yes" to the following qualities, your community is in a good position to design and implement a Blueprint for Safety.

- Community-based advocates have a central role in commenting on and shaping the criminal legal system's response to domestic violence.
- Community-based advocates and key leaders in the criminal legal system are accustomed to working together to identify and solve problems.
- We are curious and transparent about our response to domestic violence crimes.
- We seek out best practice rather than assuming that what we have been doing is the most effective approach.
- We are committed to a united approach with a shared purpose and goals.
- We can agree upon adhering to the Blueprint foundational principles to guide the response to domestic violence crimes.
- We can establish the necessary coordination.
- We can establish sufficient authority and resources to sustain the Blueprint.

8. WHAT IF WE CAN'T TAKE ON THE ENTIRE BLUEPRINT?

The Blueprint templates are a comprehensive set of best-practice guidelines for every step in the criminal legal system process. They include policies, protocols, and related training memos that can be used by any agency seeking to strengthen its response to domestic violence crimes, regardless of whether the community is ready to take on the Blueprint. While using parts of the templates to improve practice at a particular step or within a specific agency is helpful, the results do not equal a Blueprint for Safety.

9. HOW CAN WE PREPARE TO WRITE A GRANT TO DEVELOP THE BLUEPRINT FOR SAFETY IN OUR COMMUNITY?

The discussions, groundwork, and information-gathering included in Planning a Blueprint for Safety Proposal help position a community to submit a grant for funding to develop and launch the Blueprint. In addition, many of the questions lead to the kinds of reflection that benefit any coordinated interagency effort.

10. HOW DO WE LEARN MORE?

If you are interested in becoming a Blueprint for Safety community—or wondering if you’re ready for the Blueprint—contact Praxis International.

Go to www.praxisinternational.org for general information and announcements of upcoming Blueprint webinars and events.

Write to blueprint@praxisinternational.org to request a phone consultation.

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