



CAP TIPS #4

To Improve Public Awareness

How to Engage Crime Victims and Survivors in Your NCVRW Activities

Introduction

The most successful NCVRW activities and events are those that actively engage and involve crime victims and survivors. This year, the NCVRW theme – “Crime Victims’ Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect.” – offers a powerful message that is directly relevant to victims’ experiences, and should be an incentive to garner their involvement.

One of the most important goals of victim/survivor outreach is the very tenet of NCVRW. Since 1986, NCVRW has been designated to recognize the plight of crime victims; honor their dignity in the face of tremendous trauma and harm; and pay tribute to their many contributions that have helped define and create the national field of victim assistance. In other words, *the entire focus is on victims/survivors, and those who assist them!*

There are four important strategies to engage crime victims/survivors in your NCVRW planning activities and events:

- Defining their role.
- Outreach.
- Ensuring meaningful participation.
- Important follow-up activities.

Defining Roles for Crime Victims and Survivors

Your NCVRW Planning Committee should clearly define the various roles that victims can have in both planning and implementation:

Planning

Your Planning Committee should include representation from victims and survivors. You may even consider designating a “victim/survivor subcommittee” that can help coordinate victim involvement in your NCVRW activities.

In advance of NCVRW, victims can strengthen your NCVRW planning activities and help develop resources that can be used during NCVRW. You can ask them to:

- Contribute their thoughts and perceptions on what “fairness, dignity and respect” mean to them (see 2010 CAP TIPS #1, *How to Promote the 2010 NCVRW Theme*).
- Define the negative outcomes when victims are *not* treated with fairness, dignity and respect.
- Help document the “power of the personal story” that victims have had in your state and community, which has resulted in:
 - Changes in laws and public policy.
 - Creation of new protocols that identify and meet the needs of victims.
 - Greater public awareness of the plight of the victim.
 - Improved collaboration among victim-serving agencies, both system- and community-based.
- Utilize their personal contacts to seek participation in your NCVRW activities from state and community leaders, such as Governors, Attorneys General, legislators, mayors and other local elected officials, business and civic leaders, etc.
- Identify and document the types of victims’ rights and direct services that result in “fairness, dignity and respect” for victims.
- Help engage other victims and survivors through direct outreach (*see below*).

Outreach to Crime Victims and Survivors

How do you reach crime victims and survivors in order to engage them in your NCVRW activities?

The first important step is to make sure that *all* victim-serving agencies – including system- and community-based victim service providers, and justice and allied professionals – have detailed information about your NCVRW activities well in advance (like right about *now!*). You can ask them specifically to help ensure that their clients are aware of your activities, and invited and encouraged to attend and participate.

The next step is to create *victim/survivor-specific outreach materials*. This can include:

- Palm cards.
- Letters of invitation to your event(s).
- Flyers or posters.
- E-mails and listserv communications.
- Information posted on your website.
- Media outreach (such as public service announcements, letters-to-the-editor, press releases, etc.)

Your message can be very simple, for example:

“The theme of 2010 National Crime Victims’ Rights Week” is “Crime Victims’ Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect.” This is an opportunity for our (*jurisdiction*) to recognize the rights and needs of crime victims, and to work together to ensure that they are treated with fairness, dignity and respect.

(List your specific 2010 NCVRW activities).

All crime victims and survivors in our (*jurisdiction*) are encouraged to attend (*name of your event*) as honored guests. (*Also list any specific activities that will engage them during the events, such as lighting candles; reading the names of loved ones who have been murdered; receiving a flower, etc.*).

We hope that our entire community – including crime victims and survivors – will join us in recognizing the plight of crime victims, and join together to improve their treatment by our justice systems, and by our community.”

In addition, victims and survivors can be asked to help you identify other victims and survivors to participate in your NCVRW activities. Often, victims have important networks through support groups, volunteer activities, employment, and their social support networks. By providing victims with advance “Save the Date” information about your NCVRW activities – in both paper and electronic formats – you can ask them to help “spread the word” to their families, friends, and colleagues (including other victims/survivors).

Ensuring Meaningful Participation

You want to make sure that, when victims and survivors *do* attend your events, they feel welcome and are glad that they came. Any special recognition you can offer will honor them, create goodwill, and perhaps provide a foundation for ongoing relationships that can benefit both these victims/survivors, and your organization or community and its goals related to crime victim assistance.

A good place to start is to review past “Tips to Promote Victim and Community Awareness” from previous NCVRW CAP Programs. You can go to http://www.ovc.gov/ncvrw/2006/tips/tips_index.html and <http://cap.navaa.org/previous.html> to get some great ideas on how victims and survivors can be important participants in your activities.

It’s a good idea to have a separate sign-in table or designated space for “Honored Guests – Crime Victims and Survivors” to sign in. Once you identify them, you can:

- Assign special greeters to thank them for coming, make sure they have all relevant event resources, and escort them to their seats.

- Provide them with a flower or button that designates them as an “honored guest.”
- Provide them with any specific information about victim-centered activities for your event (see below).

Victim-centered Activities

There are many activities that can actively engage victims and survivors in your NCVRW events and activities, and honor them – either publicly or privately – through your actions. Some suggestions include:

- Invite a few victims to speak at your event(s), focusing on the 2010 NCVRW theme, and what can be done to improve the treatment of crime victims and survivors (you can also consider inviting three victims to address each of the components of the 2010 NCVRW theme – fairness, dignity and respect).
- Designate special recognition of crime victims (you can use and modify, as needed, the “sample certificates of appreciation” artwork included in the 2010 NCVRW Resource Guide).
- Ensure that your 2010 NCVRW proclamation or resolution (see the 2010 NCVRW Resource Guide for a *sample proclamation*) includes strong recognition of victims and survivors; and ask a dignitary to read the proclamation at your event(s).
- Ask key criminal, juvenile, tribal or Federal justice officials to personally address the NCVRW theme, and what it means to victims, in remarks at your event(s).
- Ask ALL speakers at your event(s) to personally thank the victims and survivors in attendance, and pay special tribute to them in their remarks. Some general themes here include:
 - *Without* crime victims and survivors who are willing to serve as witnesses throughout justice processes, we would *not* have an effective justice system.
 - Literally everyone *is* or *knows* a victim of crime; crime is no longer “something that happens to someone else.”
 - Our homes, neighborhoods, schools, businesses and entire communities are *all* negatively affected by crime and victimization.
- Hang a large poster with the NCVRW theme imprinted on it where victims, survivors and other participants can write down their thoughts that relate to the theme.
- In advance of your event(s), provide victims/survivors with a card imprinted with the 2010 NCVRW theme, and ask them to write down what the theme

- Invite victims and survivors to come forward at your event(s) and:
 - Light candles at the front of the room.
 - Place flowers that they receive when signing in into large, central vases at the front of the room, to create a beautiful bouquet.
 - Cite a sentence about what “fairness, dignity and/or respect” personally mean to them.
 - Bring photos of a loved one who was murdered to display in a prominent place.

It is also important is to make sure that you have trained victim advocates or mental health professionals available at your NCVRW events, to make sure that appropriate support and, if needed, crisis support is available to crime victims and survivors who attend.

Important Follow-on Activities

As noted above, it’s a good idea to have a designated sign-in sheet for crime victims and survivors, which should include a space for both their “snail mail” and email addresses. Sample sign-in sheets are available at the NCVRW CAP Subgrantees’ Web site.

It’s very important to follow-on to all victims who attended and participated in your NCVRW activities. You can:

- Send an email to all who attended, thanking them for their participation and validating that their presence helped emphasize the 2010 NCVRW theme of “Crime Victims’ Rights: Fairness. Dignity. Respect.”
- Solicit staff and volunteers who can write *personal notes* of thanks to them.
- Through your follow-on activities, provide opportunities for victims and survivors to:
 - Access any support or services they may need.
 - Volunteer to assist your organization not only during NCVRW, but year-round.
 - Continue to participate in activities that recognize and honor victims, and allow them to share “the power of *their* personal stories.”

For More Information

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