

Summary From The Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines

Published by the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), to implement the victim assistance grant program as authorized by the Victims of Crime Act of 1984, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 10601, et seq. (hereafter referred to as VOCA).

For the purpose of the VOCA grant program direct services are defined as “those efforts that (1) respond to the emotional and physical needs of crime victims; (2) assist primary and secondary victims of crime to stabilize their lives after a victimization; (3) assist victims to understand and participate in the criminal justice system; and (4) provide victims of crime with a measure of safety and security such as boarding-up broken windows and replacing or repairing locks.” The Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines indicate that: “a crime victim is a person who has suffered physical, sexual, financial, or emotional harm as a result of the commission of a crime.”

Examples of Allowable Activities Under Existing VOCA Victim Assistance Guidelines		
1	Serve Priority Victims of Crime	The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) requires states to certify that priority shall be given to eligible crime victim assistance programs providing assistance to victims of sexual assault, spousal abuse, or child abuse. See VOCA Section 10603(a)(2)(A). A minimum of 10% of each Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) (30% total) will be allocated to each of these “priority categories.” See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.A.3. OVC interprets the VOCA and Guidelines definition of “child abuse” to include any harm to children, including pornography and sexual exploitation.
2	Serve Previously Underserved Victims of Crime	VOCA also requires states to make funds available for grants to programs which serve previously underserved populations of victims of violent crime. See VOCA Section 10603(a)(2)(B). Ten percent of each VOCA grant will be allocated to victims of violent crime (other than “priority” category victims) who were “previously underserved.” These underserved victims of either adult or juvenile offenders may include, but are not limited to, victims of federal crimes; survivors of homicide victims; or victims of assault, robbery, gang violence, hate and bias crimes, intoxicated drivers, bank robbery, economic exploitation and fraud, and elder abuse. To meet the underserved requirement, state grantees must identify crime victims by the types of crime they have experienced (e.g., drunk driving, sexual assault, or domestic violence). States are encouraged to also identify gaps in available services by victims’ demographic characteristics, including male victims of color, LGBTQ victims, non-English speaking residents, persons with disabilities, members of racial or ethnic minorities, or by virtue of the fact that they are residents of rural or remote areas, or inner cities. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.A.4

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3	Award Funds to Eligible Subrecipients/Programs	Eligible organizations include victim services organizations whose sole mission is to provide services to crime victims (e.g., sexual assault and rape crisis centers, domestic violence programs and shelters, child abuse programs, centers for missing children, mental health services, and other community-based victim coalitions and support organizations including those who serve survivors of homicide victims). In addition to victim services organizations, whose sole purpose is to serve crime victims, there are many other public and non-profit organizations that have components which offer services to crime victims (e.g., criminal justice agencies, religiously-affiliated organizations, state crime victim compensation agencies; hospitals and emergency medical facilities, mental health service organizations, state/local public child and adult protective services, state grantees, legal services agencies and programs with a demonstrated history of advocacy on behalf of domestic violence victims, and public housing authorities that have components specifically trained to serve crime victims.) See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.C.
4	Award Funds for Legal Assistance and Legal Clinics	Victim assistance programs can provide emergency legal assistance such as filing protective orders and obtaining emergency custody/visitation rights when such actions are directly connected to family violence cases and are taken to ensure the health and safety of the victim. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.1.a. Additionally, in the civil proceeding context, services may include those that are reasonably needed as a direct result of the victimization, but do not include tort actions, divorce, or civil restitution efforts.
5	Award Funds for Innovative Types of Shelter including Transitional Housing	Victim assistance programs can provide shelter (including emergency, short-term nursing home shelter for elder abuse victims for whom no other safe, short-term residence is available). See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.1.a. VOCA funds may be used to support staff time in locating resources to assist victims with these expenses. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.3.i. VOCA funds <i>cannot</i> support relocation expenses for crime victims such as moving expenses, security deposits on housing, ongoing rent, and mortgage payments. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.3.i.
6	Award Funds for Forensic Interviews	OVC interprets the Guidelines to allow for victim assistance funding to be used for forensic interviews for children and individuals with disabilities. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Sections IV.E.1(a) and (b).
7	Allow Sub-recipients to Purchase Equipment/Technology	Victim assistance funds can be used to purchase equipment, which OVC interprets to include technology. VOCA funds cannot support the entire cost of an item that is not used exclusively for victim-related activities. However, VOCA funds can support a prorated share of such an item. In addition, subrecipients cannot use VOCA funds to purchase equipment for another organization or individual to perform a victim-related service. Examples of allowable costs include computers; cameras for interviewing children; two way mirrors; and equipment and furniture for shelters, work spaces, victim waiting rooms, and children's play areas. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.2.d. Additionally, the guidelines indicate that awarding grants for advanced technologies may be appropriate. Specifically, computers and software may increase a subrecipient's ability to reach and serve crime victims. Subrecipient must meet program eligibility requirements set forth in the Final VOCA Victim Assistance Guidelines, IV.B, Subrecipient Organization Eligibility Requirements. Other requirements apply. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.2.F.

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8	Substance Abuse Treatment for Victims	OVC interprets the Final VOCA Victim Assistance Guidelines as allowing for VOCA Victim Assistance Funds to be used, under certain circumstances, to support substance abuse treatment for victims. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Sections IV.E.2 and IV.E.3.h. Specifically, a state grantee and subrecipient must agree that direct services to crime victims cannot be offered without support for these expenses that the subrecipient has no other source of support for them, and that only limited amounts of VOCA funds will be used for these purposes. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Sections IV.E.2. VOCA funds cannot pay for in-patient treatment costs. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Sections IV.E.3.h.
9	Support Supervision of Direct Service Providers	State grantees may provide VOCA funds for supervision of direct service providers when they determine that such supervision is necessary and essential to providing direct services to crime victims. For example, a state grantee may determine that using VOCA funds to support a coordinator of volunteers or interns is a cost-effective way of serving more crime victims. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.2.i.
10	Allow sub-recipients to use funds for Personnel Costs for Child Adult Protective Service Workers and SANE Coordinators	VOCA funds can support state/local public child and adult protective services agencies. See Final Program Victim Assistance Guidelines, Section IV.C.5. VOCA funds may be used to pay a portion of the salary for Child/Adult Protective Service Workers who are providing direct services to child victims. VOCA funds can also support a portion of the salary for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) who are providing direct services to victims of sexual assault. See generally Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.1.g
11	Allow Sub-recipients to participate in Public Presentations	VOCA funds may be used to support presentations that are made in schools, community centers, or other public forums, and that are designed to identify crime victims and provide or refer them to needed services. Specifically, activities and costs related to such programs including presentation materials, brochures, and newspaper notices can be supported by VOCA funds. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.2.k
12	Allow sub-recipients to participate in Skills Training for Staff and Volunteers	VOCA funds designated for training are to be used exclusively for developing the skills of direct service providers including paid staff and volunteers, so that they are better able to offer quality services to crime victims. An example of skills development is training focused on how to respond to a victim in crisis. VOCA funds can be used for training both VOCA-funded and non-VOCA funded service providers who work within a VOCA recipient organization, but VOCA funds cannot be used for management and administrative training for executive directors, board members, and other individuals that do not provide direct services. VOCA funds can be used to purchase materials such as books, training manuals, and videos for direct service providers, within the VOCA-funded organization, and can support the costs of a trainer for in-service staff development. Staff from other organizations can attend in-service training activities that are held for the subrecipient's staff. VOCA funds can support costs such as travel, meals, lodging, and registration fees to attend training within the state or a similar geographic area. See Final VOCA Victim Assistance Program Guidelines, Section IV.E.2.a.b.c