



# The State Court Violence Against Women Point of Contact:

A GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS

**DECEMBER 2019**

Authors

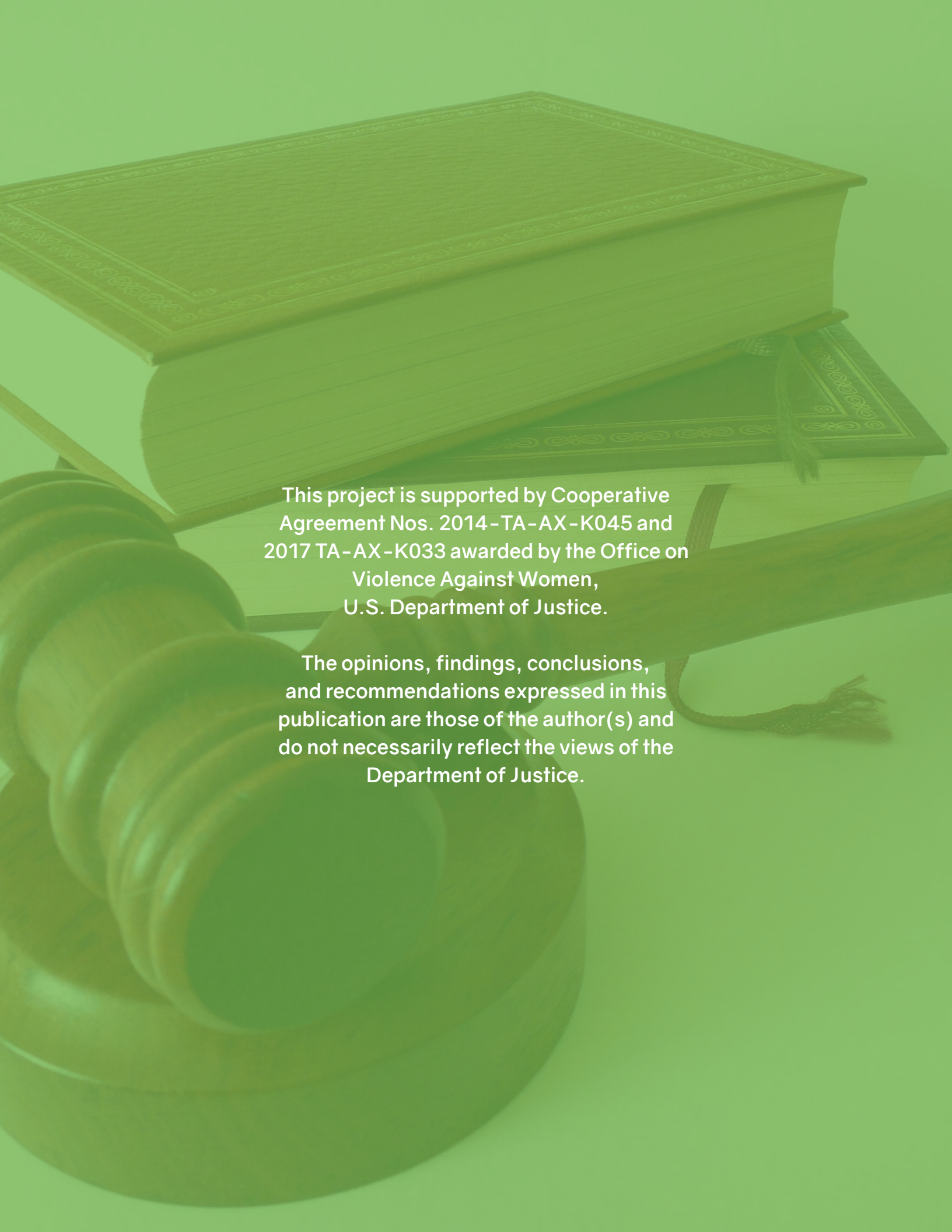
**Denise O. Dancy and Kathryn J. Genthon**



**VAWA and the Courts**

Promoting Effective Court Responses to Violence Against Women



The background is a solid green color with a faint, semi-transparent image of a stack of books and a wooden gavel. The books are stacked in the upper half, and the gavel is positioned diagonally across the lower half. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

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# INTRODUCTION

Whether you are a new Violence Against Women Point of Contact (VAW POC) looking for guidance on how to get started in your new role or are a more established Point of Contact (POC) wanting to grow the contributions of your position on behalf of the courts, this handbook is for you. The insights found within represent over a decade in the evolution of the VAW POC position in the state courts. More importantly, this handbook reflects the practical experiences and lessons garnered from VAW POC counterparts in other states and territories to assist you in establishing, enhancing, and maximizing your role as a POC.

## ORIGINS OF THE VAW POINT OF CONTACT POSITION

The VAW POC position was created to consolidate and cultivate the courts' expertise, internal and external collaborations, and access to resources to better respond to violence against women issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking. These resources include various grant programs provided by the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) through the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), particularly the [STOP \(Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors\) Violence Against Women Formula Grants Program](#).<sup>1</sup> POCs perform many roles internally and externally on behalf of their state administrative office of the courts. Three key responsibilities of a VAW POC are to become a respected and knowledgeable voice for the courts, garner a valuable seat on the state's STOP Planning Committee to represent the court's needs, and help ensure access to the STOP Program's designated 5% set-aside for courts.

The VAW POC position initially grew out of an early pilot project in a handful of states. POCs are designated by the state court administrator in each state and territory.<sup>2</sup> VAW POCs now have been identified in most states and territories. POC positions are supported through a variety of internal and external funding sources, including STOP VAWA funds.

In 2016, the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) adopted a [resolution](#) in support of VAW POC positions in state administrative offices of the courts (AOC).<sup>3</sup> The resolution acknowledges the vital role a VAW POC has in enhancing the courts' response to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. It encourages the institutionalization of the VAW POC position within state AOCs and sustained funding for the position.

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1 Each state's grant amount is calculated on a population-based formula. Four specifically designated allocations receive a set percentage of each state's grant amount —prosecution (25%), law enforcement (25%), victim services (30%), and courts (5%). The remaining 15% is allotted to a discretionary category under which the four allocation groups can also apply for additional funding.

2 From here forward in this document, states and territories will be generally referred to as "states."

3 The resolution can be found on the Conference of Chief Justices' (CCJ) website [here](#).

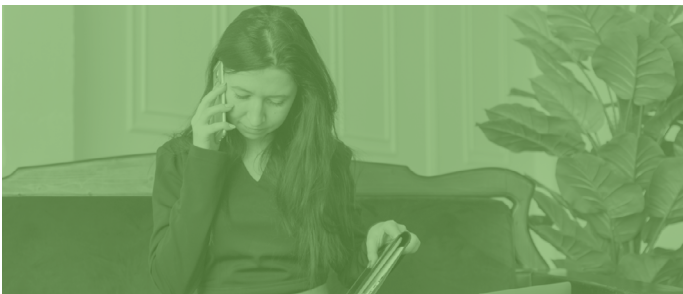
## WHAT IS THE VAW POINT OF CONTACT?

*Points of Contact are “the connectors – or capacitors – among and between the courts and other organizations, specifically as it relates to VAW matters. The POC is essentially a capacitor between funder/ funding source rules and what each constituent base needs within and without the court.”*

**- Becky Kinnamon**

Director, Crimes Against Persons Program,  
Iowa State Court Administrator’s Office, and  
Iowa VAW Point of Contact

Like the courts they serve, no two POC positions are quite the same. The POC position can be full-time or part-time. Job titles and scopes of duties vary widely. In some states, the VAW POC is a formally designated position in the AOC with well-defined purpose areas and duties that specifically address statewide domestic violence issues (e.g., a Domestic Violence Program Coordinator). In other states, those serving in the courts in various positions not specifically focused on VAW issues may be asked to serve in a less formal capacity as the VAW POC as part of their broader set of related job responsibilities (e.g., grant managers, staff attorneys, analysts and program managers). In most instances, the VAW POC reports to the state court administrator (or designee) whose ongoing support is essential to sustaining the VAW POC position and program implementation.



## THE VAW POINT OF CONTACT IN PRACTICE

*I don't think there is one specific “job” for POCs, but a melding of various positions, with some overlapping themes and duties. For instance, I staff a supreme court commission through the AOC and being the POC is one piece of that. As POC, it is up to me to not only submit all applications and reports for this grant, but any other grants I manage. I also am the “go-to” person when it comes to our staff and judicial officers looking for information on domestic and sexual violence (and all other activities covered in the grant). Furthermore, as POC, I am continuously searching out projects and partnerships with others outside the court system to help enhance our work and provide judicial officers and court staff with a community understanding of the issues. Additionally, I help facilitate meetings, conference calls, and have been more involved and active in developing education programs.*

**- Pam Dittman**

Program Coordinator, Washington  
Administrative Office of Courts, and Former  
VAW Point of Contact

Point of Contact positions generally evolve over time and expand their capacity and reach on the courts’ behalf. With the support of court leadership (which is ideally cultivated and enhanced over time), the VAW POC position affords substantial flexibility and broad opportunities for creativity and collaborations to enhance the courts’ response to violence against women.

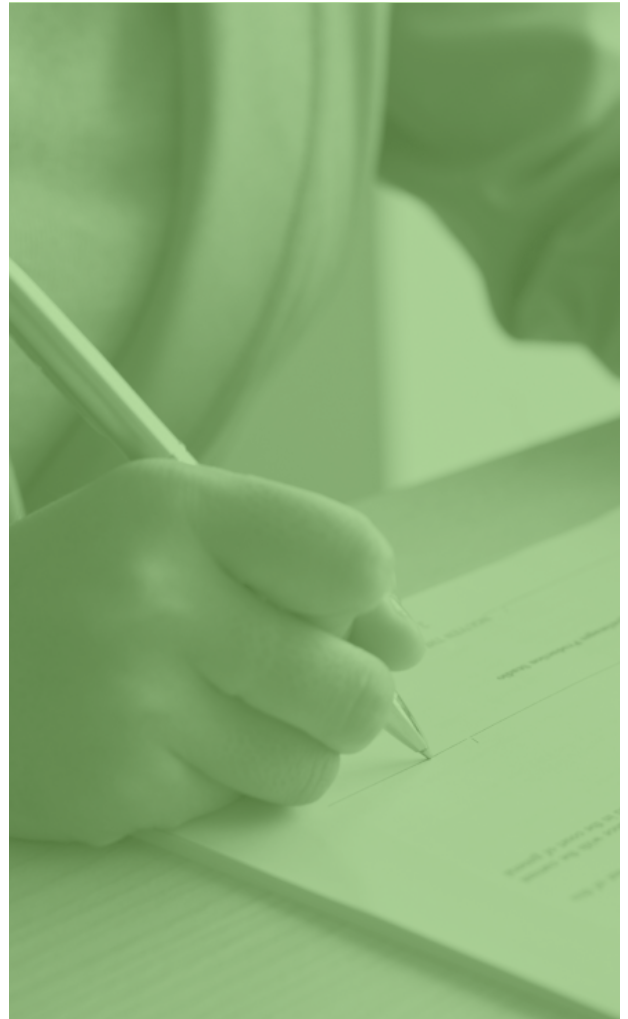
Regardless of specific job title, the basic responsibilities and expectations for the VAW POC position set out in the supporting CCJ/COSCA

resolution can be summarized as follows:

- Connect the court to resources and multidisciplinary collaborations.
- Bring the court's perspective and needs to the STOP implementation planning process.
- Leverage current funding and identify new funding sources.
- Identify resources and programs to address the courts' challenges.
- Stay up to date on emergent issues, trends and innovative programs.
- Enhance community outreach and collaborative partnerships.<sup>4</sup>

While their duties vary from state to state, VAW POCs generally are responsible for several core functions: securing funding and grant administration; court, interagency and community outreach; policy and program development and implementation; and, training and technical assistance for judicial and court staff.

The following sections provide a basic overview of the evolution of a VAW POC position from just starting out to maximizing the role as a POC. In practice, the tasks and accomplishments outlined here overlap along a continuum of experiences.



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<sup>4</sup> Kinnamon, B., & Ramos-Reardon, D. (2016, September). Getting to the Table as a VAW POC [PowerPoint presentation for National Center for State Courts Technical Assistance Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/187873686>

# Section one:

## FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTALS – ESTABLISH YOUR ROLE

GOAL	THEME	PRIMARY OBJECTIVES
Grow your knowledge and relationship base	Foundation-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Build your knowledge (of the courts and court users, VAWA/STOP, external organizations, and stakeholders)</li><li>• Work to establish relationships and trust (internally and externally)</li></ul>

As a new POC, you should focus on some foundational objectives for your role. Future successes and collaborations can be enhanced by your initial investment of time on these efforts. Your efforts as a new POC will often center on developing a working knowledge of the courts, relevant laws and trends – including VAWA and the STOP Program, identifying individuals with court expertise and supportive mentors, initiating outreach efforts, and performing core job functions.

### BUILD YOUR KNOWLEDGE

All VAW POCs must have a strong understanding of the workings and purposes of the courts – as institutions of government and as structured within your own state court system. Your role as an effective POC will generally fall within those stated purposes. Your knowledge of the courts is key to meaningful advocacy on behalf of the courts. This knowledge will both help build your credibility inside the courts and establish the unique role and valuable contributions you bring on behalf of the courts, as the VAW POC, among other justice partners and collaborations.

#### 1. Understand courts as an institution.

POCs should be familiar with the established roles and responsibilities of the courts as an institution. For more experienced POCs, this knowledge may be second nature. For newer POCs, the [National Association for Court Management's](#) (NACM) Core Competencies for courts on the [Purposes and Responsibilities of Courts](#) provides a good overview of the courts' role as an institution.

The National Center for State Courts' (NCSC) [State Court Organization](#) and [Court Statistics Project](#) provide valuable state-by-state information on trial and appellate court structures and organization, caseload statistics and highlights, and interactive customizable searches for specific data sets.

#### 2. Know your courts.

You should gather information about how your specific courts operate and about the courts' internal and external users. Learn how a case moves through both civil and criminal court systems and their similarities and differences; what forms are used for what purposes, which parties and at what point(s) in the process; and, the appropriate roles and work functions performed by various court personnel. Become familiar with court, program and issue-specific terminology. Determine what various acronyms and abbreviations mean.



Don't be afraid to ask questions, do your own research, and review the variety of resources that may be available to you, including:

- **Formal sources:** Review various committee meeting minutes, court rules and administrative orders, court user and court personnel surveys, focus group reports, statutes (including proposed legislation), training and program evaluations, caseload statistics and caseflow data, policy and procedure manuals, and relevant court forms. Attend different committee meetings and judicial conferences when possible. Observe various courtroom proceedings and dockets as your schedule will permit.
- **Informal sources:** Talk with your state court administrator, other folks within and outside of the courts, and other key stakeholders about their perspectives on the roles and needs of various court personnel, and court users (e.g., attorneys, Guardians ad litem (GAL), litigants, law enforcement, probation/parole). Capitalize on current relationships with trusted and knowledgeable colleagues and mentors who can provide ongoing input. Ask for recommendations for others who have expertise in relevant areas of need for the courts
- **Needs assessment.** You will likely become aware of specific challenges, functional gaps, or unique needs affecting your courts as you learn more. A formal needs assessment can be a big undertaking and may not be possible or necessary. At other times, your courts, and your role on their behalf, may benefit from a such a process. Some states have utilized portions of their STOP 5% court set-aside to support a variety of general or issue-specific needs assessments or surveys. These efforts have sought to identify resources and stakeholders needed to improve the courts' response to violence against women, or to refine short-term and long-term program goals.

### 3. Explore the history of the POC role in your state.

In most states, you are succeeding someone in the POC role (whether part-time or full-time) and there may be valuable historical context available to you:

- Tap into any institutional memory available (e.g., other court colleagues, program or annual reports) to learn about the operational history and evolution of the job.
- Reach out to your predecessor, if possible, to learn more about the general scope, policies and practices of the POC role to date.
- Ask others for their practical assessment of what worked and what did not, unresolved challenges, and possible ways to address any gaps going forward.
- Ask for their recommendations of other "people in the know" who would be sources of institutional knowledge.
- Refer to your specific job description for additional guidance on more recent changes in scope, practice and priority areas.
- Inquire about the courts' relationship (e.g., quality of communications, level of cooperation and collaboration) with other justice system stakeholder groups and external organizations, particularly the STOP administering agency.

This broad look back will help you get better established in your new position, assess existing relationships to date, and develop a more realistic vision for your role and program goals going forward.

## 4. Familiarize yourself with VAWA and the STOP Formula Grant Program.

Your role as your state's VAW Point of Contact is to bring the courts' perspective and needs to the STOP implementation planning process and other collaborative efforts. A well-grounded and up-to-date understanding of VAWA, the Office on Violence Against Women's STOP Formula Grant Program, and your state's specific STOP planning and implementation process, is critical to being an effective representative and voice for the courts. First and foremost, if you are not already familiar with it, study and keep current on the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#), including periodic changes in the law or its programs through [administrative rule making](#) or the federal reauthorization process.<sup>5</sup> Designated STOP administering agencies and dissemination processes will vary across states.<sup>6</sup> In some states, the state courts (specifically the AOC) directly receive the full 5% set-aside amount; in others, local courts and the AOC must participate in a competitive application process for allocated funds. Direct allocation to the AOC is becoming more commonplace but is not consistent across states. Levels of collaboration and inclusion of courts in the states' STOP planning and implementation processes also vary.

**Learn about your state's specific STOP application and planning process.** A thorough review of the following documents can provide valuable insights into your state's current STOP processes, distribution and priority areas:

- **OVW STOP Formula Grant Solicitation** (typically found through OVW's website under the [Closed](#) or [Open](#) Solicitations pages) will detail funding priorities, categories and required set-asides; allowable costs and rules; the role of the designated state administering agency and its obligation to OVW and your state.
- **OVW's STOP Frequently-Asked-Questions** (FAQs) are periodically updated and provide valuable updates on the use of STOP funds, program requirements and legislative changes related to VAWA. The Federal Register periodically publishes updates on new rules or clarifications in the Code of Federal Regulations governing the general provisions and grant program areas of VAWA ([28 CFR Part 90](#)).

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<sup>5</sup> [The Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\): Historical Overview, Funding, and Reauthorization Updated April 23, 2019](#)

<sup>6</sup> Each state has a [State Administering Agency](#) (SAA), the designated administrative and flow-through entity for a variety of state and federal grant monies (including STOP Program funds). The STOP Administering Agency is often an office situated within the SAA. The STOP Administering Agency applies for the state's STOP funds on behalf of the state and determines the application process through which courts and other eligible grantees may apply for and receive STOP funds.

## STAY ON TOP OF CHANGING STOP

The STOP Formula Grant Program and other grant program areas that fall under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) are dynamic. VAWA must be reauthorized by Congress periodically, during which there is extensive review and revisions are often made. For example, the STOP Program has evolved from originally not including courts (1994), to establishing a 5% set-aside "for" courts (2001), and clarifying that those court set-aside funds must go directly "to" courts (vs. other entities' programs "for" courts), and that courts, among other State entities, must be consulted about state STOP implementation planning (2013). The Code of Federal Regulations ([28 CFR Part 90](#)) provides clarification on required elements of the STOP Planning Committee and Implementation Plans (2016).

As of November 2019, [VAWA reauthorization](#) is pending in Congress.

# TIPS FOR COURTS

Be aware of all application-related deadlines (including for modifications).

Plan ahead with court leadership and advisory committee(s) about the courts' upcoming application.

Take advantage of pre-application teleconferences and assistance – processes and priorities can change.

Communicate with the STOP Administrator with any questions.

- **Your State STOP Program Application** will help identify specific priority areas, provide insights into other involved stakeholder groups (e.g., law enforcement, victim services), and assess proposed objectives and issues covered in the required STOP Implementation Plan. Each application for funding generally covers four years – one year for application and planning with three additional years for implementation and annual update.
- **Your State STOP Implementation Plan** will help identify the various disciplines and individuals involved in the Plan's creation, the methods, if any, used to identify needs, and specific priorities and plans for each program purpose area. The Implementation Plan may also provide results from any needs assessment done as part of the overall planning process. Your review can provide valuable insights into how the courts have been perceived and their level of participation in the process to date, and help you more effectively advocate for the courts and for remedies to any shortfalls to address court needs in the Plan during the next annual update or planning phase. OVW's [STOP Formula Program Implementation Plan Checklist](#) (last updated February 2017) provides a helpful overview of planning process and required elements of the plan.

## **Review your state STOP Implementation Plan for these details specifically:**

- *Who is your state STOP administering agency?* This varies from state-to-state.
- *What is the current 5% set-aside pass-through process?* Does your STOP administering agency pass the funds directly to the courts, or is there another pass-through layer or entity through which the courts receive their 5%?
- *Does the STOP administering agency and/or other pass-through entity assess administrative fees? If so, how much?* The STOP Program permits a total of 10% of funds per allocation (victim services, prosecutors, law enforcement and courts) can be assessed by the STOP administering agency. See the [STOP Frequently-Asked-Questions](#) (FAQs) for specific details.
- *Does your state have a competitive application process for STOP funds? Does the AOC directly receive the full 5% court set-aside funds or does it have to compete with local courts for funds?* A state's specific application process is typically determined by the individual STOP administering agency—not in VAWA—and may be modifiable in certain situations with agreement between the STOP administering agency and the AOC. (see the Virginia OES mini-grant example).

- *Is there a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), or other formal agreement that details expectations and guidelines for receiving the funds from the STOP administering agency? If so, are the obligations of the STOP administering agency and court recipient(s) regarding the distribution process and timelines, special conditions, award amount(s), reporting, approval, and deliverables requirements clearly stated? Have they been adhered to? Have the courts been kept up-to-date and provided with timely notice of changes or other requirements? If no agreement is currently in place, assess the existing process going forward, and if needed, reconsider a more formalized arrangement.*

## 5. Track state and national legislation and trends related to violence against women.

Another core responsibility as the POC is to become and remain knowledgeable about relevant laws and statutes in your state.

- Stay current on VAW-related legislation (proposed or enacted), lower and appellate court cases and other related issues (e.g., victims' issues) in your state and nationally.
- Utilize online legal research databases, such as LexisNexis, to research relevant cases, and tap into identified expertise to provide additional guidance or analysis.
- Assess any potential impacts on the courts, affected parties, or other stakeholder groups, and disseminate relevant information to stakeholders in the courts (judges, court administration, court services) as appropriate.
- Provide insights, as appropriate, to others outside the courts (e.g., domestic violence advocacy organizations, members of various VAW task forces and committees) on the court's appropriate role in enforcing these laws, addressing any emergent issues, and any broader public policy implications.

The knowledge you gain and communicate can help the courts make more informed and appropriate policy decisions, and plan more deliberate strategies and collaborations to address emerging issues in a timely manner. There are numerous resources available through the web to help search for and track relevant federal and state legislation, including:

- Federal Legislation: [GovTrack](#)
- State Legislation: Available through the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) website:
  - » [NCSL's 50-State Searchable Bill Tracking Databases](#)
  - » [Bill Tracking and Subscription Services Available on Legislative Websites](#) (by state)

## 6. Review current grant funding, court programs and practices.

Grant administration and program and policy development and implementation are other core responsibilities of VAW POCs in most jurisdictions. POCs typically manage a variety of VAW-related grants and projects, among other grant responsibilities. They perform or oversee many, if not all, aspects of program and financial reporting requirements for existing grants, and research and write new grant applications. You likely inherited several programs and policy changes to implement or oversee, and grants to manage. This may also include administration and oversight of subgrantee awards to local courts, if the AOC directly receives the full 5% court set-aside and acts as a pass-through to individual courts.

- **Grant Administration.** Review existing grant applications/awards, programs and any related reports or documentation that might provide important information (e.g., project milestones, timelines, deliverables). Familiarize yourself with the rules of current funding sources (e.g., allowable or unallowable costs), [any special conditions](#), and required reporting deadlines. Determine who your grant program manager(s) is and request assistance or clarification on rules and expectations as needed.

Research, or inquire with others, about other potential funding sources for future applications or program proposals. Don't overlook private foundations as another possible source to explore. One resource for learning more about private foundation goals and priority areas is the [Foundation Directory Online](#).

The Department of Justice also has a recording available of their [Strengthening Court Systems: Understanding State and Federal Resources](#) webinar which discusses various funding opportunities available through State Administering Agencies and other federal entities.<sup>7</sup> The webinar highlights other federally-funded resources, training and technical assistance available for court systems, and the experiences and lessons learned by some courts about grant development and resource planning.

- **Policy and Program Implementation.** Review supporting court rules, procedure or policy implementation manuals, policy statements or court administrative orders, progress updates/reports, and any other pertinent documentation. Speak with court leaders and others who have worked on existing programs or implementation efforts to get a clearer context for various goals and intended direction. Familiarize yourself with any projected milestones or timelines (for example, on data collection, deliverables, performance measurement, program evaluation).

This review will help you (1) assess existing resources and progress to date, (2) identify resources needed to advance objectives, and (3) develop or refine your vision and goals to accomplish on behalf of the courts. In addition, the review process can aid you in identifying any knowledge or skills gaps that should be addressed.

## 7. Capitalize on available technical assistance and training – for yourself and your courts.

Similar to most other POCs, you likely may be responsible for helping to provide or develop technical assistance and educational programming or training for judges, court staff and other stakeholders. You may also want to enhance your own skills and knowledge as the new POC (for example, on curriculum development, court interpretation in domestic violence and sexual assault cases, protecting victim confidentiality and privacy in the courts).

Familiarize yourself with, and take advantage of, the various state and national resources and technical assistance providers with specific expertise on violence against women issues and the courts. TA providers have numerous print and online resources on a variety of relevant topics. They are generally available for consultation, individualized technical assistance, and can assist with training or resource development or make referrals to other sources of expertise if needed. A full list of TA providers for a variety of OVW program areas can be found at [TA2TA.org/directory](http://TA2TA.org/directory).

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<sup>7</sup> This webinar was originally held in 2013 as part of the U.S. Department of Justice Access to Justice Initiative. The webinar recording has been made broadly available as a resource.

# ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Stakeholders (internal and external) need to have confidence in your expertise and truthworthiness. Fostering supportive and reliable working relationships provides you valuable inroads to important practical guidance and creative collaborations within and beyond the courts.

## 1. Nurture your connection to court leadership.

The support of court leadership is essential to sustaining the POC position and fostering innovation in it. If it is not explicitly included in your job description, talk with your state court administrative director about establishing regular communications about current and future VAW programming for emerging issues or needs. This will help you stay up to date on any shifting court priorities and ensure your efforts continue to align with the AOC's mission. Some court leaders may be comfortable with a more informal process with periodic meetings, office visits or phone and email updates. Others may prefer a more formal process to better document progress, memorialize activities and achievements, and aid in performance evaluation and succession planning. For example, in Ohio, the former VAW POC used a mix of bi-weekly in-person meetings and memos highlighting projects and current activities. The memos helped memorialize the work and accomplishments of the position for posterity.



*It's very important to identify and build your trusted advisors, people who know the courts and understand and share your passion for justice and making sure courts do the right thing in terms of holding offenders accountable and public [victim] safety...I look for people who are grounded in the law; for folks who could be resources to answer my questions, and also challenge my understanding. People who would not be afraid to say I don't think that is right.*

**-Diana Ramos Reardon**  
Policy Counsel, Ohio Supreme Court,  
and Ohio VAW Point of Contact

## 2. Grow “your team” inside the court.

Another top priority for you as a new POC is to establish trusting, supportive relationships and have access to recognized expertise within the courts. If you come to the POC position from another position in the courts, you likely already have some trusted “go-to” sources for specific expertise and guidance. As you work to expand your knowledge and representation on behalf of the courts, you will need to add to your team.

- **Tap into recognized court expertise.** Identify leaders within the courts (judges, court managers, front-line staff) with expertise on specific VAW-related issues and court efforts (e.g., specialty calendars or dockets, court policies and practices) who are willing to offer their perspectives and occasionally discuss your ideas and concerns. Look to recognized members of existing committees as other sources of reliable guidance, such as the court's VAWA Advisory Committee or Judicial Council (or your state's equivalents). Introduce yourself to committee members when possible and invite their insights. Ask others you know to facilitate an introduction if that would be more appropriate. Ask for suggestions on stakeholders outside the courts who can also

provide insights and possibly serve on VAWA-related court planning committees and cross-organizational collaboration groups.

- **Create a core group of mentors.** Choose mentors from among people that you respect and who are willing to be an informal “go-to” advisor and occasional sounding board for you. Nurture relationships with your mentors through informal means (e.g., over coffee, lunch). Ask for their insights on the potential impact of current or proposed changes in laws or practices on the courts and court users. Keep in mind your mentor group may evolve or need to expand as your areas of expertise, court priorities and funding streams change.

- **Capitalize on VAW POC peer connections.** Reach out to “virtual” mentors that are also available to you through NCSC’s [STOPforCourts listserv](#).<sup>8</sup> The listserv is comprised of your POC counterparts in other states and territories, and others in the courts working on VAW-related issues. POCs routinely seek their peers’ guidance and compare information on STOP and VAWA-related court practices and policies over the listserv. If you prefer to contact a Point of Contact individually, POC contact information can be found on the VAWA and Courts’ [website](#).

### 3. Cultivate a relationship with the STOP Administering Agency.

A key objective of most new VAW POCs is to also develop and nurture a reciprocal collaborative relationship with your state’s STOP Administrator and gain a seat, on behalf of the courts, at the STOP implementation planning meetings.

If you are not already familiar with who administers STOP grant funds in your state, your review of your state’s current Implementation Plan should provide information on the STOP administering agency and how the agency has functioned to date. The Office on Violence Against Women also maintains a list of [STOP Administrator’s Contact List](#). If possible, determine if the current STOP Administrator has been established in the position for a while or is relatively new.

Reach out to the STOP Administrator to introduce yourself as the new VAW POC and begin working to establish a relationship. Be prepared to:

- **Summarize the Point of Contact role** in the context of the Court’s mission and values, and in the STOP process. The extent of your overview may vary depending on how long the VAW POC position has existed, whether the current STOP Administrator is new or is already familiar with the POC role, and the extent of coordination with the courts on STOP to date.

*It is important to be proactive in developing and maintaining a relationship with the STOP Administering Agency. This may help ensure that you receive your full set-aside amount of funding each fiscal year.*

**- James DeBowes**  
Manager, Grant Administration,  
and Connecticut VAW POC

*The first challenge was to work with a STOP VAW coordinator...and trying to gain a seat at the table for the STOP Implementation Plan meetings. Having consistent and beneficial conversations with the coordinator opened the door to meetings.*

**- Kelly Cramer**  
Legal Analyst, Missouri  
Administrative Office of the  
Courts, and VAW POC

<sup>8</sup> If you are not already a member of NCSC’s STOPforCourts listserv, please send your request to join to Alice Allred at [aallred@ncsc.org](mailto:aallred@ncsc.org). You should also ask to be added to NCSC’s VAWPOC listserv, which is exclusively for state VAW points of contact.

- **Schedule a meeting** with the STOP Administrator to learn more about the state's STOP implementation planning process, their expectations, deadlines, priority areas and other details about the grant, and to confirm your understanding of the process based on your review of related documents. Request planned periodic meetings to continue the dialogue. Follow up on those requests and keep to any scheduled meetings as much as possible.

It is beneficial to nurture relationships with other managerial and support staff at the administering agency as well. They can often help facilitate an introduction or easier access to the Administrator or provide information you are seeking.

- **Offer to strengthen collaboration with the STOP administering agency.** Ask to participate in their multidisciplinary committees and workgroups, especially those that might benefit from a court perspective or expertise. Invite them to participate in relevant cross-agency collaboration groups, other committees or the courts' internal VAWA Planning Committee (if approved by court leadership). Request that you be included in any VAW-related committees or task forces they may implement. Volunteer to assist in other agency collaborative efforts.

#### 4. Communicate often and reach out routinely.

As one POC expressed it, *“be the curious traveler.” Be creative, express interest and enrich your knowledge, relationships and visibility in your new role.* For example, you can:

- **Take advantage of various communication platforms** (including court-approved social media) available to you. For instance, if you are not contributing to court-based newsletters or website content, volunteer to periodically contribute a VAW-related article, program updates, or news about upcoming events. One example is the series of [regularly featured articles](#) on family violence-related issues written by Indiana's VAW POC in the Indiana courts' quarterly e-publication, [Indiana Court Times](#). If something similar doesn't already exist for your courts, volunteer to start one. Invite others with expertise in the courts to contribute a small article or news update. This also can be an effective medium for introducing judicial and court colleagues to new educational information, resources, or approaches to practice. Sign up for other inter-office or divisional updates, newsletters or webinars (or host one yourself!).
- **Calendar periodic phone calls** to touch base with folks “in the know” or whose work you would like to learn more about. Invite court colleagues and leaders to coffee, lunch or, as one POC does, an occasional “information walk” for an informal conversation to get guidance, bounce ideas around, and problem-solve when needed. Offer to assist in others' efforts where appropriate and possible.
- **Hold lunchtime “brown bags” or cross-discipline discussions.** These could be used to share new information, informally discuss new court practices or programs, gauge emerging issues or trends, problem-solve, brainstorm new collaborations or projects, or host occasional presentations from other intra-organization programs.

The purpose here is three-fold: (1) increase awareness within the courts of your new role and its value in enhancing the courts' response to violence against women, (2) encourage a reciprocal flow of and access to timely relevant information, and (3) nurture mutual trust and reliability in new and existing professional relationships.



# section two:

## MAKE MORE CONNECTIONS – ENLARGE YOUR ROLE

GOAL	THEME	PRIMARY OBJECTIVES
Become the “Go-To” Person on VAWA Issues for the Court	Credibility (Yours!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Earn your credibility (to speak and be heard)</li><li>• Build key external relationships and coalitions</li></ul>

Enlarging your role as a POC centers on your ability to capitalize on the knowledge you have been gaining to (1) demonstrate specific expertise on the courts, and (2) become a respected voice for the courts internally and with other justice system stakeholders. One POC put it simply, “You begin to build a reputation for understanding how courts work internally and the need to work with others.” You recognize and act on opportunities to create meaningful connections between resources, relationships, and potential areas of shared benefit. These efforts help enhance your credibility and expertise as the VAW POC within the courts, and with external groups and partnerships (e.g., the STOP Administrator and STOP Planning Committee).

### EARN YOUR CREDIBILITY (TO SPEAK AND BE HEARD)

*The mere fact that somebody says you are the point of contact should give you some credibility. But more importantly, do you have the knowledge you need to fully represent the courts (and their needs), communicate an understanding of the court/judicial system, and identify who can open doors for you so you can engage with other justice stakeholders and have your seat at the proverbial table?*

**- Diana Ramos-Reardon, Ohio VAW POC (Ret.)**

As you become more established and practiced in your core responsibilities as a POC, opportunities to take a more strategic approach to better address the needs of the courts and engage other stakeholders will likely arise. What distinguishes these efforts from earlier ones is the larger role you, as the POC, can play in facilitating this approach. The knowledge and connections that you have been establishing will support your efforts to:

#### **1. Mobilize existing resources to expand programs and problem-solve.**

Securing additional funding for court efforts is ongoing for most POCs. This is generally done to sustain existing programs, expand the courts’ capacity to respond to emerging issues or trends, or implement more effective practices to better address violence against women. More than one VAW POC has also “inherited” an unresolved challenge (statewide or local) impacting the courts that needed to be prioritized and addressed but lacked dedicated resources or coordination to do so. POCs can respond by mobilizing available resources (e.g., multidisciplinary expertise, collaborations, data) and funding to begin to address those needs or resolve longstanding challenges.

### General Process Steps:

1. Identify a problem (or system shortfall) with multiple stakeholder input.
2. Explore use of available monies to support an initial assessment of the problem.
3. Review collective resources and relevant data available.
4. Collaborate across stakeholders to identify workable solution(s).
5. Develop a realistic strategy including a timeline for implementation and anticipated resource needs.

### Other Key Factors to Consider:

- Ask the court's VAWA Committee (or equivalent) to provide any historical knowledge and context available, and referrals to other needed stakeholder input.
- Build a team that includes external stakeholders, court VAWA advisory committee representatives, and multidisciplinary input.
- Access available STOP/VAWA or other grant monies to seed small initial efforts (e.g., an informal needs assessment, a small working or exploratory project group, a smaller-scale implementation phase).
- Explore technology solutions (short- and long-term costs, benefits for courts, stakeholders, and court users – e.g., domestic violence and sexual assault survivors).
- Plan for phased-in program development and multiple funding requests, if needed, to grow or refine efforts.
- Maintain core representation by important stakeholder groups and commit to a shared value to work through inevitable internal conflicts.
- Focus on the collective mission and goals (e.g., enhance victim safety; hold offenders accountable).

## 2. Enhance technical assistance and training efforts for the courts and relevant others.

The knowledge and collaborative relationships you have acquired can also aid you in developing more tailored and creative technical assistance and training (TTA) for the courts and others.

- Prioritize TTA based on identified needs, stakeholder input, and emerging issues or legislative trends that may impact the courts or court-users (both victims and offenders).
- Ask knowledgeable court leaders, mentors and other justice stakeholders to support the programs or products being developed.
- Facilitate programs or trainings by other justice system stakeholders for judicial officers and court personnel.
- Coordinate TTA opportunities for the courts that are offered by relevant national organizations and training and technical assistance providers (see [TA2TA.org](http://TA2TA.org) for a directory).
- Explore ways to collaborate on or coordinate training opportunities with other external stakeholders or groups where it is mutually beneficial to include knowledge of the courts and related resources.

## 3. Develop (or refine) a vision and plan for action.

Most POCs begin their position with some vision or direction from AOC of their role and where they should focus their efforts on behalf of the courts. More than one established POC has suggested that the strength of the position lies in the creativity and energy an individual brings to grow that vision.

As you become more established, periodically revisit the original vision and consider the following:

- Where have your programs and your role been focused to date?
- What have your information sources and internal and external collaborations revealed?
- What system or program gaps still exist or are foreseeable?
- What new resources, program innovations, or approaches emerging in the practitioner world to address violence against women or related issues would strengthen the courts' response?
- How can you use this knowledge as the POC to better support and add value to VAW-related court efforts and the AOC's overall mission?

Refine your vision and/or re-envision your role and formulate a realistic plan of action to support it as needed. For many POCs, this is likely to be a more informal and dynamic process that coincides with other tasks or activities (e.g., new grant proposal research or ideas, progress updates, performance reviews, STOP planning efforts). For others, it may be or evolve into a more formal process.<sup>9</sup> Communicate your ideas and the reasoning behind them to court leadership and ask for their input and support. Any number of variables may impact implementing a revised plan, but you will have articulated a clearer vision and plan to work toward and to explore partnerships and funding.

## BUILD KEY EXTERNAL RELATIONSHIPS

*The POC must establish himself or herself as the court's subject matter expert on the applicable statutes, rules, and procedures governing protective orders in the POC's state [in this example]. That will give the POC a finger on the many issues that come up so the POC can promote consistent policy throughout the state. So, hand out your business card, meet counterparts from other state agencies and advocacy groups, and get invited to participate in their projects. When they want to know how court procedure works when it comes to protective orders [for example], you should be their go-to source for that information.*

**- Kay Radwanski**

Senior Court Policy Analyst, Arizona Supreme Court,  
and VAW Point of Contact for Arizona

### **1. Engage other VAW champions in your state.**

Identify existing groups, collaboration boards, or committees outside the courts that work (or should work) with the courts to address domestic violence or related issues (e.g., DV Coalition board, other multidisciplinary working groups). If possible, try to identify someone you know who has connections to that group who can introduce you. If not, introduce yourself as the POC and explain what that means (if they are not already familiar), particularly the value the court perspective can bring to their efforts (through you as the POC). Volunteer to serve on their committees, task forces, and working groups. Ask if they are willing to act as informal advisors or be part of your "go-to" team. Emphasize the importance the court places on the perspectives of various disciplines when considering changes to policies or practices in the courts that may impact court users or other vested stakeholders.

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<sup>9</sup> If you are interested in learning more about visioning and strategic planning as a more formal process, NACM's CORE Essentials for Strengthening Court Professionals includes a module on [Vision](#), and discusses the role of leadership, governance and [strategic planning](#).

## 2. Expand your professional network.

Make new contacts and rekindle old connections. Revitalize relationships from your prior work or professional affiliations. Explore and reach out to other community partners and non-traditional organizations that could help further the courts' mission and outreach efforts. Identify what expertise and assets they have (e.g., resources, services, other professional contacts) that they might be willing to provide to support your efforts as the POC (e.g., to enhance the courts' response to violence against women, strengthen public trust and confidence in the courts, explore innovations for the courts).

## 3. Stay connected with local constituents and courts.

"Everything is local." Many POCs routinely visit and communicate with the local courts, judicial and court personnel and stakeholders to provide various training and technical assistance to local courts. Establish and maintain a mutual feedback loop (e.g., dedicated listserv, intranet, social media – if permissible, connected virtual community) to continue the dialogue between visits or events. *These relationships are invaluable.* They can help identify trends (affecting the courts, services or programs) beginning at the local level, highlight knowledge or resource gaps (local or system-wide), and other potential resources. This also allows you, as the POC, to connect local courts with national resources or technical assistance to help mitigate potential problems.

Insights from local courts can also help inform and prioritize concepts and expand purpose areas for upcoming VAWA/ STOP grant applications to better address any identified system shortfalls. Involving individuals at the local court level can provide beneficial feedback on proposed policies or programs and can be instrumental to rallying support for implementation of any changes. Input from local courts and providers, particularly related to emerging challenges, can help inform program decisions, resource prioritization, and staff training needs to more effectively respond to challenges.

*"Build trust and relationships out in the counties. Get out there, meet people and learn their perspective. It is great to look globally and statewide...but you need to remember that decisions at a statewide level [may] impact at a county level."*

**– Amber Moe**

Statewide Domestic Violence Court  
Manager, Idaho Supreme Court,  
and VAW Point of Contact

## 4. (Re) Assert the courts' place at the STOP planning table.

Prepare to respectfully assert yourself on behalf of the courts – and the state court administrator. Some experienced POCs have used the following approaches to establishing and maintaining productive collaborations.

- **Extend an invitation.** Invite others to participate in appropriate ways with other court efforts, planning committees, workgroups, or training events to learn more about the courts.
- **Offer to help.** Offer your assistance or relevant court resources, especially those that support and benefit their efforts. For example, volunteer to collaborate on development of training materials or review and provide input on drafts. Your efforts may also provide you with insights into how the courts are or have been portrayed or perceived among other stakeholders and an opportunity to encourage a more balanced perspective.
- **Roll out your "elevator speech."** This is your well-formed succinct 2-minute or less summary that

articulates why you, on behalf of the courts, should be included and have a seat at the planning table. Key talking points to consider include (depending on the audience or need):

- » You bring unique statewide perspective and valuable assets to the table on behalf of the courts.
  - » Courts have a distinct role in the community and society (think “purpose of the courts” theme).
  - » Courts are a key stakeholder in the coordinated community response with the authority to both hold offenders accountable and enhance victim safety.
  - » Public perceptions of the courts and the courts’ appropriate role in addressing both offenders and victims must be considered. A representative court voice helps ensure that any programs or products reflect realistic expectations of the courts – what they can and cannot do – and comply with the law and relevant courts rules.
  - » VAWA requires courts be consulted with and represented in the STOP planning process.
- **Seek outside technical assistance.** If efforts to establish a working relationship with the STOP administering agency remain discouraging or unsuccessful, consult with your state court administrator and reach out to other POCs, individually or through the VAWPDC listserv, for additional guidance. Ask for assistance from NCSC, the designated OVW technical assistance provider for the state court recipients of the STOP 5% court set aside. They can offer additional insights and facilitate other forms of assistance.

# section three:

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE - MAXIMIZE YOUR ROLE

GOAL	THEME	PRIMARY OBJECTIVES
Be a Leader: Leverage your Role to Create New Collaborations and Funding	Service to Others (Enhance the work of others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create and maintain a presence</li><li>• Benefit your work by enhancing the work of others</li></ul>

*Sometimes it seems that because of my job title, people think of me for any question/problem/issue/committee that involves a victim. I like to take a holistic approach to DV and my job, so that's usually not a problem, but it occasionally results in more work than I can handle. Examples: human trafficking; language access; unrepresented litigants; child abuse/neglect; helping to staff the state Children's Commission. I have learned a lot as a result of these assignments even though they are not related to my STOP grant and not technically DV. I would encourage someone to accept assignments like these, and overall, to take an expansive view of the territory that comes with family violence, sexual assault, and stalking. I've met new people and made connections I otherwise would not have.*

- **Ruth Reichard**, Former Family Violence Resource Attorney, Indiana Supreme Court, and VAW Point of Contact

Maximizing your role as the POC is mainly characterized by the more proactive – and at times more visionary – leadership role you can assume. You envision and act on relationships, connections, trends, or innovative programs that can help enhance the courts' response to violence against women and the public's trust and confidence in the courts. In general, it means recognizing the potential and practical value (now and for the future) in making new connections, facilitating beneficial introductions or access to resources to enhance others' efforts, and recognizing economies of scale to benefit multiple efforts.

## CULTIVATE A PRESENCE AMONG OTHERS

### 1. Nurture key relationships with constituent groups.

Continue to nurture key relationships with identified constituent groups such as DV and sexual assault coalitions, local prosecutors' offices or the state attorney general's office, batterer programs, corrections, and law enforcement. Look beyond your own wheelhouse. Identify other or new constituent groups (or key representatives) that can also be of assistance during emergent situations or provide informed guidance to enhance the courts' ability to respond rapidly in a time-sensitive situation.

Let people within and outside of the courts know that you are a resource for them. Look for opportunities

when the courts' voice should be heard and where the court has valuable resources to enhance others' outreach or collaboration. This can help solidify your credibility and visibility as the courts' representative on VAW-related issues, and further understanding of the courts. Some opportunities to do so might be to:

- **Volunteer** to serve as a grant reviewer to the STOP administering agency on other grants or for other partner agencies or stakeholder groups.
- **Get involved** with various statewide advisory or steering committees; ask to be invited to meetings.
- **Explore and collaborate** on ways to support other internal and external collateral efforts (such as the examples given in the above quote). Seek appropriate support from court leadership to do so, if needed.

## 2. Model the appropriate role of courts at the STOP planning table and in other collaborations

Adopt a procedural fairness approach in all your interactions. As one POC reflected, there will always be a small but meaningful group of people that you interact with as the POC who will simply not “get it.” POCs should see these interactions as an opportunity to continue to educate them about the courts and your role, and continue being a reasonable model of professional, appropriate behavior. Respectfully welcome the ideas or thoughts on the courts shared by others and offer constructive feedback. Share your court expertise to help guide proposed priorities and development of the STOP planning and implementation process through an appropriate court lens:

- Stay “court-centered” in your conversations and suggestions. Emphasize that courts have an obligation to remain neutral and balance the needs of victims and perpetrators while supporting efforts to better serve survivors.
- Bring discussions back to the relevant core purposes of the courts – what they can and cannot do, what resources are available or not – as needed.
- Acknowledge valid concerns or criticisms aimed at the courts, if appropriate. Offer to collaborate on ways to help raise court awareness about those issues and willingness to take action.
- Frame proposed remedies or programs within the appropriate role of courts. For example, a court ruling that other stakeholders or STOP planning committee members might find controversial or unfavorable can, alternatively, be viewed as a collaborative opportunity to propose targeted training for judges or develop bench products to enhance judicial decision making. Your review of the draft plan can also help ensure that the plan and any proposed deliverables reflect the courts' appropriate role and encourage more court support for training and products.
- Communicate the courts' desire to explore other ways to collaborate and provide resources to better address violence against women and support others' efforts.

## BENEFIT THE COURT'S WORK BY ENHANCING OTHERS

*I have worked hard to bridge my DV work with the work of my colleagues in other sections and divisions of the Court. These efforts have laid out the foundation that the DV Program's goals, mission, etc. align with other sections and divisions within the AOC. I'm not an island but a peninsula. My work connects with the interest of others. For example, colleagues in the Judicial College know that VAWA funds can be used to support judicial education [and that] they are able to reach to me/my position. [By helping to] build capacity within the Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence...this committee within the AOC is recognized as a body with credibility and knowledge [of] how DV impacts the work of courts.*

**-Diana Ramos-Reardon, Ohio VAW POC (Ret.)**

## 1. Offer court support and expertise to others' efforts.

How can a court perspective or resources benefit others' education programming, grant or resource development? Diana Ramos-Reardon suggests that POCs offer to "serve as an unconditional resource and 'bona fide' expert on domestic violence practices from the court perspective" to the state administering agency and on other intra- and inter-agency collaborations.

Leverage your knowledge of the courts and available court resources (including accessible national resources) to support other collaborative efforts in your state. Provide practical support or technical assistance to other organizations. Examples shared by other POCs suggest that you can:

- Supply letters of support for their grant applications, if court support is appropriate.
- Offer to be a guest speaker to present on court initiatives and goals that might be of interest or enrich their efforts.
- Connect others with state or national resources or assistance that can further their goals.
- Offer relevant court materials that may provide additional information to their audience/efforts. Seek court approval as necessary.
- Volunteer to review draft materials, products or presentations.

## 2. Capitalize on economies of scale for mutual benefit.

How can your work support or enhance the efforts of others internally (e.g., language access, dispute resolution, victim assistance efforts) or externally (e.g., victim services, community outreach or education programs), or help build capacity? What resources or expertise can you offer or share that benefit the courts and other efforts mutually? How can you enhance your value at the STOP planning and implementation table?

Your answer to these questions may vary from other POCs, but look for ways to:

- Enhance the work of the state administering agency and other justice partners.
- Serve as a catalyst to leverage available resources across efforts.
- Maximize information and resource sharing and look for ways to reduce cost and staffing burdens across efforts.
- Stay informed about national resources and what they can offer your state and other stakeholders.

## 3. Enrich your own expertise on behalf of the courts.

In other words, don't neglect your own professional development! As one POC reflected, striving for continual improvement not only provides opportunities to enhance the POC position, but also brings added value to court VAW programs and within the AOC overall. Available time, funding, and support will vary, but try to identify opportunities for:

- **Skills development.** Learn a new skill or sharpen skills in an existing area (e.g., new online education modalities, project and program management, technology solutions).
- **National conferences.** Attend at least one national conference relevant to your work each year (if permitted). NCSC offers a [travel assistance fund](#) on a first come, first serve basis, through its OVW Technical Assistance cooperative agreement to support state court VAW POCs. You can apply for travel assistance [here](#).
- **Online training.** Participate in webinars offered by OVW Technical Assistance Providers (a calendar of events and upcoming education programs is available at [TA2TA.org](#)). Offer to present on a court effort for an upcoming webinar.
- **Professional presentations.** Give presentations to professional, community or affiliate groups.
- **Publications and articles.** Contribute an article to non-court related periodicals or media outlets



(where relevant and with approval). It can help make the courts less mysterious to other stakeholders and encourage public trust and confidence in the courts.

- **Mentoring.** Mentor a newer VAW Point of Contact (NCSC can help identify and facilitate the mentoring relationship) – the professional growth and learning goes both ways.

#### 4. Plan for succession and sustainability.

Some states have not formally documented the work of the POC position beyond what has been needed for various reports, grant applications or deliverables. **Has yours?** Without a succession plan and supporting documentation in place, the institutional history of the POC position and program accomplishments may be in jeopardy. Job opportunities or retirement may come along unexpectedly. Leadership and/or court priorities change—sometimes suddenly. A reliable funding source dries up; budgets get reduced; the fiscal year cycle changes and there is no pay gap provision for your position during the transition.

These are all real-life examples from POCs that underscore the need to plan for job and leadership changes (including at the STOP administering agency) and to help sustain court VAW programs. There are several steps you can take to better position your VAW court programs and the VAW POC position for changing times:

- **Prepare legacy documentation.** Summarize the POC position (e.g., history of the position, mission, objectives, initiatives undertaken, accomplishments) if not yet documented. Ideally, this would at a minimum also include:
  - » A description of any evolution in the role and job duties of the position to date.
  - » Listing of valuable resources, and reliable internal and external contacts (“go-to” people, external collaborators).
  - » Compilation of intra-office policies, practices or efficiency shortcuts established.
  - » An *updated* job description that accurately reflects your current core job functions, roles and any expanded duties undertaken during your term. This will help identify and initiate a new hire into your position with the requisite skills. In more stable times, it can also be a helpful reference to have during performance reviews.
  - » Annual program or progress reports or summaries.

Electronically store and backup your information for your reference and for successors. Keep all legacy documents together when possible, readily accessible and easy for others to locate.

- **Retain the VAW POC Handbook.** Print out a copy of this handbook for ease of reference and for others that might follow. Keep a copy with your legacy documents. Save a local copy electronically and bookmark it in your online browsing favorites. The Handbook will be updated periodically.
- **Maintain updated policy and procedure manuals.** Keep these manuals and related materials up to date wherever possible.
- **Plan for financial sustainability.** Some grant programs will not allow for you to budget for sustainability, but where possible build provisions into grant applications and projected program budgets. Explore ways to capitalize on other economies of scale to maximize resources and cost savings to support ongoing and planned efforts (where possible).
- **Nurture relationships up and down organizational ladders.** When personnel or leadership changes happen (in the AOC, at the state administering agency, or in other stakeholder groups), it is valuable to have good connections to those that remain. This can help keep existing collaborations and programs going, preserve information-sharing, and, ideally, facilitate an easier introduction to and rapport with new leadership.

# CONCLUSION

The State Court Violence Against Women Point of Contact is a relatively new innovation in many state court administrative offices across the country. Each state's POC position by design and in practice has unique attributes, accomplishments and challenges. For all that distinguishes them individually, VAW POCs are unified by (1) an articulated commitment to enhance the Court's response to violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence and stalking, and beyond; and, (2) a heightened recognition by state court leadership of the integral role Points of Contact can play in enhancing the Court's overall mission and vision, and public trust and confidence in the courts. While the role and duties of the VAW Points of Contact in various states continue to evolve, the most established POC positions thus far have been characterized by two key features: the ongoing support of court leadership, and a creative capacity to expand and grow the position to respond to emerging issues and trends impacting the courts and court users.

This Handbook reflects the evolution in the role and capacities of POCs to date and attempts to provide a general roadmap along that path from starting out in the position to maximizing the VAW POC role. POCs and the courts continually strive to further enhance victim safety, offender accountability and access to services and justice for victims, court users and the public. We encourage you to reach out to NCSC ([www.vawaandcourts.org](http://www.vawaandcourts.org)) and other OVW-designated TA providers, and your VAW POC counterparts in other states for the most up-to-date information, resources and effective practices in addressing issues of violence against women as they come before the courts.





[www.VAWAandCourts.org](http://www.VAWAandCourts.org)



## VAWA and the Courts

Promoting Effective Court Responses to Violence Against Women

