Reviewer Guidelines
Office of Crime Victim Services—Victims of Crime Act
Open Competition—2005

Background
Every third year, the Office of Crime Victims Services (OCVS) has an open application process, which offers new programs the opportunity to compete for VOCA funds and gives interested previous grantees the chance to propose new projects. An open competition also allows for a review of the overall distribution of funds and services throughout the state. All applications are evaluated on a competitive basis. Current grantees are not guaranteed an award or funding level, although it is the philosophy of OCVS to continue to support existing grantees whenever possible.

In past years, VOCA funds steadily increased, making it feasible to both add new grantees and expand the awards of existing ones. For the 2005 competition a total of $6.5 million is available for projects to provide direct services to victims of crime. This is the same level of funding of the prior grant cycle. All applicants—current grantees and new programs alike—are competing against one another for these same dollars. All grants will begin October 1, 2005.

Copies of the Application Forms, Instructions, and Program Guidelines that were provided to applicants are enclosed for your general guidance and reference. You are welcome to read the entire application or you may choose to only read the sections that correspond to the headings on the VOCA Grant Reviewer Criteria sheet.

VOCA Update
Don’t worry, you are not expected to be experts on the VOCA rules and regulations; the staff at OCVS will address any specific technical compliance issues. However, the following brief information regarding VOCA should assist you in evaluating the applications.

- The term "VOCA Project" refers to the activities or costs paid for by either the federal VOCA dollars or the local match contribution as reflected in the proposed subgrant budget. Federal VOCA requirements generally apply to the entire VOCA project, so local match budget items must meet the same requirements as the use of federal VOCA funds.

- VOCA is primarily intended to expand and enhance the capability of local agencies to provide direct services to crime victims. In general, it may only support the costs of paid direct services staff, as well as the operating expenses essential to support the services provided by the project staff (e.g. supplies, travel, etc.).

- Examples of eligible services would be:
  - Crisis intervention
  - Hotline counseling
  - Individual and/or group therapy
  - Transportation
  - Legal, social service, medical and/or personal advocacy
  - Emergency legal services essential to meeting immediate threats to health or safety (in conjunction with other services)
  - Emergency services that are intended to restore the victim’s sense of security

- Projects that focus on non-direct victim services (e.g. prevention, public awareness or education, training, or system coordination efforts) or costs directed at investigating or prosecuting crimes are not permissible. The Program Guidelines describe the types of services and activities that are not eligible for VOCA funding.
There does not have to be a formal criminal arrest, charge or conviction to be considered as a crime victim for VOCA purposes; rather the victim must have been the subject of an act that constitutes a crime, whether committed by an adult or juvenile. Other persons directly affected by a crime, such as survivors of homicide victims and children of domestic violence victims, may also be considered to be crime victims.

VOCA cannot be used to support services to offenders, even if the offenders may themselves have been crime victims or even if the service might also be viewed as potentially beneficial to a crime victim (such as batterers’ treatment programs).

It is not generally permissible under VOCA to provide support or assistance in most routine civil proceedings, such as divorces, child support, or custody disputes (although there are some special provisions for emergencies involving imminent threats to health and safety). However, legal advocacy to assist in obtaining protective orders directly related to a crime is permissible.

Review Procedures

Included in your reviewer packet are enough evaluation sheets for each application. Start your review by evaluating the four major components of the grant application on the VOCA Grant Reviewer Criteria Sheet; then select the overall quality of the application on the Reviewer Summary Sheet. When all the applications have been reviewed and rated, rank them in comparison to one another. The grant you most strongly support should be #1, etc. Place your initial rank on the line provided.

We have eliminated number scores in favor of descriptive evaluation categories. Hopefully it will be easier to select appropriate descriptive categories based on the criteria, and then use this information to select the overall quality of the application. Reviewers are encouraged to supplement their ratings with comments or suggestions, which will assist you in participating at the later group reviewer meetings and also be helpful to applicants, should there be an appeal. The applications have been grouped into geographic regions of approximately 10-12 applicants each. Following the reviewer discussions for your region, the group will assign a final rank order.

The reviewer evaluations, rankings, and comments will then be integrated by DOJ staff with other important factors, such as the number and quality of applications submitted, the VOCA underserved population requirements, the applicant’s previous experience in managing a VOCA grant, and the equitable distribution of funds throughout the state. DOJ may accept, modify or reject the initial reviewer group decisions based on these additional factors. Applicants will be notified of the award decisions and will be afforded a reasonable opportunity to appeal to the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice also reserves the right to negotiate the final scope, amount, and terms of individual subgrant awards.

At this stage of the process, please regard the applications as confidential. Bring all evaluation materials to the group reviewer meetings, which will be held at the Department of Justice, 17 West Main Street, 8th Floor, Madison, WI. We will be contacting you shortly with further information about these meetings. If you can not attend, you may participate by conference call. At the conclusion of the group reviewer meetings, we will collect the Signature Page, Reviewer Summary Sheets and VOCA Grant Reviewer Criteria ratings from you. All other application materials may be disposed of following that meeting. If you are participating by conference call, the Reviewer Summary Sheets and VOCA Grant Reviewer Criteria ratings must be sent by June 29 to:

Amy Finnel
Office of Crime Victim Services
P.O. Box 7951
Madison, WI 53707-7951

Please feel free to call Amy at (608) 267-2251 if you have any questions or problems in completing these reviews. Thank you again for your assistance and cooperation.