



SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF CRIME CONSULTATION INITIATIVE

Report on Phase 2: Regional Consultation Sessions

Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch
Ministry of Justice
Government of British Columbia

December 2014

Introduction

The Community Safety and Crime Prevention Branch is undertaking an initiative to prepare contracted service providers who deliver victim service and violence against women programs for the process of open procurement, scheduled to be phased in beginning in the 2015/16 fiscal year.

Additional information about this initiative, including background materials, are available on the web at www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/service-provider.

This report provides an update on the status of this initiative, including the results of the phase 2 regional consultation sessions, which took place in fall 2014.

Building on the results of the phase 1 survey, the phase 2 regional consultation sessions provided the Branch with an opportunity to gather additional, in-person feedback from the sector on specific issues pertaining to program design, funding, open procurement and service delivery. The results of the regional consultation sessions will be used by the Branch to develop a draft procurement plan, which will be distributed to the sector in spring 2015 for further comment and feedback.

Overview

The *Services to Victims of Crime Consultation Initiative* is a multi-phased consultation that will culminate with the development of a procurement plan for the sector. The project is broken down into three main phases:



A critical component of this initiative involves consultations with contracted programs and service providers regarding program design, service delivery as well as the procurement plan itself. Each phase of the initiative is designed to build on the preceding phase and to inform the ultimate direction of the procurement plan.

At the end of each phase, the Branch will report out to the sector on what we heard. This document looks at the phase 2 regional consultation sessions and provides a brief overview of the Branch's plans for phase 3.

Background – Phase 2 Regional Consultations

As part of phase 2, the Branch held eight regional consultation sessions across the province in October, November and December 2014. The sessions provided an important opportunity to engage and consult directly with representative contracted service providers.

Meeting Dates and Locations

- Thursday, October 9, 2014 – Cranbrook
- Wednesday, October 15, 2014 – Nanaimo
- Friday, October 17, 2014 – Prince George
- Tuesday, October 28, 2014 – Fort St. John
- Thursday, November 13, 2014 – Terrace
- Tuesday, November 18, 2014 – Langley
- Tuesday, November 25, 2014 – Kelowna
- Tuesday, December 2, 2014 – Vancouver

In advance of each meeting, registered participants were provided a package of materials (available for download [here](#)) that included a detailed agenda with relevant discussion questions as well as two discussion papers on the following topics:

- Funding Formula for Contracted Victim Service and Violence Against Women Programs; and,
- Exploring Enhancements in Program Design and Service Delivery.

Meetings were also held with Provincial Associations (Ending Violence Association of BC, BC Society of Transition Houses and Police Victim Services Association of BC) as well as the RCMP “E” Division’s Crime Prevention Support Section.

Highlights – Phase 2 Regional Consultations

The regional consultation sessions were well attended and the dialogue lively and informative. In total, 172 people participated, representing 147 service providers.

A high-level overview of some of the themes from each of the discussion topics is provided below. More detailed feedback on each topic begins on page 9 of this report.

Funding Formula

- While participants generally acknowledged and recognized that there was a discrepancy in funding to different communities in the province and that a new funding formula could help address this, there was considerable dialogue on the proposed funding formula factors. Participants expressed a strong desire to explore alternative data sources to simply relying on population and violent crime rate. Several participants suggested other socioeconomic and trauma factors such as suicide, children/youth in care, motor vehicle accidents and unemployment rates. Participants also encouraged the Branch to look at unreported victimization, recognizing that the majority of women impacted by violence do not report to the police. In all sessions, the level of program funding was raised as a major and ongoing issue for service providers.

Program Design and Service Delivery: Exploring the Combination of Community-based Victim Services and Outreach Services

- While participants identified some benefits to combining community-based victim services and outreach services, they identified many challenges and important considerations. Overall, participants explored this agenda item with caution.



Highlights Cont'd

Program Design and Service Delivery: Enhancing Services in Rural and Remote Areas

- Participants described a variety of different ways in which they were already working innovatively to enhance services in rural and remote areas, including connecting with local community members to provide supports in the event of a crisis. They also identified a number of possible options for further enhancing services including using technology where feasible to strengthen existing services, the possibility of accessing centralized or regional emergency supports on an as needed basis, as well as the potential to strengthen the volunteer resources available in rural and remote communities.

Contract Language on Coordination Activities

- In general, the majority of participants indicated that they were supportive of seeing community coordination activities better captured in contracts but that the contract language should allow agencies some flexibility to determine how coordination work is carried out.

Open Procurement

- The final agenda topic provided an opportunity for service providers to learn and ask questions about open procurement and the Branch's planned activities. Participants expressed concerns about the impact of open procurement on clients as well as agency relationships within the community. Concerns were also raised about the potential administrative burden of the procurement process and about for-profit and transplant service providers being awarded contracts without an adequate understanding of the local service delivery environment. Branch staff did their best to answer these questions in an open and straightforward manner.



Highlights Cont'd

Session Evaluations

Participants were provided with a short evaluation form at the end of each session. The feedback was very positive, indicating that the sessions were well received.

Consistently, comments indicated that:

- Information presented was clear, informative and helpful towards understanding the process.
- The opportunity to have questions answered and concerns addressed was appreciated.
- The chance to meet face to face with Branch representatives and other service providers from across the region was valuable.

Moving forward, the evaluation feedback expressed a desire for ongoing open communication, dialogue and transparency, and that the best interests of clients remain a priority through this process.

Connection to Community Social Service Innovation and Sustainability Action Plan

At several of the regional consultation sessions, the topic of the community social services innovation and sustainability action plan was raised and discussed in greater detail. Several attendees wanted to know how the Branch's procurement initiative was linked to the sustainability action plan.

The sustainability roundtable and resulting action plan arose as a commitment out of the February 2014 five-year agreement between employers represented by the Community Social Services Employers' Association (CSSEA) and unionized employees represented by the Community Social Services Bargaining Association (CSSBA). As part of the agreement, a commitment was made to work together with government to address the longer-term sustainability of the community social services sector.

The action plan recognizes that demand for services is growing but that budgets for costs other than negotiated wages will not increase substantially for the foreseeable future. The roundtable is committed to exploring opportunities to coordinate service delivery, reduce administrative costs to free resources for value-added service, simplify and coordinate contracting and reporting measures, and partner to leverage new sources of investment.

The Branch is participating in the sustainability initiative and will look for opportunities to leverage innovative practices identified through roundtable activities. For example, key learnings from the Community Service Alignment Pilots and Contract Efficiencies and Flexibility Initiative may provide opportunities. For information on the innovation and sustainability roundtable visit www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/service_providers/index.htm.

Next Steps – Phase 3

In addition to providing a report on the phase 2 consultation sessions, we want to take this opportunity to reiterate where we are headed in phase 3 of the project, scheduled to take place in the new year.

In phase 3, the Branch will develop a draft procurement plan that will incorporate feedback heard from the previous phases and include the following information:

- Proposed program structure (if different from current)
- Proposed procurement timeframes and activities
- Draft RFP documents
- Draft funding formula

We expect to have the draft plan developed and distributed for comment around late March/early April 2015, giving another opportunity for service providers to provide input. Any final input/feedback will be considered in finalizing the procurement plan in the Summer of 2015.

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Funding Formula

Funding Formula

As part of each consultation session, Branch staff provided an overview of the current funding distribution for contracted programs and also described some of the challenges with the way in which funding is currently distributed across the province.

Challenges include an aging funding formula for victim service programs as well as a lack of a clear funding formula for violence against women (VAW) counselling and outreach programs. Branch staff described how the lack of a clear funding formula for VAW programs has resulted in a wide discrepancy in funding for these programs, including inconsistent funding per hour of service across communities and services as well as no clear formula to determine the number of hours of service that a community is eligible to receive.

In order to ensure that funding is equitably and rationally distributed across the province, the Branch put forward proposals on the following topics:

1. Proposed, high-level key principles to guide the development of a new funding formula, and
2. Proposed funding factors to be used in the new funding formula.

A discussion paper on the proposed funding formula was circulated to all attendees in advance of the sessions.

Proposed Key Principles

- Fair and Equitable
- Responsive to Demand for Services
- Transparent and Easy to Understand

Proposed Funding Factors

- Population
- Violent Crime Rate
- Differences in Urban vs. Rural Communities

Feedback

Participants acknowledged the current financial climate and identified that increasing costs, increasing demand for services and complexities of meeting clients' needs were all factors that are having a significant impact on their ability to provide services. Participants identified examples of pressures on programs related to the loss of certain services in rural communities. They identified the travel required and associated costs to provide services – sometimes across significant distances, through inclement weather conditions or through difficult terrain including mountain passes. Some participants spoke of the time required to build and maintain relationships in order to provide culturally competent services to Aboriginal communities. Challenges with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff were also discussed. Some participants spoke of challenges in providing competitive wages and benefits and suggested that a cost of living allowance should be considered. This was identified as a particular concern for communities where there is a heavy resource sector presence although participants in the Lower Mainland also noted significant challenges with cost of living, particularly the cost of housing. In communities with an active resource sector, examples were shared where entry level positions were often compensated at higher rates than that available for program staff.

Participants in all sessions identified that agencies and communities are contributing a significant amount of funding and resources directly toward the delivery of programs and services. In many cases, agencies are making these contributions through fundraising activities and through leveraging other activities they are involved in at the community level. There was a desire for the Branch to collect more information from agencies on these contributions in an effort to capture the true costs of service delivery. There were further suggestions that the Branch should in some way reflect the added value that agencies are contributing as part of its future open procurement activities. In several sessions, this value added extended to the provision of clinical counselling in the delivery of Stopping the Violence Counselling programs despite this not being covered by base funding.



Feedback Cont'd

Participants also reported challenges in securing municipal contributions for Police-based Victim Service Programs in some communities. While it was acknowledged that the majority of local governments are paying their share – and in some cases far more than their share – concerns were raised about whether the Branch was doing enough to ensure that contributions were being made citing that in many cases, agencies and sometimes even program staff are having to advocate for resources at local government council and board meetings. This was even more complicated for programs in service delivery areas where multiple municipalities or a regional district were being served.

In all sessions participants generally accepted that there are challenges associated with the way that program funding is currently distributed across the Province. The reasons for discrepancies in funding from community to community were discussed, including the history of the Violence Against Women Counselling and Outreach Programs in particular and how resources for these programs were originally managed. Branch staff confirmed that a revised funding formula could result in the movement of funding across service delivery areas.

Participants generally agreed that a new funding formula would assist toward addressing discrepancies. There was also general acceptance of the proposed key principles underpinning the development of a new formula although participants wanted a clearer definition of what was meant by a “fair and equitable” distribution of funding. One participant suggested adding accessibility of services as a principle. Another suggested adding prevention as a principle. Ensuring that programming and resources were focused on addressing violent crimes and those with a wide-reaching impact on the community was also discussed. There was also a considerable amount of discussion about the importance of preserving a gendered analysis on violence against women issues.



Feedback Cont'd

There was significant discussion, suggestions and ideas about the funding factors that should be used and how they might be weighted. Participants generally agreed with the proposed considerations for determining service delivery areas but expressed interest for clearer boundaries so that they are better defined. With respect to population, participants identified that some communities experience significant fluctuations in population related to tourism (during summer and/or winter months) and in some communities due to temporary work camps in the resource sector. These fluctuations have a direct impact on service demands and may not be captured in population totals. The proposed factor of differences between rural and urban communities was generally accepted among participants who acknowledged that services are generally more costly to provide in rural and remote areas as compared to more urban areas.

The proposed use of violent crime rate as a factor in the formula garnered a substantial amount of discussion in each session. The discussion centred primarily on the fact that the vast majority of power-based crimes, including domestic violence and sexual violence, go unreported to the police and therefore would not be captured in violent crime rate statistics. There was discussion and acknowledgment in each session about general consistencies in levels of reporting across communities and that research based on the General Social Survey on Victimization administered by Statistics Canada has found that there is no evidence to support differences in the rates of reporting from one community to another (i.e. recent research suggests there are no differences in victimization reporting rates from urban areas to smaller cities, towns and rural areas). The research notwithstanding, several participants suggested that reporting rates in certain communities, such as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and more rural Aboriginal communities, would almost certainly be lower than rates found elsewhere.



Feedback Cont'd

Participants suggested a need to look at other factors for the formula such as Aboriginal population, employment rates, divorce rates, rates of children and youth in care and other socioeconomic factors. In addition, participants suggested a need to look at factors that might be specific to certain communities. Several participants suggested the need to look at trauma as a factor. Police-based Victim Service programs shared that they spend much of their time providing crisis response to trauma related incidents such as motor vehicle accidents, sudden deaths, suicides, building fires and other incidents where crime may not have been a factor. Agencies who deliver Stopping the Violence Counselling also indicated that they are working with women who have experienced historical trauma (historical abuse and sexual assault) stating that these would not necessarily be captured in the factors being considered. Further, participants acknowledged that Aboriginal people are overrepresented in the Justice system as victims and offenders and that intergenerational trauma and the effects of residential schools are significant factors in this.

Some participants questioned whether program statistics already submitted by agencies through monthly reporting systems (OPRA and STV-DES) could be used to quantify demand for services. While there was much discussion about the need to update these systems, participants also expressed interest in seeing the Branch utilize the data they are providing through these systems.

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

**Exploring the Combination of
Community-based Victim Services and
Outreach Services**

Exploring the Combination of CBVS and Outreach

The Branch identified two topics for discussion at the regional consultation sessions pertaining to program design and service delivery. The first topic explored the possibility of combining community-based victim services and outreach services (including multicultural outreach services in the Lower Mainland).

Based on a number of internal reviews as well as feedback received from a subset of service providers and the Ending Violence Association of BC, the Branch was interested in exploring the connections between these two program types to determine if there are compelling reasons to consider a more formal combination of these programs. Attendees were asked to comment on both the potential opportunities and challenges that a combination of CBVS and outreach services might bring.

Feedback

While participants identified some benefits to exploring the combination of these programs, they identified many challenges and important considerations. Overall, participants explored this agenda item with caution.

Some of the benefits identified included providing agencies with increased flexibility in managing their program resources. Some participants suggested that many Outreach Service programs are part-time making them difficult to staff. Some agencies identified that combining services would make staffing easier and would create other administrative efficiencies relating to contracting as well as reporting.



Feedback Cont'd

A larger majority of participants suggested that the two program types are distinct both in the services they deliver and in the clients they are serving and that they do not lend themselves well to a combined service. In some communities, Outreach Service programs serve the surrounding First Nations communities and women that would otherwise never go into an agency office to seek assistance. Some participants indicated that the high demand on victim service workers to support victims through court would result in little time left for Outreach activities in a combined service.

Some participants identified that the Outreach Services Program was intended to connect women fleeing violence in relationships to important services and supports and that because most Community-based Victim Service Programs are mandated to serve both men and women, an important service for women might be lost.

Participants emphasized that every community is different, and that the clients that use the services are also different from community to community. Participants suggested that it may be more beneficial to examine possibilities on a community by community/program by program basis rather than making any major changes to the overall program structure.

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Enhancing Services in Rural and Remote Areas

Enhancing Services in Rural and Remote Areas

The second topic on program design and service delivery explored ways to enhance services in rural and remote areas of the province. Recognizing that it is simply not possible to have on-the-ground services in each and every community in British Columbia, Branch staff sought feedback from service providers on innovative ways to potentially enhance services to rural and remote areas of the province. Service providers were asked if there were innovative service structures currently in place that could potentially be expanded on as well as other ideas for enhancing services to rural and remote areas.

Feedback

Throughout the sessions service providers shared examples of initiatives they have undertaken to meet the needs of victims of crime in rural and remote areas of the province. Participants also shared their ideas for how services might be further enhanced. While it was acknowledged that many service providers are developing creative approaches to address service delivery issues, not everyone has the capacity in their agencies/programs to do this. Some participants were concerned that the Branch might be asking too much of agencies in light of already stretched budgets. It was further suggested that the Branch consider ways to encourage innovation among those that have capacity to do this.

In several sessions, participants indicated that they already strive toward ensuring services are provided to those who reside in remote and isolated communities. In one example, a program discussed making connections with a local fire fighter in a remote community who was then available to provide support in the event of a crisis. There were similar suggestions made throughout the sessions for providing training to other community members and paraprofessionals that could be available to provide support if and when required. Some participants had experience with setting up and managing volunteer resources while others identified that volunteer management is resource intensive, suggesting that the Branch could explore a role in establishing a volunteer network.



Feedback Cont'd

The use of technology was discussed in each session. Participants shared examples of video conferencing tools such as Skype and FaceTime being used to provide clinical supervision and the possibilities to expand the use of these for services to clients such as counselling. It was further suggested by one participant that these mediums be explored for court appearances for victims/witnesses on the basis that these tools are already available to an accused/offender and would be of tremendous benefit to victims of crime as well.

Participants suggested that VictimLink BC could be advertised more, and that utilizing technological options such as SMS (text messaging), email and social media (e.g. Twitter) might be a way to increase reporting and to reach a younger demographic. Specific ideas to promote VictimLink BC included renting advertising at bus stop benches, utilizing the CB radio networks in remote communities, and educating more police officers and services providers (i.e. public health nurses) about the resources in the community.

Some participants, particularly in the North and Kootenay region cautioned that the use of technology can be hampered by the availability of broadband Internet – a service not available in many rural communities. Participants also identified the importance of face-to-face interactions and relationships and that these are of particular importance when working with Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee clients.

Other suggestions made through the sessions included establishing regional response teams that could be called upon to provide support in a region when needed, setting up a special travel fund that could be accessed by service providers in crisis situations, and utilizing existing specialized provincial services where local expertise may not exist for working with a particular client group (e.g. new immigrants or refugees).

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Contract Language on Coordination Activities

Contract Language on Coordination Activities

As part of the consultation sessions, the Branch also sought feedback on whether Branch contract language should be modified to more accurately capture the community coordination work that agencies are participating in and often leading. Branch staff believe that the contract language could be strengthened as it pertains to these kinds of activities to ensure contracts are both reflective of current work as well as to underscore the importance of community coordination activities in providing services to victims of crime and violence. In addition to asking what service providers thought of more explicitly including coordination activities in the contracts, staff also asked which programs should have coordination activities referenced in their contracts.

Feedback

While participants generally supported the idea that coordination activities should be better captured within current contract language, there was considerable discussion on this topic at each session. Some participants indicated that the current contract language is adequate while others expressed a need for language that more clearly speaks to the leadership role that agencies and programs are playing in coordination activities. Some participants expressed concern with mandating coordination activities in contract language and suggested a preference for contract language that provided some flexibility to agencies providing services.



Feedback Cont'd

Participants acknowledged the importance of coordination and suggested that this work should be defined more clearly to articulate that coordination is more than simply networking; it involves discussing clients' needs and safety and having difficult conversations with partners about situations where clients may fall through the cracks. Many suggested that leading and participating in coordination activities is simply best practice and should be reflected in more than just contract language, including in program standards and best practice manuals. There was also acknowledgment that this work requires a specialized skillset and that not everyone was suited to leading coordination work. Further, some suggested that additional resources and funding might be required to better support community coordination activities, notwithstanding the significant amount of time and energy that many agencies already put into these activities.

Some participants cited challenges with getting certain partners to the table and indicated that not everyone embraced a women-centred approach to issues impacting women's safety. Several participants suggested that coordination was so important that it should be mandated in contracts and that doing so would further validate their work at the community level. Others cautioned against this approach, stating that mandating one agency to lead this work at the community level could shift the community dynamic and was counter to the spirit of coordination work. In general, the majority of participants indicated that they were supportive of seeing community coordination activities better captured in contracts for all programs but that the contract language should allow agencies some flexibility to determine how coordination work is carried out.

REGIONAL CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Open Procurement

Open Procurement

The final major topic covered at each regional consultation session was open procurement. Branch staff provided a high-level overview of government procurement policy and identified the main types of procurement documents – including Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and Requests for Expressions of Interest (RFEIs) – that the Branch was likely to use. Staff also discussed the use of direct awards, Notices of Intent (NOIs) and highlighted BC Bid. Finally, service providers were provided with some tools and resources for procurement.

Feedback

As part of the final discussion topic, participants were encouraged to ask questions and to bring forward any concerns about open procurement and the work that the Branch is undertaking.

Branch staff asked participants about their past experiences with open procurement. Most participants indicated some past experience and/or familiarity with open procurement processes. The vast majority of participants indicated that they were familiar with and had experience with solicitation tools like Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and most were familiar with BC Bid – the government website where opportunities to bid are posted.



Feedback Cont'd

There were several common themes that arose through discussion. Participants identified concerns that an open procurement process would result in competition between agencies. While there was acknowledgement that competition is an overall principle of open procurement, participants suggested that competition could damage the relationships and partnerships that are central to effective service delivery in communities. There was further concern that agencies from outside communities and/or from outside of the province would bid on contracts for the delivery of services and potentially underbid for contracts. Branch staff explained that, consistent with its current practice with RFPs, successful proponents would be required to demonstrate an understanding of the local community context along with the capacity and experience of providing the services they were bidding for. In addition, Branch staff indicated that the amount of funding available for any service would be identified clearly in an RFP and that criteria for RFPs would be weighted first on demonstrated capacity, experience, approach/methodology and only then on price. Participants also discussed the need to ensure that understanding of violence against women as a systemic issue is reflected somehow in RFPs and in the evaluation of proposals.

Questions and concerns were raised about open procurement resulting in a change in service provider and the impact this might have on vulnerable clients. Some participants raised concerns about uncertainty for staff and layoffs that may be required as a result of a change in service provider. Branch staff acknowledged the importance of these services to clients and that any changes would require careful transition planning to ensure that services to clients are maintained.

Participants also suggested the need to ensure that services remained available to specific populations including children, men (i.e. male survivors of sexual abuse), immigrants and refugees and Aboriginal communities.



Feedback Cont'd

Participants discussed the time and resources required to respond to RFPs providing several examples of recent experiences where significant time and resources were required. Participants suggested that the Branch consider providing tools and resources and/or training to assist agencies in responding to RFPs and to streamline open procurement processes as much as possible in an effort to reduce the administrative burden on agencies to respond. In addition, participants asked the Branch to consider careful timing of open procurement processes to avoid conflicts with other Ministries, as well as certain times of the year (i.e. Summer, Christmas, etc.).

Participants consistently expressed their hope for multi-year contracts stating that this would give them increased stability, enhance their ability to attract and retain qualified staff and ultimately provide better services to clients. Further, participants suggested that renewal options be included as part of the open procurement contracting process. Branch staff indicated that they would be pursuing multi-year contracts as part of the procurement process.

SERVICES TO VICTIMS OF CRIME CONSULTATION INITIATIVE

For additional information visit:

www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/service-provider