

SECTION 2. ASSESS

DETERMINE WHERE YOUR ORGANIZATION IS NOW

Most organizations get excited about the strategic planning process and want to jump right in and create the plan. However, you must provide the proper foundation for the strategic plan before you get started. The bottom line is that you need to know where your organization is *right now* before you can decide where it should be going.

*Wherever you go,
there you are.*

—Buckaroo Banzai

By taking a critical look at your organization first, you can better understand what your strategic plan can feasibly address. By getting a handle on your current purpose, processes, and capabilities, you can create a dynamic strategic plan that builds on your strengths and improves on your weaknesses.

WHAT IS IN THIS SECTION?

This section outlines the steps you need to take when you assess your organization. We discuss:

STEP 1. USING STRUCTURED METHODS TO ASSESS
YOUR ORGANIZATION

STEP 2. COLLECTING AND CONSOLIDATING DATA
ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

STEP 1. USING STRUCTURED METHODS TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

Everyone feels that they “know” their organization, but often what we know is clouded by our own thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the information we have about our organization is often anecdotal or based on hunches and assumptions. In short, we may know less about our organization than we think we do.

To truly understand where you are right now, you need to take a structured approach to gathering information. Using established models, you can investigate your organization almost as an outsider looking in. By stepping back and assessing your organization in a structured way, you may learn more than you thought possible about the work your organization does, how it does this work, and what its true strengths and weaknesses are.

You can use many assessment models. Most models are structured so that you start by focusing on a set of key questions about your organization. After identifying the key questions, you can then use data collection methods to get research-based answers to those questions.

This section introduces two different assessment models:

- Using a model to assess your organization (A framework adapted from McCaskey¹ for analyzing organizations).
- Conducting a situation analysis to assess your organization.

Both models can be extremely useful as you assess your organization. The first is focused more on taking a research-based approach—relying on structured data collection methods to get answers. The second model is more of an internal, team-based approach—relying on your planning group to work together to brainstorm answers to key questions about your organization. Both are valid models that your planning group can investigate.

1.1 USE A MODEL TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

One way to assess your organization is to collect information about critical aspects that could affect its functioning. Academic literature is full of such models. We have chosen one that is relatively simple and has been used successfully by organizational analysts over a period of years.² To use this model you collect information about the different aspects of your organization by answering questions.

The model has seven parts:

- 1. Organizational Context**
- 2. Outputs**
- 3. Culture**
- 4. Tasks**
- 5. Formal Organization**
- 6. People**
- 7. Physical Setting and Technology**

Each part has several questions that your planning group can begin answering.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 1.1 provides a detailed checklist of questions in order to successfully use this model to assess your organization. To use this model, your planning group would discuss each question and collect additional information as needed to answer the questions.

1.2 CONDUCT A SITUATION ANALYSIS TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

Another way to assess your organization is to have your planning group conduct a situation analysis, also known as a SWOT analysis.³ In this group-based approach, you work together to identify **Strengths**, **Weaknesses**, **Opportunities**, and **Threats** in your organization. A SWOT analysis provides a framework for identifying critical issues that will impact your strategic plan.

Conducting a SWOT analysis requires participants to be honest in their assessment. This is not the time to “soft shoe” the truth. Sometimes it will be difficult to hear and even say, but if it is one’s earnest desire to move the agency to a better place, then truth is essential. It is an effective way of gaining insight into your organization’s assets and liabilities. It can also help identify areas for your organization to develop, to improve, or to terminate.

- **Strengths** are positive aspects internal to the organization
Example: We have a very hard working staff.
- **Weaknesses** are negative aspects internal to the organization.
Example: The Board procrastinates in making critical decisions.
- **Opportunities** are positive and external to the organization.
Example: Organizations that meet their stated goals and objectives are eligible for discretionary funds.
- **Threats** are negative aspects external to the organization.
Example: A major funding source has changed its priorities.

As these short descriptions demonstrate, a SWOT analysis depends on a thorough assessment of issues internal and external to the organization.

- **Internal Assessment.** With an internal assessment, you analyze your organization’s position, performance, problems and potential.
- **External Assessment.** With an external assessment, you analyze the elements or forces that affect the environment in which your organization functions.

As you implement your strategic plan, you will find that your SWOT analysis will form the basis for later actions that you take. For example, your goals and objectives often come from the strengths you want to build on, the weaknesses you want to strengthen, the opportunities you want to take, and the threats you need to address.

At the same time, you will need to periodically revisit your SWOT throughout the planning process—it is a “situation” analysis, and situations often change. You may find that how you categorized issues in the past changes as time goes by. What may have initially been viewed as an opportunity may not actually be so when weighed against resources and other factors in the future. Additionally, future situations may demonstrate that what once was threat has become an opportunity.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 1.2 provides a detailed checklist of questions in order to successfully complete a SWOT analysis. This checklist includes questions both for internal and external assessment, as well as worksheets to help you determine your strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and threats. Additionally, this Tools section suggests what to do with the results of a SWOT analysis.

STEP 2. COLLECTING AND CONSOLIDATING DATA ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

Whether you use the model, or the SWOT analysis, you will most likely find that you need to collect data to help you draw the right conclusions about your organization. Different data collection methods can help you answer key questions in an unbiased way. Because strategic planning must take into account your clients, stakeholders, current and future environment, history, and sometimes other factors, it is important to gather data from as wide a variety of sources as possible.

To do this, you will need to:

- Collect archival data.
- Collect new data.
- Consolidate your data.

2.1 COLLECT ARCHIVAL DATA

Before you gather new data, which is a very technical and time-consuming endeavor, you should look to archival data sources (e.g., official records, previously published research, etc.) to see what information might already be available to you about your organization and the services it offers.

You can use four basic sources to get key archival data that focuses on general victims' issues and on specific program information:

1. **Federal Crime Victim Data Sources.** Although strategic planning efforts should rely primarily on the most localized level of data (e.g., program, municipal, county, or state), or specific types of data (e.g., type of victimization), it is often helpful to access national-scope sites. You should consider sites maintained by the federal government helpful because they:
 - Provide a national picture for comparison to local statistics.
 - Often provide data that are synthesized to the local levels.
 - Link the user to other, more specific criminal victimization data sets.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.1, "Federal crime victim data sources" lists major national data sources that can be used by strategic planners in victim services.

2. **State and Local Data Sources.** State and local level data may be available from any number of government sources, and are often available on agency websites.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.1, “State and local data sources” provides specific data source examples, with contact information for state-level criminal justice and non-criminal justice statistical Web sites, and ways to contact other state agencies.

3. **Private Sources** (e.g., Educational Institutions and National Nonprofit Organizations). A number of national nonprofit, educational, and other sources of relevant victim data that may be accessed include major, Federally funded information sources such as the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, or specialized organizations, such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Additional sources might include colleges and universities (and even individual faculty members), national victim service organizations and law enforcement-related organizations. A comprehensive list of national victim assistance organizations with web links is available at the Office for Victims of Crime web site: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/natorg.htm.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.1, “Private data sources” provides other specific private source data gathering resource examples, with websites listed.

4. **Program-specific Data** (e.g., Needs Assessment, Program Monitoring, and Evaluation). The importance of collecting local, program-specific data cannot be stressed enough. Your organization may have already conducted needs assessments or may have completed formal evaluations of its services. Look at the information that your organization has already collected and use it to find out more about what your organization does well and where it may need improvement.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.1, “Program-specific data” gives information regarding where more Needs Assessment, Program Monitoring, and Evaluation details can be found.

2.2 COLLECT NEW DATA

Collecting current data is also very important in accurately assessing where your organization is. Your planning group can use many tools to investigate the questions that you identified in **Step 1**. When collecting data, it is most important to think about why you are collecting the data. You should only collect data to investigate specific, pre-defined questions. You should always have a clear reason why you are collecting the data. It is a waste of valuable resources to simply collect data with no clear purpose in mind.

Some data collection techniques you can use to better understand your organization include:

1. **Client/stakeholder identification process.** As described in **Section 1**, you want to identify who your organization’s key clients and stakeholders are. These people have a clear interest in your organization and should be involved in the strategic planning process.
2. **Needs assessments.** Your needs assessment helps you identify the critical needs and concerns of existing clients. It can also help you identify potential clients that are unserved or under-served.
3. **Surveys.** Surveys are extremely useful and efficient instruments for gathering data, particularly with larger groups of individuals who are not amenable to interviews or focus grouping due to their size and/or their being geographically dispersed. More specifically, you can use client assessment surveys to find out how satisfied individuals are with the services they received from your organization. You can conduct client assessments through a structured written instrument or an oral interview. Survey fields can include *all* clients, or clients *randomly selected* to complete the survey.
4. **Focus groups.** You can use focus groups to get information from key groups of people that your organization interacts

with, including victim groups or other stakeholders. Focus groups involve a highly structured, facilitated discussion of a group of individuals that usually have some common interest or characteristics, in order to gain information about a specific issue or issues. A focus group is a qualitative research process designed to elicit opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions from individuals to gain insights and information about a specific topic.

5. **User groups.** User groups are similar to focus groups, but the actual group consists of *specific clients* of services offered by the group's sponsor, i.e., people who *currently use* its services or resources, or *potential clients* (such as victims who have been identified as "underserved" by the user group's sponsor). In addition, user groups can involve the gatekeepers of the resources needed to advance victim services.
6. **One-on-one interviews.** Another way to get information about how well your organization does its work is by conducting one-on-one interviews. In these interviews, you can uncover individuals' personal experiences and perceptions (such as a crime victim's perception of his or her treatment by the criminal justice system, as well as his or her actual experience with the system). One-on-one interviews result in a one-way flow of information, can vary in length, can be confidential based upon the subject's preference, and can obtain excellent personal insights that can "humanize" crime victims' experiences.
7. **Client advisory councils.** You can use advisory councils to provide ongoing information and input, as well as feedback (when requested) to an agency or strategic planning project. "Clients" can include crime victims, victim service providers, justice professionals who interact with the sponsoring agency, or others whose ongoing input and feedback are needed and valued.
8. **Public hearings and meetings.** You can use public hearings and meetings to both present and solicit information. The key advantage to public meetings and hearings is that they allow you to communicate with a large group of people simultaneously. In strategic planning processes, you can use public hearings and meetings early in the process to obtain input from key stakeholders; or after the process is complete, to present the plan and solicit feedback about its components.

9. **Affinity diagrams.** You can use an affinity diagram to identify, gather, and organize ideas and opinions. Affinity diagramming takes the results of a group’s “brainstorming,” and groups the initial processes into categories or chunks. It is an excellent tool to refine general processes into more specific, useful, and organized data.

Regardless of which tool you use, you should always try to ensure that your data collection reflects the diversity of your clientele in terms of experience, gender, age, culture, geography, and disability.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.2 “KEY STRATEGIC PLANNING AND DATA COLLECTION TOOLS,” includes a helpful chart to help you decide which data collection technique to choose. The chart compares and contrasts the characteristics, optimum numbers, benefits, and drawbacks of many different types of data collection techniques. Techniques compared are: archival data, surveys (including Client Assessment

Surveys), focus groups, one-on-one interviews, affinity diagrams, and strategic planning conferences. General information regarding archival data appeared earlier in this section. **Section 1** discussed client/stakeholder identification process.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, STEP 2.2, provides detailed information on the following data collection techniques:

- Conducting needs assessments,
- Conducting surveys,
- Conducting focus groups, and
- Creating an affinity diagram.

These tools tell you why these techniques are important, when to use them, and how to conduct them properly.

2.3 CONSOLIDATE YOUR DATA

Once you have collected all of your archival and new data, you will want to analyze what you have. A crosswalk is a way to organize the different types of information being collected across several different data sources or instruments (e.g., provider interviews, victim surveys, focus groups, etc.). The cross-

walk illustrates that different data sources have similar information and which specific questions within each data source or instrument provide this information. It is a matrix of data elements.

A crosswalk serves as a valuable tool to guide analysis and reporting. It is particularly useful in projects that are coordinating multiple data sources or sets. A crosswalk *does not* present any of the findings or results, just the various types of information that have been gathered from the different data sources. Although crosswalks are idiosyncratic to research projects, they can be used anywhere there are multiple sources of information.⁴

You can create a crosswalk to consolidate and manage all of the information you collect prior to starting your strategic plan.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2, 2.3 gives specific information about what goes into a crosswalk, how to construct one, and an example of a draft crosswalk.

SECTION 2 ENDNOTES

- 1 Michael B. McCaskey, 1996, "Case 9-480-009," In *Framework for Analyzing Work Groups*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Course Services.
- 2 See N.M. Tichy, 1983, *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political, and Cultural Dynamics*, New York: Wiley, or see Gordon L. Lippitt, Petter Lagseth, and Jack Mossop, 1985, *Implementing Organizational Change*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 3 Portions adapted (with permission) from Arizona Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting, 1998, *1998 Strategic Planning and Performance Handbook*, Arizona Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budgeting, <http://www.state.az.us/ospb/handbook.htm>.
- 4 Debra Elliott, Ph.D, 2003, Portland State University Regional Research Institute, Portland, OR, Telephone interview of September 17, 2002.



TOOLS FOR SECTION 2: ASSESS

This section provides tools and resources you can use to accurately assess where your organization is right now. These tools apply to:

STEP 1. USING STRUCTURED METHODS TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Organizational Assessment Checklist
- Conducting a SWOT Analysis

STEP 2. COLLECTING AND CONSOLIDATING DATA ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

- Collecting archival data
 - Federal Crime Victim Data Sources
 - State and Local Data Sources
 - Private Data Sources
 - Program Specific Data
- Collecting new data
 - Conducting Needs Assessment
 - Conducting Surveys
 - Conducting Focus Groups
 - Creating an Affinity Diagram
- Consolidating your data
 - Using a Crosswalk

STEP 1. USING STRUCTURED METHODS TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

1.1 USING A MODEL TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION

Organizational Assessment Checklist

Answer each question with your planning group and collect additional information as needed to assess your organization's readiness.

1. Organizational Context

- What is the purpose of the organization?
- What other organizations does it work with frequently?
- What governmental organizations regulate its activities?
- Who are the principal stakeholders in the organization?
- What is the financial condition of the organization?
- What environment is the organization facing? Have there been recent changes?

2. Outputs

- What are the organization's key products and services?
- How satisfied are customers with these products and services?

3. Culture

- What are the formal and informal rules within the organization?
- How are problems solved in the organization?
- How much feedback is tolerated from employees?
- How are decisions made?

4. Tasks

- What are the overall goals of the organization?
- What tasks must be completed for the organization to reach its goals?
- What procedures are used to complete the tasks?
- Who works on which tasks?

5. Formal Organization

- How is the work organized, both vertically and horizontally?
- What is the organizational structure?
- How is work coordinated and organized?
- How is new staff recruited?
- What is the reward system?

6. People

- How satisfied are employees with the organization? What is the turnover rate?
- Do staff members have the skills they need?
- Do staff members receive training as needed?

7. Physical Setting and Technology

- What is the physical condition of the offices occupied by the organization?
- Does the physical setting have any impact?
- What is the technological level achieved by the organization? Is it on the cutting edge or a bit behind?

1.2 CONDUCTING A SITUATION OR ANALYSIS TO ASSESS YOUR ORGANIZATION¹

Conducting a SWOT Analysis

Stage 1: Conduct an internal assessment.

a. Identify your data sources (details located in Step 2.2)

Find out about your organization by looking at data that you have already collected. Useful data sources for your internal assessment might be:

- Quality assessment surveys.
- Annual reports.
- Employee surveys.
- Annual progress review meetings.
- Client surveys.
- Program evaluations.
- Policy development files.
- Organization audit recommendations.
- Internal data bases.
- Performance measurements.
- Budget requests.
- Internal plans.

b. Consider organizational issues

- **Review your organization's scope and functions, including:**
 - Enabling State and Federal statutes and the dates they were created.
 - Historical perspective and significant events in the organization's history.
 - Client and stakeholder expectations.
 - Your public image.
 - The structure of programs and subprograms.
 - Your organizational accomplishments.
 - Existing performance measures and how well they gauge success.

- **Review organizational aspects, including:**
 - The size and composition of your work force (including the number of employees, minority composition, professional, technical, clerical, exempt, classified positions, etc.).
 - Organizational structure and processes (including divisions/departments, quality and management style, key management policies/operating characteristics).
 - The location of the organization's main office, field offices and any travel requirements, etc.; the location of service or regulated populations.
 - Human resources (including training, experience, compensation/benefits, turnover rates, morale).
 - Capital assets and capital improvement needs.
 - Information technology (IT); the degree of automation in your organization; the quality of telecommunications, organization IT plans, data collection, and tracking and monitoring systems.
 - Key organizational events and areas of change, their potential impact, and your organization's responsiveness to change.

- **Review fiscal aspects, including:**
 - The size of your budget (trends in appropriations and expenditures, significant events, etc.).
 - Incoming funds: Federal, non-appropriated, fees, etc.
 - A comparison of your operating costs with other jurisdictions'.
 - The relationship of your budget to your program/subprogram structure.
 - The degree to which your budget meets current and expected needs.
 - Internal accounting procedures.

c. Determine your strengths and weaknesses

Finally, to determine your strengths and weaknesses, answer these three key questions:

■ Where has the organization been?

- Have the needs of internal and external clients been met in the past?
- Have the resources and services been of the highest quality?
- What has changed internally? Has the organization been reorganized? Have improvements been made or has the organization been stagnant or in decline? Why?

■ Where is the organization now?

The next step is to find out the current status of the organization's performance.

- Identify current programs or activities. Does the existing structure of programs and subprograms make sense? What are the statutory mandates for those programs or activities?
- Do existing programs or activities support one another in the organization, or in allied agencies? Are any in conflict? Are all programs and activities needed?
- What are the accomplishments of current programs or activities? What is being done well? Poorly?
- Do you have current (baseline) performance measures? If so, are you meeting your expected levels of performance? Why or why not? If you do not have baselines established, do you have a plan in place to do so? What is the plan?
- What do the public, clients, and stakeholders think of current programs? How successfully are clients' needs being met?
- Are there any identifiable populations that are currently unserved or underserved?
- What benchmarking information can be utilized to compare the quality and cost of the organization's services with those of other public or private organizations in your state?
- How does your organization compare to recognized standards?
- Are planning, budgeting, quality, and other management efforts integrated?

■ **What are the strengths and weaknesses?**

Finally, use the information that you have collected and analyzed to identify your organization's strengths and weakness. This includes strengths and weaknesses in resources, processes, service delivery, etc.

- What is your organization's capacity to act?
- What advantages or strengths exist? How can strengths be built on?
- What disadvantages or weaknesses exist? How can weaknesses be overcome?
- What are the constraints in meeting the clients' needs and expectations?
- How are the needs and expectations of clients changing? What opportunities for positive change exist? Does the plan accommodate that change?

SWOT Strengths and Weaknesses Identification Worksheet

Use this worksheet to list your organization's strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths and Weaknesses	
List Strengths and Assets We Can Build Upon	List Our Weaknesses and Liabilities

Stage 2: Conduct an external assessment

The external assessment, or environmental scan, identifies the opportunities and threats present in the current environment, and anticipate changes in the future environment. This portion of the SWOT provides an essential backdrop for strategic planning and policy development.

a. Identify your data sources (examples listed in Step 2.1)

Find out about your external issues that affect your organization by reviewing data. Useful data sources for your external assessment are:

- Federal and state government statistical reports and databases.
- Federal, state, and local government legislation, regulations and executive orders or actions.
- Federal, state, and local government budgets and policy statements.
- Federal, state, and local government special studies.
- Court decisions and actions.
- National and regional professional organizations or associations.
- Interest or advocacy groups.
- Underserved or unserved clients.
- Media (both broadcast and print).
- University and college resource centers.
- Organization advisory and governing boards.

b. Identify organization aspects to consider

- **Review your organization's demographics, including:**
 - Characteristics of your client demographic (age, education, geographic, special needs, impact on state's economic, political, cultural climate, etc.).
 - Trends and their impact (including population shifts, emerging demographic characteristics, etc.).
- **Review economic variables, including:**
 - Unemployment rates, interest rates, etc.
 - The extent to which clients and stakeholders are affected by economic conditions.
 - Expected future economic conditions and their impact on your organization and your clients and stakeholders.

- Your state’s fiscal forecast and revenue estimates.
 - Your organization’s response to changing economic conditions.
- **Review the impact of “other” government statutes and regulations, including:**
 - Key legislation or key events, etc.
 - Current government activities (including identifying relevant government entities, relationship to state entities, impact on operations, etc.).
 - The anticipated impact of future government actions on your organization and its clients (including organization-specific Federal mandates; court cases, Federal budget, general mandates; i.e., Americans With Disabilities Act, etc.).
- **Review other legal issues, including the:**
 - Impact of anticipated state statutory changes.
 - Impact of current and outstanding court cases.
 - Impact of local government requirements.
- **Review technological developments, including the:**
 - Impact of technology on current organization operations (products/services in the marketplace, telecommunications, etc.).
 - Impact of anticipated technological advances.
- **Review public policy issues, including:**
 - Current events.
 - Juvenile crime, children and family issues.

c. Identify your opportunities and threats

Now that you have completed a thorough inventory of the strengths and weaknesses, follow a similar process to determine the threats and opportunities facing your organization. Assessing opportunities and threats means you need to answer two key questions.

1. What is the current external environment?

- What is your organization’s current fiscal status?
- What elements of the current external environment are relevant to your organization? How?

- What elements are most critical? Which are likely to facilitate or impede the organization?
- What are the major current issues or problems? Are these local, statewide, regional, national or global in scope? Why are these issues or problems of such importance?
- What current events or policy issues have captured the attention of the public? How do they affect the organization?

2. How may the environment differ in the future?

- What are your organization's revenue and expenditure estimates for next year, the next five years?
- What forces are at work that might affect or alter key elements of the environment?
- Are trends likely to continue? Are changes forecast?
- What major issues or problems are anticipated? What effects could they have on the organization?
- What implications do these future forces and environmental changes (trends and issues) hold for the organization? Which is most critical?
- What are the most likely scenarios for the future?

SWOT Opportunities and Threats Identification Worksheet

Use this worksheet to identify your opportunities and threats.

Opportunities and Threats		
People Who Use Our Services (Our Stakeholders)	Competitors and Allies	External Forces That Impact What We Do

Stage 3: Examine results of the SWOT Analysis

When preparing a SWOT analysis, consider that the strategic plan will be a public document available for outside review. Although it is important to be factual in listing a organization's weaknesses, you should be careful about the way you word statements so that this information will not be misinterpreted. For instance, a statement summarizing problems or weaknesses can be written to stress opportunities for improvement.

You should use the results of the internal and external analyses and client identification to formulate the mission, vision, values, goals, and objectives. These will be developed in **Section 3, Create**, of the Strategic Planning process, deciding where you want your organization to go.

STEP 2. COLLECTING AND CONSOLIDATING DATA ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION

2.1 COLLECTING ARCHIVAL DATA

This section describes how your strategic planning work group can locate and use existing crime and victimization data to inform your planning process.

Federal Crime Victim Data Sources

National and Federal data sources can be referenced as benchmarks for local analyses or used to provide guidance about how you might want to conduct local data collection and analysis.

The major national and Federal databases that are available to strategic planners in victim services include the following:

The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics

The Sourcebook compiles data from more than 100 sources in over 600 tables about all aspects of the U.S. criminal justice system. The Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics 2000, the 28th edition, is available from the Bureau of Justice Statistics Clearinghouse.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)

The U.S. Department of Justice's BJS website, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs, contains a wealth of crime and victimization data. These data are available in many forms, including:

- Crime and victim statistics.
- Victim characteristics.
- BJS publications.
- A compendium of federal justice statistics.
- Key crime statistics at a glance.
- Crime and justice data on-line.
- Spread sheets for data analysis.
- Sexual assault reports to law enforcement.
- Urban, suburban, and rural victimization.
- Victimization and race.
- Sex offenders and victims.

Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI)

The FBI website, www.fbi.gov/ucr/ucr.htm, provides access to Uniform Crime Report Statistics data, which are also available from BJS. The Uniform Crime Reports are the longest running, continuous, national source of crime statistics in the nation. These data are considered very reliable for what they represent, which is crimes reported to the police.

Initially conceived as a resource allocation tool, the Uniform Crime Reports can have significant implications for victim service strategic planners, including data available at the state and local level. However, they have significant limitations—in particular, there is no accounting of crimes *not* reported to the police. Although they do not report to the police, these victims may still access a number of victim assistance services from VOCA grantees and others. This phenomenon will be discussed further below in the “State and Local Data Sources” section where the issues of *local crime victimization surveys* are addressed.

Office on Violence Against Women (OVAW)

The OVAW provides a variety of statistics regarding violence against women on its website, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo. The OVAW will provide print materials upon request.

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)

BJA's website, www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA, provides information related to a wide variety of law enforcement topics. These topics assist your planning process by giving statistics relevant to victim services.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)

OJJDP's website, www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org, provides statistics related to the juvenile population—both offenders and victims—and also those who offend against juveniles. This information may be important if you are incorporating child victim services or assistance for victims of juvenile offenders into your plan.

The White House Social Statistics Briefing Room

The Social Statistics Briefing Room at the White House website, www.whitehouse.gov/fsbr/ssbr.html, provides access to information that may be useful to strategic planners, as well as links to many other agencies.

FedStats

Fedstats, www.fedstats.gov, provides access to Federal data provided through approximately 70 Federal agencies.

The Census Bureau

Census information, at www.census.gov, is often essential to support population-based estimates of current and future service needs. It can also provide more basic population descriptions for funding sources or for programmatic purposes.

State and Local Data Sources

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is providing software and assistance to states and localities which would like to develop their own Crime Victimization Surveys.

If you can develop your Crime Victimization Survey initiative before or during their strategic planning process, or perhaps even as a goal of strategic planning, it will help you understand your state's actual rates of criminal victimization. Clearly, reported crime data misses a great deal of crime that goes unreported. This was the rationale for the development of the National Crime Victimization Survey and should be considered at the state level. The BJS website notes:

"BJS (www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs) and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) developed a software program for localities to conduct their own telephone surveys of residents to collect data on crime victimization, attitudes toward policing, and other community-related issues. This survey can produce information similar to that published in *Criminal Victimization and Perceptions of Community Safety in 12 Cities, 1998*. Interested states may want to review a sample of a state victimization survey from the State of Iowa, which can be viewed at http://csbs.uni.edu/dept/csbr/data/crime_vic.html."

There are also many non-criminal justice agencies that may have data sets containing information that would be useful to strategic planners in victim services. These include departments of:

- Children, Youth, and Family Services.
- Child Protection.
- Elderly Services.
- Social and Human Services.
- Mental Health.
- Addiction/Substance Abuse Services.
- Persons with Disabilities.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to list all contact information for these sources, as it is different in each state. Local phone books or internet search engines are useful places to find contact information.

State crime victim data sources

- State-level Victimization Survey Kit:
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/cvs.htm. (A sample of a state victimization survey from Iowa can be viewed at:
http://csbsnt.csbs.uni.edu/dept/csbr/data/crime_vic.html).
- California: <http://caag.state.ca.us/cjsc/datatabs.htm>.
- Connecticut: www.state.ct.us/dps/Crimes_Analysis_Unit.htm.
- Florida: www.fdle.state.fl.us/Crime_Statistics/.
- Georgia: www.ganet.org/gbi/disclucr.html.
- Idaho: www.isp.state.id.us/citizen/crime_stats.html.
- Illinois: www.jrsa.org/jaibg/state_data2/illinois01/.
- Iowa: www.state.ia.us/government/dhr/cjpp/JDW.html.
- Massachusetts: www.state.ma.us/msp/cru/SPRESRCH.HTM.
- Michigan: www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1645_3501_4621---,00.html.
- Minnesota: www.mnplan.state.mn.us/cj/.
- Montana: <http://bccdoj.doj.state.mt.us/sac/> or www.jrsa.org/jaibg/state_data2/montana01/.
- Nebraska: www.nol.org/home/crimecom/PDF%20Files/01PRELIM.pdf, and www.state.ne.us/home/crimecom/Functions.htm.
- New York:
<http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/crimnet/ojsa/areastat/areast.htm>.
- North Carolina: <http://sbi2.jus.state.nc.us/crp/public/Default.htm>.
- Oregon: www.ocjc.state.or.us/SAC.htm.
- Texas: www.tdcj.state.tx.us/red/red-home.htm.
- Virginia: www.vsp.state.va.us/crimestatistics.htm and <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/crime/>.
- West Virginia: www.wvstatepolice.com/ucr/ucr.htm.
- Additional State-level Crime Statistics: www.ncpc.org/50stats.htm.

If your state is not listed, contact your local police, and ask if there are any compiled statistics that you could use for your research.

Private Data Sources

National victim assistance organizations

A comprehensive list of national victim assistance organizations with web links is available at the Office for Victims of Crime website:

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/help/natorg.htm.

- American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law: www.abanet.org/child/.
- American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children: www.apsac.org/.
- Anti-Defamation League: www.adl.org/hate-patrol/main.html.
- Center for Criminology and Criminal Justice Research, University of Texas at Austin (Site sponsored by the American Statistical Association and the USDOJ/BJS): www.la.utexas.edu/research/crime_criminaljustice_research/.
- Child Abuse Prevention Association: www.capa.org.
- Child Abuse Prevention Network: <http://child.cornell.edu>.
- Childhelp USA: www.childhelpusa.org.
- Child Quest International: www.childquest.org/.
- Child Welfare League of America: www.cwla.org.
- Concerns of Police Survivors (COPS): www.nationalcops.org.
- Cornell University's Child Abuse Data Archives: www.ndacan.cornell.edu/.
- The Disaster Center's Crime Statistics Data Bases: www.disastercenter.com/crime/.
- Family Violence Prevention Fund: www.fvpf.org.
- Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community: www.dvinstitute.org.
- Justice Research and Statistics Association (JRSA): www.jrsa.org/U.
- JRSA's State Statistical Analysis information: www.jrsainfo.org/sac/.
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving: www.madd.org.
- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children: www.missingkids.org.
- National Center for Victims of Crime: www.ncvc.org.
- National Center on Elder Abuse: www.elderabusecenter.org/.

- National Children’s Alliance: www.nncac.org.
- National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information: www.calib.com/nccanch.
- National Coalition Against Domestic Violence: www.ncadv.org.
- National Coalition of Homicide Survivors: www.mivictims.org.
- National Commission Against Drunk Driving: www.ncadd.com.
- National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics: www.search.org/.
- National Conference of State Legislatures Criminal Justice Links: www.ncsl.org/programs/cj/websites.htm.
- National Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Association: www.nationalcasa.org/.
- National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center: www.musc.edu/cvc/.
- National Criminal Justice Reference Service, NCJRS:
 - <http://virlib.ncjrs.org/stat.asp?category=53&subcategory=210> and
 - <http://virlib.ncjrs.org/Statistics.asp>.
 - Crime victim information can be accessed at <http://virlib.ncjrs.org/VictimsOfCrime.asp>, which provides general victim information, while other areas on this site will provide very specific information, e.g., information on hate crimes can be found at www.ncjrs.org/hate_crimes/hate_crimes.html.
- National Fraud Information Center: www.fraud.org.
- National Insurance Crime Bureau: www.nicb.org.
- National Organization for Victim Assistance: www.try-nova.org.
- National Sexual Violence Research Center, www.nsvrc.org.
- National Victim Assistance Academy, OVC-Site or www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/assist/vaa.htm.
- National Victims Constitutional Amendment Network www.nvcan.org.
- National Violence Against Women Prevention Research Center www.violenceagainstwomen.org.
- Neighbors Who Care: www.neighborswhocare.org.
- Northeastern State University: <http://arapaho.nsuok.edu/~dreveskr/CJRR.html-ssi>.

- Parents of Murdered Children (POMC): www.pomc.com.
- Safe Campuses Now: www.uga.edu/~safe-campus/.
- Security on Campus: www.campussafety.org/.
- University of Maryland's CESAR Site:
www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/bytopic/cj.asp.
- University of Michigan Statistical Data:
 - www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/stsoc.html#crime.
 - www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/stats.html.
 - www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/home.html.
 - www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/ucr.html.
 - www.icpsr.umich.edu/cgi/subject.prl?path=NACJD&format=tb&query=X.
- Victims' Assistance Legal Organization: www.valor-national.org.

Program Specific Data

There are two primary sources of program-specific data that can complement the information available from the larger data sets discussed above. These are:

- Needs assessments; and,
- Program monitoring and evaluation.

Needs assessments are discussed in this section under **"Collecting new data."** Monitoring and evaluation are discussed in **Section 6, Track**, as they also relate to important post-strategic plan implementation and follow-up issues.

2.2 COLLECTING NEW DATA

Collecting new, current data is also very important in accurately assessing where your program is. The chart below compares and contrasts many of the key data collection and analysis tools listed in **Section 2, Assess**. Additionally, the chart includes archival data and Strategic Planning Conference, i.e., Future Search or Appreciative Inquiry methods.

The client/stakeholder identification process was discussed in **Section 1, Prepare**. Needs assessment information is provided below the following chart.

Key Strategic Planning and Data Collection Tools

Tool	Characteristics	Optimum Numbers	Benefits	Drawbacks
Archival data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Federal Sources ■ State Sources ■ Private Sources ■ Program-specific data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Limitless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quantifiable ■ Easily viewed in charts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collecting so much that it becomes unmanageable
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Data from a large number of people ■ Written or oral ■ Random selection or all possible respondents ■ Satisfaction level for services (Client Assessment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Any group size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Confidentiality ■ Attempt to reach large number of people ■ Written or oral ■ Cost effective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Relatively small number of returns ■ Literacy levels of respondents need to be considered
Focus Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Highly structured ■ Facilitated discussions ■ Group has some common interest or characteristic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ No larger than 20 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Structured dialogue gives consistency across all groups ■ Questions designed to elicit specific information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Time intensive ■ Logistics and preparation for assuring success ■ Skilled facilitator needed

Key Strategic Planning and Data Collection Tools

Tool	Characteristics	Optimum Numbers	Benefits	Drawbacks
One-on-one interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can enlist subjective information on a personal basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time will limit the number interviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral history and stories present powerful information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time intensive Can be emotional Needs a relatively large number in order to have an accurate representation
Affinity Diagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A group method for organizing and prioritizing data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups up to 12 people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesizes large numbers of ideas into a smaller number of broader categories Can also then set priorities for the broad groupings - e.g., through voting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The leader must allow all participants to lead as well
Strategic Planning Conference, i.e., Future Search or Appreciative Inquiry methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive, cross-functional, cross-organization, large group vision and planning process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any size group from 10 to 1000 or more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive, cross-component representation Active Strengths-base approach Energizing Visionary - new programs to be considered or strategies for change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trained facilitator advised Logistics and planning required

Conducting Needs Assessments

Comprehensive needs assessments can help you justify new programs, changes in current program priorities, or other needed adjustments. By openly engaging in the needs assessment process, an organization may determine that it would be more efficient or cost-effective to focus its efforts on certain areas to the exclusion of others if alternative services are already available.

What questions do needs assessments answer?

Needs assessments seek to address and answer questions like:

- Who are the individuals we seek to serve?
- What are the needs of the victims we serve that are currently being met? What needs are currently unmet?
- What resources are, and are not, available to meet these needs?
- Are there specific victim populations who are currently underserved or unserved?
- What are the capacities and shortcomings of the organization in meeting these needs?
- What are the resources needed to address any shortcomings?

By investigating these issues, the strategic planning team can assess and prioritize the needs of its clients, and the organization's ability to meet those needs.

What types of needs assessments are there?

Needs assessments can be conducted on several levels or aimed at different targets. Three important types are:

- Community needs assessments.
- Organization needs assessments.
- Program-specific needs assessments.

Conducting community needs assessments

Assessing and, perhaps more importantly, understanding community needs is essential, especially in the early stages of planning. Understanding the needs of the community you serve will help you design the most effective planning process.

The following tools can be used to gather information for a community needs assessment:

Community Needs Assessment Tools

- Surveys of crime victims (See www.state.tn.us/finance/rds/victimshome-page.htm)
- Surveys of victim service providers, criminal and juvenile justice officials, and allied professionals
- Mail surveys and questionnaires (e.g., see Dillman's seminal work in this area)²
- Telephone surveys
- Exit interviews
- Follow-up surveys
- Executive interviews
- Focus groups (see "Focus Groups" on page T2-30 of the Toolkit)

Community needs assessments can involve a considerable level of effort and investment. Your organization may be able to use existing needs assessment tools or data, or get involved in a broader effort while maintaining a crime victims' focus.

To see an example of the needs assessment process and results, The Office for Victims of Crime offers a special OVC Bulletin, entitled *Denver Victim Services 2000 Needs Assessment*,³ which can be accessed online at the following website:

www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/publications/bulletins/dv_10_2000_1/welcome.html.

Conducting organization needs assessments

Assessing an organization's needs can involve an in-depth self-examination or an evaluation by an objective third party.

There are a variety of tools and resources available to the state and/or non-profit organization interested in examining its strengths and weaknesses.

Organization Needs Assessment Tools and Resources

- **The National Endowment for the Arts offers a free, seven-page (online) “Organizational Self-Assessment Checklist.”**⁴ It contains over 160 questions that will help audit an organization’s purpose, programs, governance, staff, marketing, public and community relations, fund-raising, financial management, facilities, planning, communications and decision-making, and external environment (available at <http://arts.endow.gov/pub/Lessons/Lessons/WARSHAWSKI.HTML>).
- **The Management Assistance Program offers “Conducting a Complete Fitness Test of Your Nonprofit Organization.”**⁵ This seven-page Fitness Test includes over 135 questions covering legal, board governance, human resources, planning, financial management, and fund-raising. The Complete Fitness Test of Your Nonprofit Organization is available at www.managementhelp.org/np_progs/fit_mod/fitness.htm.
- **The McKinsey “Capacity Assessment Grid” is a free, online resource available to nonprofit organizations.**⁶ This 40-page, self-administered needs assessment tool helps nonprofits look at their aspirations, strategies, organizational skills, human resources, systems and infrastructure, organizational structure, and organizational culture. It can be accessed online at the following website: www.venturephilanthropypartners.org/usr_doc/6_rpt.pdf.

Conducting victim services program-related needs assessments

Victims service program-related needs assessments should focus on 10 key principles.⁷ In 1997, the Association of State Correctional Administrators (ASCA), with support from the Promising Practices and Strategies project, identified ten core elements that should form the foundation of a corrections-based victim services program.

These elements can be applied to other programs as well. The ASCA Victims Committee recommended the following ten core elements for victim services within correctional settings:

ASCA Ten Core Elements Checklist

Sample Needs Assessment Form Used with State Agencies Based Upon the Ten Core Elements of Corrections-Based Victim Services Programming				
10 Core Elements of Corrections-Based Victim Services Programming	Do We Now Meet Standard?	Do We Want to Meet?	Action Required to Meet Test	Comments
Incorporate victims' rights and needs into agency mission statement and develop VS mission and vision statements.				
Designate full-time staff person for VS and designate reps at institutions and offices.				
Provide core services to victims that include notification, protection, input, restitution, information, and referral.				
Create victim advisory council to guide program.				
Establish written policies and procedures for victim rights and services.				
Develop public information/out-reach plan.				
Develop and use training curriculum for orientation and continuing education.				
Develop policies and protocols for victimized staff.				
Implement the victim impact classes and panels per California Youth Authority (CYA) curricula.				
Designate agency representative to be liaison with VS community.				

Adapted by William McCoy, The McCoy Company (Columbus, Ohio), Fall 2002

Conducting Surveys

One of the most effective ways to improve the delivery of victim services and the implementation of victims' rights is to conduct direct surveys of clients served by an organization.

What purposes do surveys serve?

The purpose of a survey is for the clients to tell an organization:

- Their perceptions of how they were treated by organization staff.
- Whether or not they received the services they expected or were offered.
- Whether or not their statutory or constitutional rights as victims were enforced. (Keep in mind that victims often don't know their rights, so the survey question would need to list or explain them).
- Recommendations for improving the implementation of victims' rights, or delivery of victim services.
- Open-ended comments that offer further insights into the client's feelings about the organization and its programs.

Client surveys can be general in nature, or tailored to specific victim populations or victim assistance programs and services. Surveys can be conducted of *all* clients (resources permitting), or a randomly-selected survey field that is representative of the overall clientele.

How can you create a survey?

There are eight key steps in creating a survey:

- **Step 1: Identify the inquiry.** Review the information you want to gather in terms of its contribution to strategic planning. Review your basic research questions to make sure they elicit the right information.
- **Step 2: Develop the sample.** Determine what group(s) of individuals you want for your sample. *This is critical to the integrity of your survey.* Samples may be either some form of random sample (e.g., of the entire population of a state or jurisdiction, or of a large group of victims and survivors), or more deliberate (e.g., choosing to survey all victims and survivors who have received certain services, or all advocates and service providers in certain programs). Be sure you identify a culturally inclusive sample.

- **Step 3: Develop the survey instrument.** Construct the survey instrument carefully—you want to make sure it measures the right variables. Surveys can measure:
 - Values and beliefs,
 - Attitudes,
 - Experiences,
 - Behaviors,
 - Characteristics, and,
 - Other factors of interest.
- **Step 4: Choose your question structure.** There are different ways to structure the questions on a survey (for example, questions can be open-ended, closed-ended, and mixed). There are also different ways you can present alternative responding choices for participants. It is important to choose the correct format for what is being assessed.
- **Step 5: Write your questions clearly.** When designing questions, watch for common problems with wording, such as:
 - **Inappropriate vocabulary**
Do not use terms that will be unfamiliar to your audience. For example, if you are conducting a survey of victims, you might not want to refer to cases that are “nolle prossed.”
 - **Vagueness**
For example, “What goals do you have for the future?” is probably too general a question. A better question could be, “What are three goals that you would like your office to reach in the next two years?”
 - **Bias**
You should ask questions in a manner that can potentially elicit a wide range of responses. If you ask someone, “How do you feel that the police have been unfair in the handling of your case?” you are biasing the respondent in terms of listing negative responses. An unbiased question would be, “How do you feel that the police have handled your case?”
 - **Double-barreled questions**
Only ask one question at a time. “How often do you construct your budget and for what time periods?” may yield responses that are confusing.

- **Double negatives**
Do not ask questions that have two negatives in them, such as, “Do you disagree with the decision of the prosecutor in your county to not allow victims under the age of six to testify?”
- **Exclusivity**
When you give the respondent a choice of responses where you want them to select only one, you must be sure that the responses are mutually exclusive. For example, if you ask respondents where their office is located and the possible responses are “within the city,” “near to the police station,” and “in a high-rise office building” these answers would not meet the exclusivity criteria.
- **Assumptions about the respondent’s knowledge**
For example, your respondents may not be familiar with the strategic planning process. Make sure you ask questions that do not include steps you have already started that they would not understand.
- **Inaccuracy**
Make sure several people in your organization read over all of your questions to be sure they do not contain errors.
- **Appropriateness and referent problems**
Make sure that the respondents have the background that will allow them to answer the questions you are asking.

Be sure to review your questions to address any of these problems.

- **Step 6: Pilot test or otherwise review your survey.** It is very important to pilot test your survey. At the very least, find someone outside the process to review your survey. This will help you identify potential problems and correct them before the entire sample is surveyed.
- **Step 7: Survey carefully.** Surveys are usually conducted by mail (e.g., the use of survey instruments or questionnaires). Surveys can also be conducted by telephone, but these can be very time consuming and require a well trained telephone calling staff. In either event, you must strictly adhere to recognized survey methodologies, including sample selection, in order to ensure that your data are reliable and valid.

One of the most critical aspects of having a successful survey is to making sure that the response rate is high enough that you can feel confident that those who responded are similar to those who did not. Some of the keys to having a good response rate are:

- Make sure the instructions of how and when to complete the survey are clear.
 - Include a motivating cover letter from a person that will encourage the target audience to respond.
 - Include a return envelope with postage so that the respondent can easily mail it back.
 - Follow-up the survey with a postcard, telephone call, or both to remind respondents to return it.
 - Include an incentive for participation if you can.
- **Step 8: Analyze and present your data.** Record and review your data, taking care to interpret results recognizing the limitations of mail surveys. Present your data summaries appropriately (for example, by using descriptive statistics or charts) for review by others involved in the strategic planning process and/or outside, independent reviewers.

Where can you learn more about surveys?

There are many good survey research texts. Among the most respected is:

- Dillman's (1978) *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design*.⁸
- A more recent guide is Nardi's (2003) *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*.⁹

You can also look at some examples of surveys to get more ideas. The Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs has developed eight client surveys for victims of different types of programs. These sample surveys can be easily adapted to any jurisdiction, organization, and provide an excellent "baseline" for client survey development. The eight surveys can be accessed at: www.state.tn.us/finance/rds/victimshomepage.htm.

Conducting Focus Groups

A focus group can be defined as a group of interacting individuals having some common interest or characteristics, brought together by a moderator, who uses the group and its interactions as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue.¹⁰

Unlike the one-way flow of information in a one-on-one interview, focus groups generate data through the “give and take” of group discussion. Listening as people share and compare their different points of view provides a wealth of information—not just about *what they think*, but why *they think the way they do*.¹¹

What purposes do focus groups serve?

In strategic planning, focus groups serve a variety of purposes, which are to:

- **Identify crime victims’ most salient needs and concerns.**
While victims’ issues vary considerably, focus groups can elicit input from similar types of victims (for example, victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, etc.), a range of victims, and/or community- and system-based service providers, justice professionals, and allied professionals about the major needs of victims.
- **Seek input from a variety of stakeholders about victims’ rights and services.**
The “range” of stakeholders includes virtually *anyone* who is concerned about personal and community safety, and justice policy and practices, and should reflect the diversity of clients and communities served.
- **Identify strengths and gaps in public policy, victim assistance programming, victim services, and collaborative efforts that seek to benefit victims.**
A good focus group discussion guide will provoke input and insights into how victims are best *identified* and *served* through policy, programs and practices.
- **Provide a foundation for *quantitative research*, such as the development of victim-related surveys or needs assessment processes.**
The design of focus groups can lead to findings that help create quantitative research instruments and processes.
- **Contribute to the development of a strategic plan that identifies strengths and gaps in victims’ rights and services and either fills or builds upon them.**

What are key focus group characteristics?

Certain key characteristics will affect the information you get from your focus group.

- **Group size.** The research on focus groups generally recommends six to twelve participants as optimum for impact. Some statewide strategic planning initiatives for victim services have conducted focus groups with up to 20 participants; however, the larger the size of the group, the more difficult the group interactions are to manage.
- **Length of group discussion.** Most focus groups encompass 90 minutes to three hours of discussion. If focus groups are longer, it is necessary to build in breaks to allow participants time to refresh.
- **Group participants.** In traditional focus groups, participants are randomly chosen in a manner that seeks homogeneity among participants, in order to elicit opinions from a “like” representative group (for example, *all community-based victim service providers*). Depending upon the focus group goals, sponsors may wish to:
 - Seek complete homogeneity in participants.
 - Seek variety in participants based upon how their backgrounds, insights, perspectives and diversity by culture, gender and geography will contribute to goals and outcomes.
 - Conduct simultaneous focus groups where two different groups of participants (with each group’s participants alike, but different from the other group, i.e., a group of crime victims and a group of judges) respond to the same discussion guide questions, then are brought together to share responses and provide further opportunities for a combined group discussion.

How can you create a focus group?

Planning for a focus group involves completing eight key planning steps:

1. **Establish focus group goals.** The focus group process must include the development of clear and measurable goals. While these are useful tools for focus group sponsors, they are also essential for participants to understand why they are being asked to participate in a focus group session.
2. **Select a focus group facilitator.** The focus group facilitator is critical to the success of the entire process. He or she must function as a neutral leader who can also serve as a “referee,” if needed, during the group process. The focus group facilitator should possess the following qualities:

- **Independence:** Able to separate him/herself from the topics at hand, maintain complete objectivity, and have no hidden agendas that will affect the outcomes.
 - **Strong communication skills:** Clear, concise, honest, trustworthy, and able to relate to a variety of opinions without showing preferences.
 - **Strong group dynamics skills:** Able to engage in intense group discussions and encourage all members to participate, while maintaining a flow that keeps with the stated agenda.
 - **Cultural competence:** Skilled and comfortable facilitating individuals who represent diverse cultures (as well as gender, geography and disability).
 - **Flexibility:** Willing to freely follow group discussion and permit relevant diversions, if needed, to accommodate participants' input and ideas.
 - **Perception:** Able to read between the lines of participants' comments, and offer probes to elicit further discussions.
 - **Patience:** Capable of letting individuals complete their verbalizations without rushing them, and allowing time for reflection between questions.
 - **Respect:** Respectful of the diversity of participants, as well as the diversity of their opinions and input.
3. **Knowledge of issues:** While the facilitator need not be an expert in victim issues, s/he should be familiar with the dynamics of the field and of victimization in general (including victim trauma); and familiar with the goals of the overall strategic planning project.
4. **Develop the focus group agenda.** A typical agenda will include the following:
- Introduction of focus group sponsors and facilitator(s).
 - Introduction of participants.
 - Overview of strategic planning project and focus group goals (with software presentation, tear sheets, and/or individual handouts), and allowing participants to contribute to these goals.
 - Overview of group processes (including discussion guide, any individual work sheets, etc.).
 - Group establishment of ground rules.
 - Questions and answers.

5. **Develop the focus group discussion guide and related resources.** The focus group discussion guide is highly dependent upon overall strategic planning goals, as well as the goals of the focus group (see “Establish Focus Group Goals” above). To the degree possible, any data that have been received relevant to the overall strategic planning goals should be incorporated in the development of the discussion guide.
6. **Select focus group participants.** The goals and purpose of the focus group will determine whom to invite. Possible examples are listed below.
7. **Invite focus group participants.** The way you invite participants will depend on how you want to select participants. You may want to hand out flyers inviting random individuals in certain areas to participate. You may want to mail invitations with RSVP phone numbers, or call participants to arrange their participation.
8. **Arrange for your focus group logistics.** In order to prepare for your focus groups, you must:
 - Determine the location for your focus group.
 - Arrange for any audio/visual equipment you might need.
 - Arrange for the specific needs of your participants.
 - Arrange for participant resources.
 - Invite and confirm focus group participants.
 - Conduct a “Pilot Test” of the focus group.

Potential Participants for Statewide Strategic Planning Focus Groups

Academicians	Law enforcement
Appellate level representatives	Medical professionals
Civic leaders	Mental health professionals
Community-based victim service providers	Neighborhood associations and groups
Crime victims	Parole professionals
Criminal and juvenile justice professionals	Probation professionals
Corrections professionals	Prosecutors
Court administrators	Public policy makers (local and state)
Defense attorneys	Representatives of organizations that meet the needs of culturally diverse populations
Employment services	School representatives
Executive branch representatives (state)	Social services
Funding sources (public and private)	System-based victim service providers
Housing services	Transportation services
Inter-faith community representatives	Others
Judges	

Where can you learn more about focus groups?

To find information on analyzing data and writing a report, look at these resources:

M. Marczak and M. Sewell, "Using Focus Groups for Evaluation." *Cybernet Evaluation*, Tuscon, AZ: The University of Arizona.¹²

R.A. Krueger, 1988, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.¹³

Creating an Affinity Diagram

Affinity diagrams result from a facilitated process that can help your planning group come to consensus. They are an effective method to identify, gather, and organize ideas and opinions.

Affinity diagramming is best used in a relatively small group (no more than 12 people). It starts out with the identification of a broad issue or problem and then, through group processing, identifies more specific areas and proposed solutions.

In strategic planning, the affinity diagram can be used in virtually any group format (such as the planning leadership group, user groups, roundtables of planning participants, etc.). It validates individual perceptions and input while, at the same time, offers a forum for clarifying initial information and adding new concepts that are generated through the process.

How can you create an affinity diagram?

There are six key steps to developing an affinity diagram:

1. **State the problem or issue to be explored.** (It helps to use presentation software or other visual depictions that publicly display the problem or issue for all participants to view, and to provide an opportunity for clarification, if needed). A time limit should be established for this initial session (depending on the problem or issue, usually no more than 60 minutes).
2. **Brainstorm ideas to address the problem or issue (with clear guidelines that “no idea is a bad idea”).** The goal is to obtain *as much input and insight as possible* from this initial stage. Each participant should have a specified number of small adhesive notes or index cards (three to five are usually adequate) to write down his or her ideas (to encourage and document individual participation *prior* to group interactions).
3. **Have the facilitator collect adhesive notes or index cards and spread them out on a flat surface or secure them to a wall.**
4. **Arrange the adhesive notes or index cards into similar or related groups.** The facilitator’s challenge is to achieve consensus among participants about groupings, with “majority votes” utilized in cases where there may be disagreements. If additional insights result from the group’s discussion, they should be added on a small adhesive note or index card to the appropriate category.

5. **Create a title or heading for each grouping that summarizes the categories.**
6. **Summarize the final groupings or categories, along with the related subjects under each, on tear sheets or, preferably, in a report back to all participants.**

How can you refine the affinity diagram?

If you seek to establish priorities through the affinity process, one additional step can be taken to achieve consensus on key findings:

1. Once the complete diagram is visually posted, the facilitator states that each grouping should have “X” number of priorities.
2. Provide each participant with a specified number of sticky dots (usually two or three) for each category (these can be color coded to reflect the number of categories).
3. Allow 10-15 minutes for each participant to place his or her sticky dots under the item(s) that reflect *their highest priority* in each category.
4. Move the notes or cards with the largest number of dots to the *top* of each grouping. Identify them in any summary report as the “priorities of the group.”

2.3 CONSOLIDATING YOUR DATA

Consolidating your data is the final, and crucial, step in data collection. Without effectively consolidating your data, you will not be able to compare the different data you have found to see any contradictions or identify good and bad options for your organization. A crosswalk is a good way to consolidate your data.

Using a Crosswalk

How do you use a crosswalk?

When a strategic plan has several data sources, as is the case with a statewide needs assessment, a crosswalk helps to organize all of the information from all of the data sources about a certain topic. The crosswalk helps place all like information into one chart, so that it is easily compiled and compared. For example, if there is an interest in information about barriers to service delivery, the strategic planning team can look at that section of the crosswalk and know which data sources have barrier information, and which questions in the data collection instruments relate to barriers.

The crosswalk not only helps to ensure that all of the relevant information about a certain topic is being captured, but also shows what topics will have information from all sources or a combination of sources. This is helpful when the strategic planning team is interested in looking at differences or similarities across respondent groups.

How is a crosswalk constructed?

A crosswalk is separated into dimensions, or categories, of collected data. Each dimension contains all the types of data collected on that topic or kind of information from each of the assessment sources. Therefore, by looking at each dimension, the project team can immediately see what type of information has been collected on that topic and from where it was collected.

Most crosswalks are developed in table formats. Each dimension is reflected in a separate table of the crosswalk. Every data source is assigned a column in each of the tables. Each data source is represented in each dimension, so it is immediately evident if there is relevant information regarding a certain topic. The data source columns are consistent throughout the dimensions of the entire crosswalk to ensure easy access and avoid confusion of data sources.

What does a sample crosswalk look like?

The Oregon Department of Justice, Crime Victims' Assistance Section conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of the current state of victim services and victims' needs in the state. The project implemented a crosswalk of the survey/interview items, which organized the information across different survey fields.

The Oregon Victims of Crime Needs Assessment Crosswalk was separated into eight dimensions, or categories:¹⁵

1. Support and Services.
2. Organization Referral Sources.
3. Descriptive Information about Victims of Crime.
4. The Crimes and the Impact on Victims.
5. Service Needs, Gaps, and Barriers.
6. Crime Victims Rights and Compensation.
7. Service System: Recommendations for Improvement.
8. Descriptive Information about the Organization.

There were six data sources for the Oregon needs assessment:¹⁶

1. Service Provider Interviews.
2. Referral Source Surveys.
3. Victim Surveys.
4. Key Informant Interviews.
5. Focus Group Questions.
6. Public Meeting Questions.

When using the crosswalk, you can see which questions or topics were used by each data source. For example, if you were evaluating the support and services dimension of your research, and wanted to know which data sources discussed Victim Notification of Offender/Case Information, you could move down to the row which addresses this topic in the first table, and see that Service Provider Interviews, Referral Source Interviews, Victim Surveys, and Focus Group Questions did. Information gathered by each of these data sources can then be compiled, and results formed.

The blank spaces in the crosswalk indicate that the particular question being cataloged was not asked of that particular data collection group. For example, question 26i and 12i (the first on the crosswalk) were asked during service provider interviews, and referral source surveys, but not asked during victim surveys, key informant interviews, focus groups, or public meetings.

Sample Crosswalk

**Oregon Victims of Crime Needs Assessment
CROSSWALK OF INTERVIEW/SURVEY ITEMS (Draft 6/03/02)**

Service Provider Interview (P)	Referral Source Survey (R)	Victim Survey (V)	Key Informant Interview (K)	Focus Group Questions (F)	Public Meeting Questions (M)
<i>DIMENSION: Support and Services</i>					
26i. Please tell me whether or not your agency offered [each service] to victims of crime directly during the last fiscal year.	12i. Please tell me whether or not your agency offered [each service] to victims of crime directly during the last fiscal year.				
26ii. Total number of victims served last fiscal year.		10i. Did you receive this service?			
26iii. [if not provided:] Offered by other agencies in your service area?	12ii. Please mark each service that was referred out by your agency during the last fiscal year.				
		10ii. How useful was this service? 10iii. Did you need this service?		2. Were there services offered that were not helpful or not needed? 3. If you received services, which ones were useful?	1. If you or someone you know was victimized, what services did you find useful?

**Oregon Victims of Crime Needs Assessment (continued)
CROSSWALK OF INTERVIEW/SURVEY ITEMS (Draft 6/03/02)**

Service Provider Interview (P)	Referral Source Survey (R)	Victim Survey (V)	Key Informant Interview (K)	Focus Group Questions (F)	Public Meeting Questions (M)
26ss. Which services are provided by a person who has been victimized by crime?					
6uu. Which service, of all those available in your community, do victims usually start with?		11. What was the first agency you contacted for help after the crime? 12. Overall, how accessible were all the services you received or needed?			
26e. Did you offer Victim Notification of Offender/Case Information?	12e. Did you offer Victim Notification of Offender/Case Information?	5. If the crime was reported, were you kept informed of the status of the offender?		4. If your case was prosecuted, did you understand the information you received about the case? If not, what were the problems you encountered?	

**Oregon Victims of Crime Needs Assessment (continued)
CROSSWALK OF INTERVIEW/SURVEY ITEMS (Draft 6/03/02)**

Service Provider Interview (P)	Referral Source Survey (R)	Victim Survey (V)	Key Informant Interview (K)	Focus Group Questions (F)	Public Meeting Questions (M)
		6. If the crime was not reported to the police or sheriff, what was the primary reason for not reporting it?			3. What ideas do you have about addressing the problem of not reporting?
26g. Did you offer assistance with or support for preparing a Victim Impact Statement?	12g. Did you offer assistance with or support for preparing a Victim Impact Statement?	7. Did you write or orally present a Victim Impact Statement for the courts to consider at the sentencing hearing for the offender? 7a. If NO, why not?			
		9a-n. Please rate how helpful [family, friends, law enforcement officer, victim assistance liaison, etc.] were in assisting you as a crime victim/survivor.			

SECTION 2
TOOLS
ENDNOTES

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