



Resource Sharing Project Rural Training & Technical Assistance

Rural Outreach

According to the National Crime Victimization Study¹, someone experiences sexual violence in the United States every two minutes. Yet we consistently hear from rural advocates that they struggle to practice the skills necessary to support sexual assault survivors and that they know there are sexual assault survivors in their community who are not seeking services. Rather than waiting for sexual assault survivors to call or walk in our doors, we can proactively provide outreach to our communities and make sure that everyone knows that we are here to help.

Why is outreach so important?

Sexual assault outreach can take many forms but the purpose remains the same: informing our community of the many services we have available to support the long and short term needs of sexual violence survivors and their support systems. Outreach to our rural communities is how we let survivors know that our services exist and welcome them to join us to explore their healing.

In rural areas we often assume everybody knows everybody and every organization. While this may be true when it comes to your domestic violence services, it is often not true for sexual assault services. Our reputations within the community can be strong, but not always balanced. Intentional and focused outreach to sexual assault survivors is the key to creating a reputation for serving sexual assault survivors and providing high-quality services.

In addition to reaching sexual assault survivors, effective outreach can help secondary survivors, future volunteers, possible board members, and interested donors know the mission of our organization and our

¹ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2010-2014 (2015).

commitment to addressing and ending sexual violence. When speaking with our community we never really know who identifies as a survivor, who might be interested in volunteering, or who will become a vital community member engaged with our mission. Every presentation, speaking engagement, educational session, and training is an opportunity to engage the hearts and minds of our community.

Targeted outreach is outreach focused on connecting with a specific group of survivors. For some agencies that might be a particular county or portion of their service area. But for most agencies the groups of survivors missing from services are survivors with marginalized identities. Marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence and therefore should disproportionately make up the survivors we serve. Native communities, immigrants, refugees, communities of colors, the LGBTQ community, and folks with physical and cognitive disabilities all experience sexual violence at much higher rates than their counterparts and require specialized, respectful, and culturally appropriate outreach from us.

Where should I start?

A good place to start is by assessing your current outreach efforts and your community as a whole.

As a staff, create a list of current collaborations, partnerships, and people and organizations routinely referred to and by your program. Teamwork is important in creating this list because staff have often cultivated personal relationships and connections based on individual work



instead of program relationships. Add to the list what monthly or yearly events and meetings the program attends. Take a look at the list together. What surprises you? What is missing? What does this list say about your program's priorities?

Next, take a look at the demographics for your program's service area. Gather community demographics based on age, race, ethnicity, gender, income, language spoken, nationality, and education level. Compare this data to the demographic information of the survivors the program has served in the last few years. Gather internal data broken down by victimization type and services provided. Take a look at this information as a staff. What surprises you? Who is missing? What does this list say about your program's priorities?

Consider conducting a community assessment to gather more specific information about your service area. A community assessment will help your program listen to your community's experiences, hopes, and concerns around sexual violence so as to help your program better design outreach and services. For more information on how to put together a community assessment, check out [Listening to Our Communities: Assessment Toolkit](#).

How do I provide outreach to marginalized communities?

Every community is diverse, including rural communities. Rural communities contain many ethnicities, races, religions, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, nationalities, ages, and immigration statuses. Even if we know the marginalized community in our service area is very small we need to spend time reaching out.

Prior to any targeted outreach, our agencies should provide all staff, volunteers, and board members with training related to supporting specific marginalized communities present in your service area. It is also important to create a culture which encourages staff to examine their own beliefs about gender, race, sexuality, physical ability, etc. Our services are influenced by our personal views so we need to take the time to analyze our biases and then work diligently to change them before we serve sexual violence survivors.

To provide culturally specific outreach, we need to leave our offices and conduct outreach where community members are gathering. Build

relationships with formal or informal community leaders who can help you identify the events or spaces your program should be frequenting. Show respect and build trust by engaging in celebratory community events like pow-wows, gay pride parades, and day of the dead celebrations when invited.

As you engage in reflection and planning with your program consider these questions:

- What are the census demographics of my community, including communities of color, the LGBTQ community, and immigrant and refugee communities, among others? Keep in mind the limitations and underrepresentation of some populations within census information.
- Outreach involves developing a relationship with a specific population based on their needs as they perceive them. How do I engage with this community and learn about their needs respectfully?
- We know oppression complicates survivors' experiences of healing. What are the cultural resources and strengths that support a survivor's healing in my community?
- What do culturally relevant services look like in my community?
- How will I engage survivors in evaluating the effectiveness of my culturally specific outreach and services?

For more information on providing outreach to specific marginalized communities check out these resources:

[Building Meaningful Partnerships: Supporting Native Survivors in Rural Communities](#)

[Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Rural Sexual Violence survivors](#)

[Cultivating Inclusive Practices: Working with Rural Immigrant and Refugee Communities](#)

[Eight Step Advocacy Plan for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Survivors of Sexual Assault](#)

[Serving Sexual Violence Survivors with Disabilities](#)

Where do I do outreach?

Below are suggestions from rural advocates across the country:

- *“We are doing targeted outreach to the migrant farm worker community. Food banks are a great place for us. Because of the weather most of ours are outside. We keep mobile office hours near where migrant farmers are known to live, and we frequent the local housing authority.”*
- *“We are really starting to have conversations about doing outreach to the people and programs that are already serving sexual assault survivors. We know survivors are disclosing to people in our community- so how do we connect with them? How do we bridge that? Make sure those folks are prepared and ready to hear disclosures and that they know about our services.”*
- *“We dedicated a lot of time to creating resources to distribute in our community. Pull tab flyers, brochures, that kind of thing. Our coalition was able to help us figure out what to put it them.”*
- *“Presentations in schools and in the community are great. We are really able to dive in to our services and have great conversations.”*
 - *“Working with churches and other faith communities. A lot of the people in our community really value that support system so we started there.”*
- *“We reach out to the Knights of Columbus, Shriners, and other community groups for fundraising and partnership.”*
- *“Sexual Assault Awareness Month has always been such a great reason to open up the conversation about sexual assault in our community. Every year we really go big.”*
- *“The Cut It Out Program has been helpful for us. We talk to beauticians, salons, and barbers about our services.”*
- *“Our program is new to this community so we are really at the beginning of outreach. We have been spending most of our time just meeting with organizations and people. We walked down Main Street and went in every business and introduced ourselves. It was a little awkward, but people were interested in hearing about what we do.”*

- *“We have a support group in the local jail. We put up flyers in the jail and lots of people hear about services from the group.”*
- *“Our agency uses community specific statistics to plan the outreach we want to implement.”*
- *“We have two VERY large billboards advertising our services along the highway. That has been so helpful.”*
- *“Letter boards in local shops advertise for our program.”*
- *“Radio announcements. Our local station lets us record PSAs for free.”*
- *“The local newspaper- they publish for free!”*
- *“Social media! Mostly Facebook and our website. But people contact us that way so we have really started to try to engage with the community that way.”*
- *“Definitely utilizing volunteers has been the most helpful. We have volunteers go to events and represent our program. A lot of our volunteers also just personally connect folks to our services.”*



How do I reach my whole service area?

Rural dual/multi-service advocacy agencies are often responsible for very large service areas. It can feel like a constant struggle to find ways to advertise services, build relationships, and connect with communities, some of which are hours away. How do you build a reputation with a community three counties from the main office? Where do you start when no one has heard of your program?

Hiring advocates to exclusively provide sexual assault services, in addition to ensuring all staff members are able to provide crisis intervention to sexual violence survivors, can be the key to prioritizing outreach. This ensures that when staff isn't working with sexual assault survivors they will be able to spend time proactively improving sexual assault services and conducting outreach. Advocates will know it is the priority of their job to provide outreach and find creative ways to improve services for sexual assault survivors in the community.

Having sexual assault advocates out in the community is important for outreach to survivors, and critical to the success of sexual assault services in rural communities. Since sexual violence survivors are spread across our entire service area, more and more sexual violence advocates are spending time away from the office and instead building relationships in the community. When providing remote advocacy or hosting remote office hours take the opportunity to engage with the local community and build relationships. Office landlords, librarians, churches, and neighboring shops, are all opportunities to provide outreach.

As a program, explore remote advocacy and how to place an emphasis on outreach across the service area. For more information on remote advocacy check out [Remote Supervision in Rural Dual/Multi-Service Advocacy Agencies](#).

How do I get comfortable conducting outreach?

We hear from rural advocates that conducting outreach can be an intimidating process. The skills necessary for outreach- introducing yourself to strangers, representing your program, walking into unfamiliar businesses, making cold calls, speaking confidently and persuasively to

your community- don't always come naturally. How do advocates get comfortable providing outreach to their rural community? A few rural advocates give their advice:

- *“I am not shy but I still really relate to this struggle. For me I needed to spend time familiarizing myself with the materials I was handing people. That made me feel really comfortable and confident talking to folks. I usually ask for just five minutes of their time. Oh, and practice with your peers!”*
- *“I suggest reading about the movement. Read a few books, find a few articles, and familiarize yourself with the anti-sexual assault movement. This will help you feel knowledgeable and feel comfortable. Consider asking your supervisor what books you should be reading.”*
- *“Try starting somewhere you are comfortable. If you come from a religious background, start by talking with faith communities. Practice, practice, practice. Once you are feeling a little more confident, then push yourself by speaking with someone unfamiliar. Practice feeling a little uncomfortable.”*

How can coalitions help?

State/territorial coalitions can help programs with several aspects related to providing outreach to rural communities. Many coalitions collect or keep statistics on sexual violence, and can help programs develop statistics and demographic information for their particular communities. Your coalition can help identify target audiences for outreach and outreach strategies that will work best for your program and service area. State/territorial coalitions can also provide training on outreach and community education skills. In addition, many coalitions may have outreach materials specific to sexual assault, such as brochures and informational cards developed that they can share with your program to customize for your community.

Despite the necessity of outreach to meaningfully serve sexual assault survivors, programs have not always felt that outreach activities were prioritized by funding, and may be unsure how to report on outreach activities. Your state/territorial coalition can work with your program to capture outreach efforts in reports to funders and to write grants for

outreach. Coalitions and programs can also work together to detail the importance of outreach and create support for the ongoing work of outreach at your program and in your community.

Defining outreach as informing our community of the many services we have available to support the long and short term needs of sexual violence survivors and their support systems means that it is a vital component of our anti-sexual violence work with our communities. Removing obstacles and developing skills for effective outreach will create access for sexual assault survivors and community relationships for our programs.



This publication was prepared by Leah Green, RSP Rural TA Specialist, with input from many Rural Grantees. For more information, contact leah@iowacasa.org or visit www.resourcesharingproject.org/rural-training-and-technical-assistance.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2015-TA-AX-K018 awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

CREATING A STRATEGIC OUTREACH PLAN



1. Set your outreach goals

Example goal: Increase awareness of our services in Cedar County.

2. Identify target audiences

Example audience: Faith communities in Cedar County

3. Craft a message with the target audience in mind

Example message: Faith leaders are often a trusted support system in times of crisis and trauma. We want to help you feel confident in supporting sexual assault survivors in your community and make sure you know we are able to offer services to survivors you are supporting.

4. Develop activities, events, and methods of outreach to the target audience

Example activity: Our program will present at the Cedar County Faith Council meeting in April. In May, I will meet one-on-one with interested faith leaders to discuss our services more in depth.

Execute your plan!

6. Evaluate the outcome

