



STOP Administrators' Role in Improving Access to Services That Meet the Unique Needs of Immigrant and Limited English Proficient Survivors

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This fact sheet is designed to identify the priority considerations for STOP Administrators leveraging their role as funders to improve access to justice and victim services for immigrant and limited English proficient (LEP) survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence. Understanding the unique dynamic of abuse and coercive control experienced by immigrant survivors and the full range of legal rights options helps STOP Administrators: select grantees employing best practices; monitor grantees' progress; encourage the growth of collaborative partnerships among programs; and identify and leverage funds to meet the training and technical assistance needs of grantees.

Research on barriers to access to life saving services and support for immigrant survivors demonstrates that building victim and legal services providers' knowledge about the full range of services and legal options immigrant survivors can legally access is key to immigrant and LEP survivors' ability to receive the services they need to heal and thrive. Best practices for working with immigrant and LEP survivors requires employing a holistic approach designed to ensure that grantees know about and collaborate to ensure that all survivors and their children in the state access all of the assistance they are eligible to receive under, not only immigration laws, but also family, public benefits, VOCA victim assistance and victim compensationⁱⁱ, language access, and legal services laws. The goal is to provide STOP Administrators a quick reference overview that highlights key issues and legal rights, options and language access requirements with links to additional materials, tools and resources that will support the work of STOP Administrators and grantees.

What are the barriers and common challenges that immigrant and LEP survivors face?

Perpetrators of family and sexual violence against immigrant and LEP victims have additional tools that can be extremely effective in locking victims into abusive homes and jobs and in isolating and silencing victims preventing them from seeking help. The following combine with use of culturally based coercion tactics to create significant barriers:

- Immigration related abuse
 - o Fear of deportation: Perpetrators of violence against immigrant women are actively involved in efforts to trigger the victim's deportationⁱⁱⁱ as retaliation, to elude prosecution, to defeat issuance of protections orders and win custody of children
 - O Abusers who have the power to file applications for legal immigration status for their immigrant spouses and children will not file immigration papers or with use threats to not file or withdraw papers filed as powerful coercive control tools locking victims in abusive relationships^{iv}
- Language barriers

- O Abusers of LEP victims the victim's limited English proficiency and the abuser's ability to speak English as a key aspect of the coercive control in the relationship to deny victims information, provide misinformation, confuse victims about options available to help them, and hamper justice system access by serving as the victim's "interpreter". V
- O Language barriers prevent abused immigrants from obtaining police protection impeding victim's ability to communication with law enforcement when police respond to calls to help from victims. Results include: police using the perpetrator to interpret at crime scenes and failure to take police reports including in sexual assault cases involving immigrant victims^{vi}
- o Language barriers make it difficult for LEP victims to access victim services programs, shelters, legal services, and the court system^{vii}

• Fear of losing children

- o Fear of losing children is one of the most significant factors that locks immigrant survivors in abusive homes. viii
- O Perpetrators use citizenship and legal immigration status to convince victims that if she tries to leave the relationship, the perpetrator will get custody of the children and victims will not see their children again. ix
- O Untrained judges misled by perpetrators who provide legally incorrect information about immigration law to courts rely upon that information to issue custody orders that are harmful to immigrant victims and their children.^x
- O Many immigrant victims stay with abusers because they believe they cannot survive economically without the abuser's support. They do not know that there are services available to help victims open to all immigrants, xi they qualify for immigration relief that brings work authorization xii and public benefits access, or that they can filed for public benefits that their children are eligible to receive. xiii

What legal rights and services do immigrant survivors have access to?

STOP Administrators funding and monitoring grantees serving immigrant victims should ensure that programs are facilitating access for immigrant survivors and their children to the full range of assistance that survivors are legally able to access. The following is a list of the major forms of legal relief programs need to be able to help victims access:

• <u>Language Access</u> xiv

Since delay or denial of access to interpreters can have life, death, health or other serious consequences for limited English Proficient crime victims the requirements for providing language access to victim services, legal services, police, prosecutors and the court at its zenith and all grantees should be required to have language access plans that address crucial language access needs. Facilitating language access is an extremely important role STOP Administrators can play. Grant application should ask whether the agency has a language access plan, what steps they take to provide language access and should require that budgets include a line item for interpretation and translation. This role can include monitoring for language access compliance, requiring all grantees by the end of the grant to have language access plans and convening trainings for grantees on language access are key steps to take.

• Access to Legal Services^{xv}

Immigrant victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, and any U visa criminal activity are eligible for legal services including Legal Services Corporation funded legal assistance regardless of the victim's immigration status. The abuse may have occurred in the U.S. or abroad and the representation is open to children and adult victims.

<u>Legal Protections under Family Laws</u>

Immigrant victims have the same rights under all state family laws as all other victims in protection order, custody, divorce and other family court proceedings. Victim safety is promoted when lawyers and advocates screen victims early so that they can file and have their immigration case pending before the abuser is served with papers in a protection order, custody or family court proceeding. Significant numbers of abusers report victims in efforts to trigger their deportation and filing the victims' immigration provides VAWA confidentiality xix protection from deportation. Immigrant victims' willingness to obtain protection orders, custody, and child support increases significantly once victims have filed immigration cases. Xxi Programs serving immigrant victims in family court cases need training to effectively address these issues and to ensure that they are seeking family court remedies that address victim's language, cultural and immigration status need including through seeking creative civil protection order remedies. Xxiii Research has found that victim advocates and attorneys play a vital role promoting victim safety through protection orders. Xxiii

• Immigration relief <u>xxiv</u>

For more than two decades Congress created wide range of forms of immigration relief available to offer protection from deportation, access to work authorization and a path to legal immigration status for immigrant crime victims. To effectively serve immigrant crime victims advocates, attorneys and justice system personnel need to be aware of, able to screen for, and who in the state has the expertise to effectively serve immigrant victims in the following cases:

- VAWA self-petition^{xxv}
 - o Available for abused spouses and children of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents, and abused parents of U.S. citizens over 21 years of age
- VAWA cancellation of removal and VAWA suspension of deportation xxvi
 - o Available for abused spouses and children of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents to receive protection from deportation
- Battered spouse waiver (VAWA)xxvii
 - o Available for abused spouses of U.S. citizens with two-year conditional permanent residency
- U visas xxviii
 - o Available for immigrant survivors who have suffered substantial harm from criminal activity and have been, are being, or are likely to be helpful in the

detection, investigation, prosecution, conviction or sentencing of a crime perpetrator

- T visas^{xxix} and Continued Presence^{xxx}
 - o Available for victims of severe forms of human trafficking
- Abused spouse of visa holders xxxi
 - Available to spouses battered or subjected to extreme cruelty by spouses with the following visas: A (diplomatic visa), E(3) (Australian specialty occupation worker visa), G (foreign government or international organization members' visa), H (employment visas)
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)xxxii
 - Available to children who are or were abused, battered, neglected, or abandoned by one or both parents
- Deferred Actions (DACA)**xxiii
 - o Available as deferred action for child arrivals
- Asylum xxxiv
 - o Available to individuals who have a well-founded fear or persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group
 - Individuals who are survivors of domestic violence may receive gender-based asylum

• Public benefits

Programs and services necessary to protect life and safety xxxv open to all persons without regard to immigration status these services include shelter, transitional housing, xxxvi victim services, emergency medical cases, police assistance, crisis counseling intervention, violence and abuse prevention, treatment of mental illness or substance abuse, help during adverse weather conditions, soup kitchens, community food banks, elementary and secondary education, school lunch and breakfast, WIC, nutrition programs for those requiring special assistance, and immunizations, testing and treatment for communicable diseases,. Immigrant victims are also able to file for and receive public benefits that their children qualify for on their children's behalf. xxxvii

As immigrant victims begin the process of filing for immigration relief their access to state and federal public benefits grows. **xxxviii** Which public benefits an immigrant victim qualifies for depends on the type of immigration relief the victim files for, the state the victim lives in and when the victim first entered the United States. **xxix** Due to these complexities it is important that grantees working with immigrant victims accompany them when victims are applying for state and federal public benefits to ensure that the victim is able to access all the assistance that they are eligible to receive. **I NIWAP* has developed an infographic map**Ii* where victim advocates, attorneys and others working with immigrant victims can see in each state which immigrant victims qualify for TANF, food stamps, public and assisted housing, post-secondary educational grants and loans, health care subsidies, access to the health care exchanges, subsidized child care, driver's licenses, low income home energy assistance and FEMA assistance.

What is the STOP Administrator's role in assisting immigrant survivors?

STOP Administrators play a unique role in providing meaningful access to necessary services for immigrant and LEP victims of violence. STOP Administrators can better fund projects and most effectively provide necessary technical assistance to grantees in the state by improving their understanding of the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence experienced by immigrant victims and immigrant and LEP victims legal options. These include understanding the barriers that immigrant and LEP crime victims face when engaging in the civil and criminal justice systems and with community based victim services programs, and by being aware of the services to which victims are legally entitled without regard to immigration status. The following are some of the ways in which STOP Administrators can use their knowledge of the information outlined above to leverage their resources and fund programs and projects that support activities which promote meaningful access to the full range of services, legal protections and other assistance available to and designed to help immigrant and LEP victims and their children:

• State planning process

- o Incorporate accessibility for immigrant and LEP survivors in the Implementation Planning process to develop statewide priorities for funding projects that serve diverse populations of immigrant and LEP survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence
- Develop funding priorities that supports projects that ensure accessibility for immigrant and LEP survivors

• Requests for Proposals (RFP) and grant award process

- o Determine whether LEP programs and accessibility are built into the budget for a given project or built into the agency budget
- o Make having or willingness to develop a language access plan, implementation of the language access plan and keeping the language access plan and training on the plan for agency staff up to date and mandatory in RFPs because all agencies receiving federal funds are required to provide language access

• Supporting grantees

- o Assist grantees in accessing technical assistance locally and nationally to support funded projects that assist immigrant and LEP survivors
- o Build ally relationships between all grantees and culturally and linguistically specific community based organizations
- o Foster relationships between programs serving immigrant victims and police and prosecution agencies in the state
 - Research indicates that stronger relationships between programs serving immigrant victims with police and prosecution agencies results in more certifications for U and T visas xliii
 - Where police, prosecutors or courts are reticent to sign U or T visa certifications, STOP Administrators can be the ally to bring the grantees and government officials together to build understanding of and the benefits to law enforcement and prosecutors having active U and T visa certification programs.
 - This can include:

- <u>Technical Assistance</u>: Obtaining technical assistance for grantees and government officials from national and state based technical assistance programs; and
- Training: Bringing national technical assistance providers to the state to train law enforcement and prosecutors and to train advocates and attorneys to build strong working relationships with law enforcement and prosecutors that promote both certification and better outcomes in criminal cases involving immigrant survivors. connecting grantees and/or law enforcement with national technical assistance providers and bringing specialized training into the state on certification xliii
- Connect grantees to resources, tools, check lists, question and answer materials developed by national technical assistance providers who are experts on assisting grantees and other professionals in meeting the needs of immigrant and LEP survivors^{xliv}

• Monitoring and grant reports

- Talk to grantees and staff of funded programs to determine how much they know about:
 - Immigrant victims legal rights under immigration, family and public benefits laws
 - LEP plans and steps grantees can take to further their LEP plans
- o Offer technical assistance to help programs re-evaluate their current strategies and practices for serving immigrant and LEP victims
- o Ensure that any situations in which services could may be denied to an immigrant or LEP victim are reported to supervisors in order to determine whether a strategy needs to be developed in order to address unique cases and meet the needs of a broader range of immigrant and LEP survivors
- o Specify what needs to be included in grant reports to incentivize grantees to:
 - Attend specialized training that increase grantees knowledge of legal rights and best practices for serving immigrant and LEP survivors
 - Offer particularized services that meet the needs of survivors from diverse immigrant and LEP communities
- o Consider developing checklists and questions to ask grantees for monitoring and grant reporting on services provided to immigrant and LEP survivors

• <u>Limited English Proficient (LEP) programs</u>

- o Provide data on language needs within the state, so programs understand why the provision of language access programs is important
- o Prioritize the development of language access plans in RFPs and requirements grantees must agree to upon receiving grant funding
- o Consider giving more points in the grant competition process to programs with language access plans
- Leverage resources within the state to maximize the impact of LEP specific projects
- o Monitor sub-grantees compliance with LEP accessibility

See Meaghan Fitzpatrick, et A

i See Meaghan Fitzpatrick, et al., Access to Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing for Battered Immigrants and Immigrant Victims of Crime, Nat'l Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (June 3, 2014), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/pubs/access-shelters-housing/; see also Benish Anver & Leslye E. Orloff, Protection Orders and Battered Immigrants: The Impact of Attorneys and Advocates, Nat'l Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project (June 20, 2014), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/pubs/battered-imms-cpo-advocacy/. ii Victim compensation is available without regard to immigration status in all states and U.S. jurisdictions except Alabama.

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^{*} See generally Soraya Fata, et al., Custody of Children in Mixed-Status Families: Preventing the Misunderstanding and Misuse of Immigration Status in State-Court Custody Proceedings, 47 FAM. L. Q. 191 (2013), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/pubs/mixed-status-fams-child-custody/.

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xl See Anna Pohl, et al., Barriers to Accessing Services: The Importance of Advocates Accompanying Battered Immigrants Applying for Public Benefits, in Breaking Barriers: A COMPLETE GUIDE TO LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESOURCES FOR BATTERED IMMIGRANTS, NAT'L IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROJECT & LEGAL MOMENTUM (July 1, 2013), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/pubs/ch4-3-importance-advocates/.

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^{xiii} See GISELLE HASS, ET AL., *U-Visa Legal Advocacy: Overview of Effective Policies and Practices,* NAT'L IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROJECT (Dec. 12, 2013), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/pubs/uvisa-collaboration-policy-brief/.

xiiii See NAT'L IMMIGRANT WOMEN'S ADVOCACY PROJECT, Law Enforcement Training Outreach Flyer (Dec. 12, 2016), http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/law-enforcement-training-outreach-flyer/.

xliv See the National Immigrant Women's Advocacy Project's American University Washington College of Law Web Library of materials: http://niwaplibrary.wcl.american.edu/ and the Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Gender Based Violence's web materials on Language Access http://www.api-gbv.org/organizing/interpretation.php