

Step by Step:

Tools for Developing a Coordinated Response to Violence Against Women



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We appreciate and acknowledge all those who in their communities are working across sectors to respond to and end violence against women, children and vulnerable men. CCWS has had the privilege of working with many communities in British Columbia and know that across the Province collaboration efforts have made substantive improvements to women’s safety that, in many situations, has saved lives.

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CCWS interviewed or received Interview Guides from Chairs of Community Coordination Initiatives whose membership in coordination committees had sustained many years of working together in ebb and flow, and who along the way had significantly impacted women’s safety in their community. We also received information from newer groups that are doing innovative work. We know of many creative projects taken on by Violence Against Women Coordination Initiatives and while we were unable to include them all, we did want to ensure the Guide had some of the voices of the on the ground work of coordination. To that end, we posted on the CCWS and EVA BC listservs a call for “Lessons Learned”. We were excited by the number of responses we received and not at all surprised at the positive impact community coordination was having across the province.

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Three Definitions of Coordination:

1. *Defining Domestic Violence Against Women and Battering*, from National Training Project/Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project

“An interagency effort to change the climate of tolerance toward battering by institutionalizing practices and procedures which centralize victim safety and the notion of accountability in domestic assault cases.”

2. *Building Partnerships to End Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Rural and Isolated Communities*

“Coordination of a community’s response to violence against women through the building of a series of collaborative partnerships among responders.

‘Coordination’ is an active word that describes the outcome (a more coordinated response), not the tool to achieve this (working in partnership).”

3. Community Coordination for Women’s Safety

“An interagency effort that reflects and respects the mandates and wisdom of many disciplines and voices and is created by **intentional** cross-sector dialogue, focused on the task of collectively understanding and defining what ‘safety’ really looks like in practice.”

About CCWS: Background and History

The Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) Program is an outcome of the work of local and provincial women's anti-violence organizations and Victim Services and Community Program Division (VSCPD) of the Ministry of Attorney General. The Program began in 2001 as the result of several years of consultation and coordination by the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ending Violence Association of BC (EVA BC).

The Program's development and start-up was managed through a partnership between EVA BC and VSCPD. Approximately nine months after the intensive work of project start-up, EVA BC took over as the sole managing partner, while VSCPD continued to participate actively in the Provincial Working Group. Funding for the CCWS Program has been provided by a broad spectrum of sources, namely: the Law Foundation of BC; the National Crime Prevention Centre's Community Mobilization Program and Crime Prevention Partnership Program (Justice Canada); the National Victims Policy Centre of the Department of Justice; and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services. The Law Foundation of BC was the major funder for the first 2.5 years of the Program. As of 2009, the CCWS Program has been funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Managing Partner: The Ending Violence Association of British Columbia

The Ending Violence Association of British Columbia (EVA BC) provides support and training to approximately 240 anti-violence programs across BC: Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs, Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs, Sexual Assault Centres, STV Outreach Programs and Multicultural Outreach Programs. The mandate of EVA BC is to provide support and training to the anti-violence programs under our umbrella. We also undertake research, conduct analysis of policy and legislation, develop and distribute resources and tools, educate the public (including government bodies) on the needs of victims of violence, develop and maintain standards for the provision of service and work to foster the development of relevant cross-sector initiatives across BC.

CCWS Program Mandate

Community Coordination for Women's Safety works with violence against women responders in communities across the Province of BC, and at the provincial level, to support the development of integrated, coordinated responses to gender-based violence. CCWS aims to increase the safety of women across BC who have experienced violence.

To this end, we:

- provide consultation, information, analysis and training to communities to help them develop and maintain cross-sector community coordination on violence against women;
- support the development of solutions and strategies at local, regional and provincial levels that address sexual and domestic violence and increase women's access to justice and other systems.

The CCWS program includes a Provincial Working Group made up of senior police and RCMP members, representatives from relevant provincial ministries, major provincial non-profit organizations and members of the civil and criminal bar. It also includes members who represent Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and immigrant and refugee women. Working Group members provide technical expertise and liaison between their sector and the program. Specific local or regional concerns that have broader implications are also addressed by the CCWS Provincial Working Group.

The work of the CCWS Program has been grounded in evidence-based research and the experience of communities in Canada and the United States, where coordination among law enforcement and community service providers has proven to be one of the most effective methods of increasing women's safety. Communities with a coordinated response are more likely than other communities to have more effective referral systems, a better understanding of mutual roles and responsibilities and a more efficient use of resources.

BC now has over 50 local Violence Against Women coordination initiatives. They involve representatives from a cross-section of community-based and system-based agencies addressing violence against women.

A Note About Language

Different coordination initiatives may use different terms for the same concept.

We have chosen certain terms to use here in an effort to be consistent throughout the guide:

“Coordination”

In this guide, we use “coordination” to mean coordination of a community’s response to violence against women through the building of a series of collaborative partnerships among responders. For us, “coordination” is an active word that describes the outcome (a more coordinated response), not the tool to achieve this (working in partnership).

“Violence against women”

Our focus in this guide is on certain forms of violence against women: violence in intimate relationships, sexual assault and criminal harassment.

* Some coordination initiatives focus only on violence in intimate relationships and refer to themselves as “VAWIR” (Violence Against Women in Relationships committees), they are affected or guided by policy that is specific to violence in intimate relationships, for example, the BC Violence Against Women in Relationships policy or the RCMP Violence in Relationships policy.

“Victims of violence”

Please note that the language we use in this guide assumes that victims of violence are female and offenders are male. This means that we are focusing on violence against women in heterosexual relationships, given that the majority of violence in relationships is perpetrated by men against women. We in no way want to disregard the existence of males being victimized or violence in same sex relationships.

The Case for Coordination

Over the last ten years in BC there have been a number of dramatic and tragic deaths of women and children as a result of domestic violence. In 2002, Sonya Handel's six children were killed by her estranged husband who was "troubled and abusive", in Quatsino. In 2003, Sherry Heron and Anna Adams were killed in Mission Memorial Hospital by Sherry's estranged husband. Denise Purdy was also killed by her estranged husband in 2003 in Nanaimo. That same year, Lorraine Sue Awasis was shot and killed by police during a domestic violence altercation in Alert Bay. In 2006, Navreet Waraich was stabbed to death by her husband in New Westminster. Surrey school teacher Manjit Panghali and her unborn child were also murdered in 2006 and her husband charged in connection. That same year Gurjett Kaur Ghuman was shot in the face and blinded by her estranged husband while dropping their daughter off for visitation - he then turned the gun on himself. In 2007, in Oak Bay, Christian Lee, his mother Sunny Park and her parents were killed by her estranged husband who had a history of abusive behavior - he then killed himself. In 2008, the three children of Darcy Schoenborn were killed by their estranged father in their mother's Merritt home when she had left to get groceries. Majit Kaur Sandhu was also murdered in 2008 - both she and her daughter were shot by her husband, her daughter survived. On Father's Day in 2009, Sukhwinder Kaur Johal was seriously injured and her two teenage sons were murdered by her new husband after it was disclosed that she was planning to leave the relationship. While on vacation in India, Vancouver resident Kuldip Kaur was murdered on her way to a wedding in March of 2009. Her husband was arrested in connection with the murder. In 2010, Tejinder Kaur Dhanoa was murdered in her Surrey home, her husband has been charged in connection.

Since the 1995 shooting of Sharon Velisek in Vernon and the April, 1996 Vernon massacre involving the murders of 9 family members of the Ghakhal/Chahal family, much progress has been made in the area of violence against women. A firm foundation has been built resulting from a Ministry of Attorney General Inquiry chaired by Justice Josiah Wood in the late 1990s and other more recent high profile Coroner's inquests. Sadly, these more recent tragedies remind us that more needs to be done.

Recommendations from Coroners' inquests and/or local inquiries have identified what may have helped prevent tragic deaths like the ones above: a coordinated response system, a network that could identify and address risk and provide specialized support in a coordinated and proactive way that involves a variety of systems. This echoes similar inquest findings in Ontario.

Major reports and much of the research on violence against women have demonstrated that coordinating the work of various response systems is crucial to keeping women safe.

“It is the power we gain when we come together with other people to make change in our lives - when we recognize that we are a community.”
- Paul Kivel, quoted in K. Louise Schmidt's *Transforming Abuse*, 1995

Report to the Chief Coroner of BC

Findings and Recommendations of the Domestic Violence Death Review Panel, May 2010:

“Victims and perpetrators of domestic violence encounter a number of service providers as they progress through the legal system. It is absolutely critical that there be a standardized, collaborative approach to domestic violence by all agencies, ministries, and support networks reinforced by enhanced public awareness of the risks for families in distress.”

Many of the women involved in the recent domestic violence tragedies in BC faced particular barriers that made it more difficult for them to access critical support systems. Sherry Heron suffered from physical disabilities related to injuries to her head and pelvis. Lorraine Sue Awasis was Aboriginal and living on reserve. Denise Purdy was an immigrant woman of colour, Sonya Handel was living in a remote and isolated community, Sunny Park was an immigrant woman with language barriers. Navreet Waraich, Sukhwinder Kaur Johal and her two sons were all recent immigrants. The experiences of Heron, Awasis, Handel, Purdy, Park, Waraich and Johal reflect the reality of many women in our culturally and geographically diverse province.

In places where coordination exists, there have been substantive improvements to local community safety strategies. Policies have been created or improved and protocols between key responders have been developed to address cases with a high risk of lethality. Through collaboration, local safety nets can be tightened and lives saved.

CCWS brings cross-sectoral groups of responders together to facilitate preventative, collaborative safety planning and long term strategic planning for women's safety.

Why We Wrote this Guide

Each year, new communities, mostly from rural regions, connect with CCWS about local issues that are impacting women's safety. Often, alongside many other issues, is the fragmentation of their local response and the increased risk to women perpetuated by this lack of coordination.

People who connect with us who are engaged in coordination always want to know what others are doing, how they have overcome challenges and what successes they can share. We wrote this guide to address these questions and to bring to light the many successes of British Columbia's unique violence against women coordination movement.

Each section will include tools CCWS has developed to help communities work in collaboration. We have ensured that they are in an easy format so they can be printed off and photocopied easily for use in communities. We hope the readers of this guide will find the tools contained herein helpful and in some small way be inspired. More tools can be found at www.endingviolence.org/ccws/.

Addressing the Fragmented Response

What is a “Fragmented Response?”

There are many services that respond to violence against women, including: Community-Based Victim Services, STV Counselling, STV Outreach, Multicultural Outreach, Transition Houses, Aboriginal organizations, assaultive men’s treatment programs, police-based victim services, tribal councils and faith organizations, police, child protection, hospitals, probation, social assistance, etc. A woman who has been abused comes into contact with these response services in a number of possible ways. She may involuntarily become involved with police or child protection due to reports by a third party or she may seek help herself from a hospital, a community-based agency or the legal system.

When a survivor of violence comes into contact with community-based or systems-based services and those services do not have a coordinated response in place, the survivor can encounter gaps in service or lack of coordination of services that may seriously compromise her safety. This is what we mean by a fragmented response. For example, her community-based support worker may not have the working relationship with police that would help the woman gain the protection she needs or police may not refer women to appropriate community-based services due to lack of information or awareness or policies may exist that create barriers to a seamless referral system.

Offenders can also encounter gaps. These gaps can include a lack of voluntary and mandated treatment programs, lack of consistent enforcement of court orders, and sentencing to anger management or mental health counselling instead of treatment that addresses issues of power and control.

Individual or cultural beliefs and attitudes can also contribute to fragmentation of services. Sometimes, service providers may struggle to work collaboratively because of historic judgments, beliefs or lack of information about colleagues in other disciplines or other areas of difference such as race, gender, class and ability.

The Impact of Fragmentation

Women who are accessing services know when services are working well and can experience firsthand the direct benefits of this. They also know when collaboration is not happening. An important BC study confirmed that women who had experienced violence were well aware of how coordinated the response was when they sought help.

In *Measures of Empowerment for Women Who are Victims of Violence and Who Use the Justice System* written by Mary Russell in 2001, one victim was quoted as saying:

“The police, Crown and Probation all worked together and talked to each other in fixing the no-contact order.’... In contrast, victims were also aware when the service they received was from an isolated unit [non-coordinated] perspective. For example, one victim who felt that she had been ill-served, that there was little sharing of information between services, described her experience as follows: ‘There was no team work because each is an individual organization, and you are just left hanging there.’”

Survivors of abuse usually struggle with a great deal of shame and self blame: the offenders tell them that they have somehow caused the abuse and many misguided societal attitudes confirm this accusation. Many survivors suffer from post-traumatic stress and physical injuries or serious long-term side effects on their health.

Most women who are in abusive relationships want the violence to stop, but do not necessarily want the relationship to end. However, community and system based responders, as well as the general public, often focus on the woman leaving as the solution to the violence. Women who do not leave an abusive relationship may try several times before leaving for good. The services a woman is able to access during these attempts to gain safety will have everything to do with whether she feels safety is possible.

In addition to these factors, there is the fact that many survivors of abuse are still not safe after they leave their relationship: the abuse often continues or even escalates once a survivor leaves. Forty percent of women with a violent ex-partner reported that violence occurred after the couple separated, and most stated that the assaults became more severe or began after separation (Statistics Canada Juristat, Vol. 21 No 7, 2001). It is common for a woman who has been abused to live with a high level of justified fear due to ongoing violence and/or threats of violence. In a small isolated

community, a woman may be at additional risk where there is a concerted effort on the part of community leaders to deny or minimize the incidence of violence, or where people who speak out about violence are threatened or assaulted.

When a survivor falls through the gaps created by uncoordinated services, the danger is that she may decide to give up and never attempt to access services again. Fragmentation of services may reinforce the messages that many offenders give their victims: it's your fault; no one will help you; you will never be safe from me. Lack of coordination of services may also lead to reduced levels of emotional support or physical safety for abused women. Gaps in services for offenders reduce the offenders' ability to access effective services and therefore reduce women's safety. A woman's safety is also negatively impacted by a fragmented response to her children's needs or to the needs of her extended family.

Programs designed to prevent violence also need to be part of a collaborative and coordinated response, as they help change the societal attitudes that lead to violence. It is important that these programs benefit from the knowledge that frontline systems and community workers have gained through their work with survivors of violence. Collaboration between education programs and other community services can ensure that educators have the necessary skills to handle disclosures from audience members and that they deliver messages, information and referrals that are consistent with the support services that community would provide.

Getting Started: Building a Strong Foundation

Processes that increase a woman's safety also increase her children's safety and security at the same time. Like any community-driven initiative, to be successful and sustainable coordination related to violence against women must start from the ground up with all the key stakeholders building a foundation for the work together. The quality of the foundation will be reflected in the work outcomes the group produces. If a strong foundation is built, outcomes should include improved and consistent protection strategies implemented by all responders. This will result in a safer community for women and children, as well as better accountability standards for those who offend.

Essential Building Blocks of a Strong Foundation:

- Building Strong Relationships
- Recognizing Stereotyping
- Recognizing Power Imbalances
- Diversity
- Finding Common Ground
 - Beliefs
 - Purpose
 - Values
- Keeping Stakeholders Engaged
- Strong Leadership
- The Role of the Chair in Coordination
- Shared Leadership
- Accountability
- Administrative Tasks for Coordination Initiatives

Building Strong Relationships

In science, in the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting - to many physicists, they are *all* there is to reality. One physicist, Henry Stapp, describes elementary particles (life's creators) as, "in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things". In other words, nothing exists independent of its relationship with something else. And "if nothing happens except in relationship to something else, we can move away from our need to think of things as polar opposites." (*Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley, 1994)

This may not seem relevant to our role in coordination but in fact, what we are saying is that nothing we do will be more important than our constant attention to fostering the relationships of the members of the group with one another and the actions that will promote and strengthen these relationships.

"Relationship takes precedence over getting and keeping power, reputation and honor. Rather than conquering enemies one hopes for transformation, turning opponents into friends and allies to deal with common problems."

- Argenta Friends Press, quoted in K. Louise Schmidt's *Transforming Abuse*, 1995

An ancient Sufi teaching captures this: "You think because you understand *one* you must understand *two*, because one and one makes two. But you must also understand *and*." (Wheatley)

This relatively new way of thinking about the world is changing how we view group dynamics and organizational change. We no longer think of a group or organization as made up of only *parts* that contribute to a whole. Now it's important to see a group as a constantly changing set of *connections* or *currents* working towards wholeness. And if we begin to shift our thinking in this way it is easier to see *disharmony* (chaos) in a group as a natural phenomenon that will ultimately result in *order*. As Margaret Wheatley says, "Disorder can play a critical role in giving birth to new higher forms of order."

Experiences from the Field

“In order to enter into working with different systems (people with different beliefs) I had to leave my attitude of ‘owning the truth, or they should, or I know what they need to do’ at the door. I had to go with an open mind, respecting the other participants and believing that we all want to help, learn, and contribute. I also had to learn to control my impulses to correct or fix someone else’s opinion, view, etc. (If I thought they were wrong) and wait until I can share in a constructive manner without blaming or attacking. All of this has taken a lot of work and increasing my own awareness of my own thoughts, feelings, reactions, beliefs, attitudes, needs, values, etc. Sometimes I am successful, sometimes I am not. Another tip is to have a lot of patience, and keep the desire of getting my way out of the way. And at the same time balancing all of that with staying true to my reasons to be there to learn, collaborate and to create better services for women who are experiencing abuse.”

- Marylyn Guiterrez-Diez, Domestic Violence Prevention Program, Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, 2010

Coordination Work - Bridging the Cultural Gaps

Our group is still in the forming stage, and the focus of our time together has been absorbed with: relationship building and developing a mandate and mission statement. The group is split in half in terms of representation of First Nations (FN) and non-First Nations participants. During a meeting, tension erupted between two participants.

A FN woman was sharing a very personal story about a relative who was staying with her, who had been having a hard time following some very basic house rules. She shared this story in order to make a point to the group that many people have a hard time following very rigid rules. A non-FN woman piped in and commented on the other woman’s story offering her perspective that there is a possibility that FASD could be involved with her relative’s inability to follow rules. In turn, the FN woman became angry at this comment. She said that she is sick and tired of white people placing her people into labels that may or may not fit. The group went silent. Immediately, the non-FN woman apologized.

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The FN woman shared that her and her people were deeply offended. The non-FN woman left the room.

After a moment of silence, another group participant changed the subject and the rest of the meeting carried on as if nothing had happened. Following the meeting, I made contact with both women involved, asking if they would feel comfortable to have a meeting to debrief and share any feelings that came up since the last meeting. The three of us met about 2 weeks after.

I will say with certainty that I will remember with gratitude the meeting I am about to describe. I was grateful for the opportunity to witness a healing that took place. During the debriefing meeting, each woman spoke very candidly about her feelings, her thoughts, her reactions, and her hopes. Each woman listened intently to the other and really heard and validated where the other was coming from. They talked about big issues, including white professionals coming into the community and taking jobs from local FN people. They talked about racism and how it is alive and present today. They talked about how to be culturally sensitive while at the same time finding ways to bridge cultural divides. They talked about how to be aware of history without harping on history.

After each woman spoke and listened, the FN woman approached the non-FN woman and hugged her and they held each other. And the FN woman showed her a spiritual hug that was taught to her by an elder where you hug on both sides, offering balance to a greeting.

Though my role was to facilitate, I said very little during the meeting. From my perspective, this story reflects an incredible healing that took place for these two women and the histories that came before them.

We spent the next coordination meeting coming up with a list of guidelines about how to address conflict in the group, should it come up again.

- Amy Rappaport,
Haida Gwaii Coordination for Community Safety Committee, 2010

Stereotyping

Tips for Addressing Stereotypes:

1. Be conscious of how we stereotype people.

Most of us make judgments, at one time or another, about others. We might imagine that because a person is in a certain profession, or from a particular cultural background or sexual orientation, that they will hold certain beliefs and values generally believed to be part of that group. These ideas can be easily reinforced by the fact that *because* someone is from a background or profession different from ours, they may in fact have very different opinions and ideas. They may have ways of speaking that identify them with a particular group or profession. This makes it dangerously easy for us to stereotype that person as just another “feminist/advocate type” or “cop” and not see beyond that judgment to who that person actually is.

In building relationships and partnerships it is crucial to be conscious of stereotyping so that each person can be seen for *all* that they can bring to the partnership.

2. Be honest about your differences.

Some people may assume that partners can only work together if there are no significant differences; if differences (real or apparent) arise, there may be an effort to deny or minimize them. Partners we spoke to found that this was not effective. While the partnership may end up deciding not to spend a great deal of time trying to iron out or work through differences, it is important to acknowledge that the differences do exist, and can actually be a strength.

3. Be patient and have a sense of humour.

Many partnerships emphasized the importance of patience and a sense of humour, two qualities that seem to be necessary in order to be able to work through or around or across difference. Appropriate humour can be useful for breaking the ice, easing tension or boosting morale; laughing together can be an important part of bonding. Patience—a willingness to take the time you need to build relationships and a letting go of the expectation things will happen immediately—can go a long way towards lowering stress levels for all.

4. Respect each other's work culture.

When differences in philosophy or ways of working arise, it can help to understand how they may relate to differences in work culture. Particularly if your partnership requires that you enter your partner's "territory" (for example, if the work of the partnership is done out of their office space or you deliver education in their schools), it is essential to respect their way of doing things. Being willing to respect the norms of your partner's workplace demonstrates your commitment to working together and your appreciation of the work that they do. And if you have questions, concerns or suggestions that relate to your partner's work culture, it is unlikely that these will be heard if you have not first shown sincere respect for what is in place (respect, of course, is not the same as agreement).

It is also important to recognize that the representative from your partner agency may have philosophical differences with his/her own agency. Remember that all members of an agency may not share a common philosophy.

Power Imbalances

How Do Imbalances Develop?

People involved in partnerships report that power imbalances can happen in a number of ways. Some exist before the partnership even begins, and result from factors such as unequal access to resources, unequal status in society or unequal levels of credibility in the community. These advantages may be due to the position of the agency or stem from the individual's access to power as a result of gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, age, etc.

Once a partnership begins, partners may develop differing levels of power due to factors such as: perceptions of whose work is more important, levels of seniority, location of the partnership (e.g. within one partner's agency), access to information, or ownership of material property used by the partnership (e.g. office supplies, vehicles, etc).

Language is an important part of access to power. There are several ways that people can gain power through the use of language. For example, if there are certain people who know specialized jargon related to legal issues, and they use this language in a group that includes people who are not familiar with it, the latter can be effectively excluded from the discussion. This can easily happen when people are so accustomed to using jargon they are not even aware they are doing it. This is a particular challenge for intersectoral work. It can be useful to encourage people to define specialized terms as they speak, or even to create a glossary so that everyone can have a common understanding of the specialized language.

As well, language and ways of speaking can be a sign of class status and access to higher education. In general, the more formal and neutral a person's language, the more likely they will be taken seriously. This is something to pay attention to if you are determined to balance power within your partnership. Notice whether certain people, because of the way they speak, are seen as arrogant, or if their contributions to discussion are dismissed as too "emotional" or "angry."

Partners can also gain power through their behaviour. One person may be so busy that she never has time to discuss issues with her partners or listen to others'

questions about her work in the partnership. Another partner may gain power by not sharing information with others. One partner may gain power by taking on all the work and not allowing others to be more involved. A partner may gain power by dominating discussions. Another partner may gain power by not speaking openly about their motivations for being in the partnership or by not participating in important discussions.

Power imbalances inevitably exist and it is best to be conscious of them. An imbalance is not necessarily a negative factor. It depends on whether the imbalance harms the partners, the work of the partnership and/or the clients of the partnership. If one person has more power, how do they choose to use that power? For example, one person in the partnership may have more power because they have more experience than the other partners; the other partners look to this person for support and information in certain circumstances. This power imbalance is not necessarily a negative situation. The person with more experience may use her power to increase the knowledge and skill level of her partners by sharing the information she has gained over her years of experience. She still has more experience and thus more power, but she has used it to benefit the partnership and ultimately the clients of the partnership.

Tips for Addressing Power Imbalance

1. Be clear on what “power” means.

If discussions about power come up in your partnership, make sure the partners are all talking about the same thing. Is it the power to speak freely? The power to withhold funding? The power to make policy? It’s also very important to distinguish between the power of the individual and the power of the agency they represent. For example, an RCMP officer may be seen by a member of a community agency as having a great deal of power; however, the officer him/herself may have very little power *within* the RCMP, depending on their rank. This points to the importance of partners taking the time to learn about each other’s work culture.

2. Information is power: if you have it, share it.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for people to make decisions and substantive contributions without information. Effective collaboration requires that everyone involved in the partnership have as much of the relevant information as possible. Shared information equals shared power. Partners may have different, equally relevant and complementary information. When information is freely shared, not only will the partnership become stronger and more trusting, but women’s safety, the ultimate “product” of the partnership, is improved.

Take some time (on your own) to make an honest assessment of how much power you have in the partnership. Many people that we interviewed talked about the importance of recognizing their own power. An RCMP member who acted as Chair of a Coordination Initiative realized he had the power to heavily influence the direction of the initiative. He was aware of his tendency to talk a lot, and to speak forcefully because of the passion he had for the issue of violence against women. He did his best to make space for others to speak and to make decisions. Another police officer realized that he had the power to convince other police officers to change some inappropriate behaviour (like telling sexist jokes). He used this power to improve working conditions for his partners. An anti-violence educator realized that she had more power than the youth involved in the education program. She made a concerted effort to make space for the youth to do planning and decision making for the program.

Think about the ways in which you have power. Do you have power because of being male or white or able-bodied? Do you have power that comes from your education or experience? Is your work in the partnership considered more important than others’? Once you have considered the ways in which you have power, think about the other people in your partnership and how you can contribute to an egalitarian environment.

3. Be prepared to name power imbalances.

If power imbalances are not named there is great potential for resentment to build. This relates to the importance of process and to the importance of creating common ground. Has your partnership created an atmosphere where members can ask questions or constructively challenge power imbalances in the partnership? Are imbalances named right from the start? For example, one person we interviewed talked about how important it was for his partnership that the person who was in charge of the partnership acknowledged that he was in a leadership role right from the beginning. He did not try to deny the power that he had, and he used it to try to create as healthy a work environment as possible.

After you have done your assessment of how much power you have, think about how you might react if someone were to question your power. This can be challenging, particularly for those who are not used to thinking of themselves as having power or for those who are used to working in a hierarchical setting where power is neither discussed nor questioned. In a partnership, where collaboration and reciprocity is key, power imbalances must be visible.

4. Take concrete steps to reduce or eliminate power imbalances if necessary.

Once problematic power imbalances have been acknowledged, it is important to move on to finding ways to create a healthy working environment where all partners can contribute.

Interviewees offered practical suggestions about how to do this:

- Have the same number of people from each agency involved in the partnership so that one agency doesn't have more power (in some cases, groups that have experienced particular discrimination may need more representatives in order for members to feel that they have an equal voice).
- Have all partners take turns hosting meetings at their agencies.
- Make sure the location of the meetings is accessible to all potential participants.
- One coordination initiative realized that there was not much participation from members of the nearby Aboriginal community. They moved their meeting location closer to this community so that it would be easier for members to attend; this resulted in increased participation from that community.

4. Take concrete steps to reduce or eliminate power imbalances if necessary.

- Make sure that everyone at the table has a chance to speak. Create opportunities for people who are usually silent and address situations where one or a few people dominate the discussion. A skilled Chair can help ensure the smooth running of the group.
- If your community has a Domestic Violence Unit you might consider creating double-sided business cards with the name of the police officer on one side and the counsellor on the other; in communities where this has been done, it has been a concrete way of showing the equality of the partners.

5. Move on, don't get stuck.

Determine whether all instances of power imbalance need to be addressed; perhaps in some situations there is enough general good faith in each other's intentions to move on in the work.

6. Don't give up.

If power imbalances have an unacceptable impact on the work of the partnership, find ways to correct them if at all possible.

Diversity

When organizations or people attempt to build partnerships with each other, one of the biggest sets of challenges can arise when there are differences in race, culture, ability or sexuality. For example, one partner may be white, Canadian-born and/or fluent in English while the other partner is Aboriginal or is of colour, immigrant and/or not considered fluent in English. Or, in another partnership, most people may be able-bodied and/or heterosexual while one person is a lesbian or has a disability. It is imperative that your partnership be conscious and respectful of these issues in order to work effectively across cultures and communities.

Like others in this province, we are still involved in trying to figure out the best ways in which to work together in order to form true partnerships instead of doing what most often happens—a “mainstream” agency determines the direction of its partnership with an Aboriginal or immigrant serving agency, or a white worker makes all the decisions in the partnership she has with a non-white colleague. Because of situations like these, potentially great partnerships can fail, non-white workers can be marginalized and non-white women survivors of violence can end up not receiving effective services.

Some partnerships we spoke with felt that diversity was not an issue for their partnership because the community they lived in was almost completely white. Others felt that diversity was not an issue because there were people of colour, people with disabilities or Aboriginal people in the partnership.

One scenario has occurred in a similar way in a number of Coordination Committees. The committees made a concerted effort to invite representatives from Aboriginal communities. However, after the Aboriginal people began attending the committee, there was no concerted effort to open up the discussion so that everyone could participate. Consequently, the discussion was mostly carried out by white members and was not generally focussed on issues that were relevant to the Aboriginal community. It is not enough just to invite people of colour or Aboriginal people into your partnership without thinking about why or how you’re doing it. As well, if your partnership is already created and started, and then Aboriginal people or people of colour are “added in” (invited later) it means that the project has already been defined without their input. How much power or influence will they have? What will they gain from their participation?

Another coordination initiative held a panel about oppression that, in the end, did not have a lasting impact on the initiative. One of the reasons for this was because most of the systems members did not attend. Attention needs to be given to how to present information in ways that work for your target audience; it is important that this kind of event is jointly planned. Try making the purpose of educational events clear, the motivation transparent, the start and end time, and planned activities very apparent. Consult with all involved as to what is important to put on the agenda. Chances are that members want to help make all victims of violence safe but they take in information in different ways. How can you support white people in your partnership to listen and respond to complaints and demands from people of colour and Aboriginal people? How can you support processes where all members of the partnership are getting their needs met?

One of the themes that came out in some of the work that we have done with Aboriginal women survivors of violence is the request to “just go and listen” - a request that non-Aboriginal people leave the comfort of their own places and go to Aboriginal people and communities and listen to their realities, just spending some time listening and learning.

As we saw in the last section, command of language is an important aspect of access to power. It is also important to consider whether the partnership is based in the needs of a diverse population. One of the insights that white advocates gained in the process of developing the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Program was that it was very different for a white woman to imagine involving the police in her relationship than for a black woman. White women, particularly middle and upper class women, were used to thinking the police were there to protect them. Black women, on the other hand, often came from families and communities who had been persecuted by police. It was much more likely that a black man would be harshly prosecuted by the legal system than a white man would. This is an important learning to keep in mind, particularly when forming partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups. In Canada, Aboriginal people are far more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be arrested and to spend time in jail. How can your partnership work to address underlying inequalities like this one?

Through the course of our research we heard about a number of factors that can determine whether or not people feel welcome in a group. Often, people from marginalized communities have become accustomed to experiencing racism, ableism or other forms of discrimination. They may come to a partnership anticipating that there will be incidents of subtle or overt oppression. It may be helpful to recognize that this tension might exist and think of practical ways to show that your group is committed to creating a safe environment.

Tips on Encouraging Diversity

1. Put it in writing.

Document your partnership's commitment to creating an egalitarian workplace, working from an anti-oppression perspective, making services accessible to people who face particular discrimination, and/or any other anti-oppression commitment. Review your progress on this issue on a regular basis.

2. Hire and/or invite people from communities that face particular discrimination to participate equally in your partnership.

When making these invitations it is important to make them for the right reasons. Are you inviting these communities because of how it will be seen by funders or others or because you truly desire and need their equal participation in order for your partnership to be successful? Put work into planning for how best to facilitate equal participation. For example, if you are working on legal issues, will the group or person you are inviting have had access to legal information? Or will their experience of discrimination have led to less access and therefore they require extra information in advance?

3. Hold anti-oppression training sessions for the partnership.

People who grow up with privilege are generally unaware of beliefs they may have that perpetuate inequality. There may be trainers in your community or at least written resources that can help increase awareness of beliefs and lead to more effective partnerships.

4. Address oppressive comments or "jokes".

Any offensive comments or "jokes" can quickly create an environment in which people feel threatened, hurt or angry and of course lose their desire to participate in the partnership. It is not reasonable to expect that partners "learn to take a joke". Instead, addressing and not tolerating such comments can be a strong sign of commitment to working together. As well, if done in a skilled manner, this can provide an opportunity for the person who made the joke or comment to learn from their mistake.

5. Acknowledge reality.

It can be tempting to brush over differences between the partners or to deny that power imbalances exist. However, like other issues we address in this guide, equality issues require open, constructive dialogue as opposed to denial or minimization.

5. Acknowledge reality.

It can be helpful to acknowledge the social context of inequality from the beginning, so that issues are not individualized.

6. Don't be afraid to take time to talk.

Discussions related to diversity are a good example of when talk and process are important work, and not “extra.” Of course there may be many spontaneous discussions of equality issues. But you may also set aside time for training or discussion regarding issues of inequality and diversity. It is crucial to plan carefully and to have skilled facilitation in place so that discussions can be as constructive as possible and contribute to the goal of increasing safety for all women who have experienced violence.

7. Create strong connections between the partnership and agencies or groups serving communities that face particular discrimination.

Communities that face particular discrimination may not be part of your partnership. However, the more you have these communities involved in your partnership, the more likely it is your work and efforts will reach women in these communities. Your partnership can be made more accessible for all women by building connections with other agencies or groups in your community to share information and skills, as well as to make the best referrals possible. Many Coordination Initiatives have representation from Aboriginal bands and immigrant serving agencies. By opening up your partnership to all communities, you are potentially lessening their marginalization and increasing opportunities for learning.

8. Explore options such as providing services off-site or providing services in languages other than English.

A number of partnerships that we spoke to found that making adjustments to existing services, as long as it was carefully done, enabled the services to be more accessible. Simply moving the physical location of a service can significantly change the clientele that are able to access it and can challenge service providers to learn how to best serve that community. Making an effort to provide services in a language other than English can be a perfect opportunity to create a connection with an immigrant serving agency or group. For example, many counselling programs for abused women have formed partnerships with social service agencies in smaller towns outside of where they are located. The social service agencies are providing counselling space for a day each week so that women in those communities don't have to travel to the counselling program.

Reducing Barriers to Equal Participation in Your Partnership.

- Include Aboriginal people as much as possible. Be sure they are not “tokens” included simply to make the partnership look good.
- Be aware of and honour the great effort that marginalized people make in order to come to the partnership table. They may be overworked and struggling with a lack of resources in their community, as well as nervous about how they will be treated in the partnership.
- Commit your partnership to addressing local examples of oppression in the health, social, and justice systems.
- Make sure your partnership is seen as supporting and/or initiating anti-racism campaigns.
- Take on the grueling task of defining what “equality” means for everyone in partnership and then practice it.
- Admit you don’t know everything and can’t fix everything.
- Challenge all forms of discrimination—racism, sexism, ableism, classism, and all the other “isms” out there.
- Work to understand that barriers for marginalized populations are extremely complicated and include personal, cultural, social and political aspects.
- Be open to learning what marginalized populations can teach you about life, caring, survival, and resistance.
- Celebrate differences (instead of pretending there are none).
- Admit your preconceptions and prejudices because we all have them—it doesn’t make us bad, just uninformed—and become informed and educated

Adapted from suggestions by Sheila Dick, Counsellor/Family Support Worker, Canim Lake Band.

Be aware that there is a difference between “cultural sensitivity” (which can include drumming, beading, dancing, hunting) and “cultural safety” (which addresses over a century of systemic discrimination, oppression, and historic/inter-generational disempowerment).

- Sheila Dick, Counsellor/Family Support Worker, Canim Lake Band

Finding Common Ground - Beliefs

Members of a cross-sector coordination initiative may come together assuming they are either all of one mind about an issue, or alternatively, from unbridgeable differences. Often, the assumptions we make about our commonalities or differences get in the way of sorting through the varying viewpoints on the issue, its root causes and therefore its solutions. Finding a middle ground together, in which there is agreement, is a good first step towards finding commonality and bridging differences.

Beliefs

- What beliefs about violence against women do we have in common?

Let's Get Philosophical

As discussed in CCWS's 2005 manual, *Building Partnerships to End Violence Against Women*, the topic of violence against women has been political and controversial ever since women began to speak publicly about it. One of the most controversial issues has been whether or not violence is gender-based. Although most studies show overwhelming evidence of the connection between gender and violence, there has been strong resistance to the idea that violence in relationships or sexual assault is most often committed by men against women. Workers in some programs may have feminist beliefs about violence against women (generally speaking, they believe that violence against women is rooted in an oppression framework, i.e. sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, classism). Other workers may believe that feminists wish to focus on women to the exclusion of men, and conjure up images of women making "unreasonable" demands. Some workers may have strongly held beliefs about the societal context of violence against women, while others focus on each case without necessarily making the link to the societal context.

Those who work within their own sectors often have, or assume they have, a shared philosophy about violence against women – what violence is and what will make

women safest. One of the most stressful aspects of entering into a partnership is wondering about the other partner's philosophy and commitment to end violence. One partner may be committed to ending violence against women, while the other is committed to improving a particular sector's response to incidents of violence against women. One of the first tasks of building a partnership is discovering whether you will be able to work together.

It is common for people to have intense feelings and beliefs about violence against women that come from working in the anti-violence field, from personal experiences of violence or from strongly held philosophical or political beliefs. Members of a group may find themselves spending a great deal of time and energy trying to convince their partner(s) that their perspective on violence against women is right. It can be easy to lose perspective – that is, to see each discussion as equally essential, and to lose the ability to “pick your battles”. However, it is unlikely that you will be able to work with other sectors if you are not able to look at putting aside, questioning or changing your own beliefs. When it seems that you and another member of your team have reached an impasse you might ask yourself: Are there things that I can let go? Are there conversations that perhaps do not need to continue? What needs to happen in order to work together for women's safety? Focusing on the outcome of increasing safety for women can help partners gain perspective and remember why and how they can work together towards this goal.

Establish Bottom Line Philosophy: What is Not Negotiable?

Without a clear “bottom line”, partners can become engaged in endless irresolvable discussions, and/or end up delivering unfocussed services. Are there any issues that simply must be agreed upon before the partnership can move forward? Are there certain values that all partners must hold? For example, partners must agree that violence against women occurs in all cultures, and is not more common in immigrant or Aboriginal communities. Or all partners must agree that the offender is solely responsible for his violence and the victim is not to blame.

Once a bottom line philosophy is established, decide how to ensure that this philosophy is reflected in your work. What will you do if people who become involved in the partnership in the future turn out not to share this philosophy?

The CCWS Tool “Finding Common Ground” has led many groups through the process of defining that “bottom line”.

Finding Common Ground - Beliefs Exercise

BRAINSTORM: Each of us has assumptions about violence against women, such as why it happens and what will stop it. Ask the group what **their** assumptions are (or assumptions they've heard over the years) and record on flipchart.

e.g. Violence in relationships is a consequence of alcohol and drug misuse.

OPTION ONE:

Go through each assumption and discuss in large group - find consensus on accepting or rejecting the assumption.

- If time permits and the group is willing, do two rounds for each of the assumptions (if not, perhaps do one round of both questions).
 1. The way I understand this assumption is:
 2. How would I change/eliminate this assumption?
- Edit the accepted assumption - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”.

OPTION TWO:

Break the group into smaller groups - have each small group find consensus on accepting or rejecting 3 of the assumptions and present to the large group.

- Small groups do two rounds for each of the assumptions.
 1. The way I understand this assumption is:
 2. How would I change/eliminate this assumption?
- Edit the accepted assumption - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”
- Report back to larger group - discuss adopting the assumption as “a belief we have in common”.

Developing a set of common beliefs is an essential step in a work plan for building a well-functioning coordination initiative.

Finding Common Ground - Purpose

Purpose

- Who are we?
- Where are we going?
- What do we stand for?

Defining Purpose

Another building block in the foundation requires developing consensus on the purpose of the group. A mission statement is a way of getting the group clear on their purpose, on what they stand for, and working toward common goals.

The work to build a mission statement can start conversations about beliefs and values about violence against women.

“The first two years of the DV Court Committee we spent on discussing who are we and what are we doing here. We needed to be meaningful. We had to have the hard philosophical discussions about what we mean by woman abuse vs. general abuse.”

- Carol Seychuk, Smithers CCWS, 2010

Finding Common Ground - Purpose Building a Mission Statement Exercise

Building a Mission Statement:

The Mission Statement explains the fundamental purpose of an organization or initiative. It gives the reason for the organization's existence. It answers the question "Why do we exist?"

To develop a Mission Statement the question to be asked is:

"What are we here to do together?"

Some guiding questions in building a Mission Statement:

1. What is our purpose?
2. How do we behave?
3. Whom do we serve?

Vision

Sometimes, Mission Statements can include a Vision Statement to state a sense of direction. Such a statement says if we are true to our purpose today, what might be the result in the future. A Vision Statement answers the question "where are we going?"

Values and Beliefs

Mission and vision tell of what we are and where we are going, and values and beliefs tell about how we believe, act and behave while we are en route.

Sometimes groups work on values and beliefs statements separately from the Mission Statement. A beliefs statement is sometimes called "common ground" or "grounding assumptions". Values statements are usually referred to as "Ground Rules", "Process Guidelines" or "Climate Goals". Regardless of what we call them, they are a crucial part of the formation of an organization or initiative, because the process of developing them together is key to creating a strong and coherent foundation from which to accomplish our goals.

The articulation of our values and beliefs can act as a template or guide that will predetermine our decisions and predict how we perform our duties and live in our relationships to the group. Our activities should reflect our beliefs and values in practice (what we do) and process (how we do it).

Why are we here? What do we stand for? Where are we going?

To Develop Your Mission Statement:

1. Do a separate brainstorm on each of the above three questions. Record everything on three sheets of flipchart paper.
2. Go through your lists together and categorize the 20 most important words under the following headings:

Action	How	Where	Who	When	What	Missing

(The "missing" category is for words you find you need to complete your Mission Statement that you have not found on your flipcharts.)

3. Using these 25 words, write your Mission Statement, ensuring it answers the above three questions.
(You may use this same process for revisiting and revising your existing Mission Statement.)

References for this exercise include:

1. P. Senge, R. Ross, B. Smith, C. Roberts and A. Kleiner, The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization, 1994.
2. Henry Mintzberg, James Brian Quinn and John Voyer, The Strategic Process, 1998.
3. R. Dufour, Building a Learning Organization, 1999.
4. Thanks also to: Nancy Gale, Director, Williams Lake, BC, Child Development Centre.

Finding Common Ground - Values

Defining Values and Keeping Them Alive in the Group

By developing together a set of “guidelines” or “group norms” and posting them at each gathering, a group can easily facilitate an environment that addresses “how” they will work together and the style of communication and participation they want to foster in their group.

The CCWS Tool “Developing Group Guidelines” sets out an easy process a group can use to define values.

Values

- How will we conduct our work with each other?

Finding Common Ground - Values Exercise

Developing Group Guidelines

The development of guidelines for working together in a safe and supportive environment is crucial to the work of coordination initiatives.

While this may seem like an overly simple and basic task, it is beneficial to undertake this process and have the guidelines posted at each meeting. This way they act as a gentle reminder when difficult issues arise.

The guidelines can be revisited at any time during the work of the committee and renewed or changed by the group.

1. Introduce the development of group guidelines as a way of establishing agreements/ground rules for how the group will work together so that there is always an atmosphere of trust and respect.
2. Lead a brainstorm around ground rules that will facilitate safety and respectful communication among group members. Record the ideas on a piece of flipchart paper.
3. At the end of the brainstorm, ask the large group to review the points listed and to indicate their agreement with the proposed ground rules.
4. Once agreement has been reached, post the list and let the group know that in the event issues arise, each of them has a responsibility to remind the group of the agreement reached.
5. Ensure that the rules are posted at each meeting and assure the group that they can be revisited if they need changing at some point down the road.

Keeping Stakeholders Engaged: Balance Task and Process

Every team has some people who are focused on *task* (product), and some who are focused on *process*. A team that thrives is one that values both task and process and finds ways to incorporate both into their work. The *task* side of coordination will be the work done to fill gaps and recommend changes that will improve the community safety net for women experiencing violence. The *process* part of coordination will be the work done to build trust, relationships, common ground, mission statements and goals and objectives. This foundation building work is essential to developing a viable committed team who will be able to produce improvements to their local safety net.

“Our greatest strength and challenge is ‘the way we work’. There is so much diversity of points of view about violence against women at our table. Our meetings are energetic and sometimes oppositional. We challenge each other, but come out feeling highly energized because of the diversity of the discussion and the cross-sector learning that has occurred.”

- Wanda Watts, Smithers CCWS, 2010

One of the best examples of the way this dichotomy of task and process plays out at a coordination table is when in the early stages of the group’s formation, someone offers *the* solution to a problem immediately upon it being identified. Of course a coordination group is a *solutions focused* group so this would not appear to be a problem. However, solutions are best developed by *all* the players at the table having input. A solution that comes from only one sector, while it may seem an appropriate solution, may not get buy-in from all, and could have pieces of the solution missing. Good sustainable solutions are developed through truly collaborative dialogue with input from all the players.

The development of protocols, for example, may be an attractive incentive for newly forming groups as a tangible task that could be produced. Most communities have found however, that when protocols are developed too soon, before there is a strong foundation of trust and open dialogue, the agreements are weak and implementation is often unsustainable. Coordination Initiative members who have worked together to build trusting relationships that allow for intentional dialogue have found that their protocols are more substantial and sustainable.

Strong Leadership

We have all been to meetings where it feels we are spinning our wheels. We enter a room where nothing much is happening, participate in whatever the agenda is and yet leave the meeting not feeling the least bit impacted. Perhaps we do not even remember much of the meeting. And then, on the other hand, there are meetings where the energy in the room is thick with connections and exchange, laughter or passion. Whether the meeting was harmonious or not, we leave feeling somehow enriched, having learned something new or made a connection important to our work. What makes the difference? Is it just leadership? Both meetings had leaders (Chairs) but one was highly productive and the other was not. Why?

Often, the difference lies in the basics of preparation and planning, tools leaders can use to generate the kind of energy they want to see in meetings. What is done prior to a meeting to organize the space, materials, and ambiance, and build and nurture relationships will typically have a huge impact on the tenor and success of the meeting.

“We found that having strong administrative support and someone with the drive to tackle the tasks and projects showed people the progress they were making and gave them a sense of legitimacy and history and shows the committee they are spending their time well.”

- Carol Seychuk and Wanda Watts for Smithers CCWS, 2010

Strong Leadership Tool

Ways to create a meeting that has the potential to inspire:

- Follow-up on invitations to ensure people understand the importance of their role and begin to foster a sense of *belonging*;
- Pay attention to details,
 - Create an orderly room,
 - Ensure enough chairs, etc.,
 - Consider the table/chair arrangement,
 - Ensure those with special needs will be comfortable,
 - Ensure your materials are in order;
- Greet participants equally;
- Ensure each participant is welcomed regardless of their arrival time;
- Bring participants quickly up to date if late;
- Keep the vision of the group alive in your discussions;
- Demonstrate your commitment to a democratic environment by ensuring all are heard and all points of view are honoured;
- Encourage inquiry when differing points of view are expressed;
- Start and end on time.

The Role of the Chair in Coordination

It's important that one person hold the vision for the coordination committee and keep the group focused on their overall mission and mandate. It is generally optimal for the Chair of a coordination committee to take on this leadership role within the committee. However, sometimes the Chair takes on the role of leading the meetings while the vision and other tasks are held by a coordinator, or another committee member.

The Chair as Facilitator

Leaders of any collaborative group could be seen as “super” participants - presenting ideas, advocating positions, responding to comments, facilitating consensus, promoting cooperation and follow through. While some leaders will want to abide by formal meeting rules, meetings of coordination initiatives will be the most productive when the leaders (Chairpersons) act as facilitators. A facilitator's role is to focus on the flow of the meeting and ensure participation from everyone present so as to build the group as a constructive and cohesive unit.

The Role of the Chair in Coordination Tool

The Role of the Chair

1. Prior to the Meeting

- Membership:
 - Ensure all stakeholders are invited;
 - Follow up with any invitees who have not confirmed their attendance;
 - Bring new members up to date on goals and objectives, members' role and responsibilities.
 - Make an effort to ensure the location of the meeting will maximize the participation of the largest diversity of stakeholders.

- Agenda:
 - Prepare meeting agenda pursuant to last meeting and input from members;
 - Determine time allocations for agenda items;
 - Connect with any members who will be presenting and let them know the time scheduled on agenda;
 - Connect with any members who are involved with issues that may be brought to the table so that they can be prepared with relevant information such as policy or procedures;
 - Determine any handouts;
 - Distribute agenda and handouts.

2. At the Meeting

As a facilitator, some of what the Chair will focus on includes:

- Keeping the meeting focused;
- Encouraging constructive discussion and debate;
- Allowing new ideas or points to be raised without judgment;
- Maintaining order so only one person talks at a time (keeping a speakers' list);
- Dealing with problems that arise in the meeting;

2. At the Meeting

As a facilitator, some of what the Chair will focus on includes:

- Ensuring that views, positions and arguments are understood;
- Balancing task and process;
- Reframing and recapping discussion to encourage consensus;
- Recognizing contributions and participation;
- Facilitating process to ensure **ALL** points of view are heard and valued;
- Ensure there is an understanding of the organizational mandate;
- Evaluating the meeting effectiveness and how it could be improved.

3. After the Meeting

Once the meeting is over ensure continuity and follow through by:

- Distributing minutes or some type of record of items discussed and any decisions or agreements made;
- Developing and distributing the agenda for next meeting.

Adapted from:

Chairing a Meeting. *Association Xpertise Inc.* retrieved September, 2010,
http://www.axi.ca/TCA/Nov2002/facilitationrole_1.shtml.

Shared Leadership

Due to a scarcity of resources, over the years many communities have shared the leadership and chairing roles of their coordination initiatives. This has been done in a variety of creative ways in order to encourage shared ownership as well as distribute the workload.

For many communities it has been difficult to move quickly on the many issues identified. Where there has been success, it has been because members have taken ownership of the vision and are committed to sharing with the Chairs the work that may result from discussions or strategies developed at meetings.

Examples of Shared Leadership

- The work is divided based on the skill sets of the partners. One might be responsible for the administrative duties such as minutes and timekeeping, the other for the chairing and facilitation duties. If the same members hold these roles consistently and there is good communication and shared vision between the partners, this can be an effective method of sharing leadership.
- A system-based member will partner with a community-based member. This partnership has resulted in increasing the credibility of each partner's sector in the group. The different perspectives of the Co-chairs can be an asset in many ways, including in the role of co-facilitation. As with all Co-chair roles, to be effective the partners will want to discuss any obvious differences they may have prior to meeting.
- All the work is shared including the in-meeting facilitation and time keeping, the out-of-the-meeting planning, preparation and follow-up. This allows both partners a substantial support system for the work, including a constructive place to debrief meetings and strategize issues.
- The work of coordination is broken down into issue areas such as justice, health, children who witness violence, or offender accountability, and sub-committees are formed around leaders in these areas of interest.

- The chairing and minute taking role is rotated monthly, quarterly or yearly, thus giving everyone the opportunity to experience the work. While this is an often cited example of shared leadership, it is rarely effective in keeping the work alive and moving forward. Too much seems to get lost by the passing of responsibility from one to the other, who will then have a learning curve before becoming effective in the role.

“Some of the challenges & successes that we have faced as a committee:

- Having a Chair who understands the complex issues faced by women experiencing violence is definitely an asset to our committee.
- Also, having a Chair that can facilitate difficult conversations with diplomacy & sensitivity is of great benefit.
- Having a committee that is committed to really looking at and dissecting the challenges that we all face. Being able to examine how we work and be open to change.
- We have found that having one person Chair for a period of time such as one or two years is more effective than a rotating Chair.
- The Chair takes on the responsibility of creating the Agenda for each meeting as well as writing letters on behalf of the committee and making contact with other agencies on behalf of the committee.
- Having a consistent person as Chair also results in more consistent tracking of issues from meeting to meeting”.

- Julie Gibson, Sunshine Coast Prevention of Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee, 2010

Work Plan for Community Coordination Initiatives Tool

1. Identify and invite key people/organizations.
2. Develop ground rules for working together.
3. Identify common ground - common principles:
 - Develop Mission Statement centralizing victim safety.
4. Decide on the work ahead - goals:
 - Determine mandate of the initiative,
 - Determine scope of participants.
5. Develop strategies for beginning the work. Possible strategies could include:
 - Coordination committee,
 - Sub-committee or work teams around specific issues,
 - Community agreements,
 - Operational partnership(s),
 - Project/Issue focused collaboration (e.g. service gap).
6. Equalize all members' awareness of the issues through training.
7. Inform one another of roles and responsibilities:
 - Clarify reporting relationships to and from members' organizations;
 - Discuss each member's representation in coordination initiative (does a member represent self or organization? What are the limitations of each?);
 - What level of staff is needed at the coordination initiative to facilitate the work?
8. Discuss and develop guidelines re:
 - confidentiality,
 - decision making,
 - conflict resolution.
9. Determine who will represent the work of the coordination initiative to the community. Remember that some participants, such as Crown and Ministry representatives, are prohibited from undertaking public advocacy.
10. Discuss the concept of accountability. What will it mean in the initiative?
 - What are the benchmarks to which accountability will be measured? (i.e. Protocols? Policy? Best practice models? Group norms?)

11. Determine what role in the work process will play. How will you balance process and outcomes?
12. Develop consistent methods for securing involvement:
 - Identify strategies for participation without committee involvement (e.g. individual meetings with Chair/Coordinator),
 - Subcommittees,
 - Participating at particular issue-focused meetings,
 - Social meetings.
13. Identify the problems - possible strategies:
 - Issues management - does your coordination initiative have a protocol for issues/solutions management?
 - Monitor gaps/problems - what will be the process for follow-up?
 - supportive community infrastructure of services for victims
 - sanctions and rehabilitation opportunities for abusers;
 - Make recommendations for solutions - where will recommendations go (local, regional, provincial, federal)?
 - Develop protocols as needed.
14. Respond to the problem - possible strategies:
 - Form task focused working groups or sub-committees; write briefs, letters, recommendations for change to those in charge of policy and procedure (remember that some participants, such as Crown and Ministry representatives are prohibited from participating in letter writing campaigns or public advocacy);
 - Develop models of "Best Practice".

References for this exercise include:

- i. Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General (BC MPSSG) initiatives such as training for justice system and victim services, emergency response alarm systems, priority response cell phones, operational partnerships.
- ii. Gail Edinger, *Work Plan For Developing/Enhancing A Coordination Committee*, 2000.
- iii. Ministry of Attorney General *Framework Document Community Coordination to Stop Violence Against Women in Relationships*, 1993.
- iv. Ellen L. Pence and Melanie F. Shepard, Editors, *Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence, Lessons from Duluth and Beyond*, Sage Publications, 1999.

Accountability

What do We Mean by Accountability?

Accountability in a partnership means that partners are required or expected to meet one or more agreed upon *benchmarks*; i.e. they are expected to produce certain deliverables or to carry out their tasks in a certain manner. Partners may be accountable not only to each other, but to their own agencies, their clients, and/or the community at large.

Some partnerships state they are accountable to an agreed upon definition of women's safety - this is the benchmark against which members measure their success. In other words, all of their work is seen through a "safety lens." Melanie Shepard and Ellen Pence point out that using traditional criminal justice system benchmarks such as an increased number of arrests or prosecutions doesn't automatically ensure that women are safer. They emphasize the importance of keeping safety as the bottom line.

The Partnership Toolkit prepared by the Collaboration Roundtable proposes that effective accountability is based on five principles:

1. Clear roles and responsibilities,
2. Clear and realistic expectations,
3. Expectations balanced with resources,
4. Credible reporting, and
5. Reasonable adjustment (i.e. based on monitoring).

This emphasizes the fact that effective accountability is dependent on other aspects of the partnership being healthy. Accountability is not possible without such conditions as clear and open communication, understanding and respect for how each partner is accountable to their own agency, flexibility and trust.

Tips for Ensuring Accountability

1. Have a clear understanding about whom you are accountable to and what you are accountable for.

Once you are clear about mandates, roles and responsibilities (see “Tips for Clarifying Mandates, Roles and Responsibilities” on page 73), figure out to whom you are accountable. Are you accountable to your partner? How about to your own particular agency? Is there a larger body that governs the partnership? Are you accountable to funders? What about the women you serve? The community at large? If you say that you are accountable to the women you serve or to the community, what exactly does this mean? It might mean that you do your best to guarantee that you will provide a certain number of hours of service a week or that you will provide certain kinds of services or that you will provide these services in a certain way.

There may be different levels or kinds of accountability for different partners. For example, on a Violence Against Women Coordination Committee, some members may have the authority to represent their agencies and are therefore more able to take action on issues identified at the committee, whereas people who attend but do not officially represent their agency may need to check with their agency before they commit to acting.

2. Discuss what might happen if different "accountabilities" conflict.

What happens when accountability to your partner conflicts with accountability to your agency or to the women you work with? This conflict came up in the Vancouver Police DVU. The community counsellors struggled with the fact that they were expected to share information with their police partners yet the women they worked with expected them to keep their information confidential; in fact, the women would often specify that certain information not be passed on to the police. The community counsellors felt caught. They had to respect both parties' expectations. The head of the police unit at that time, Doug LePard, made it clear that victim safety was the main priority. He told the counsellors that they only had to disclose information to their police partners if it was information that would "compromise our credibility in court, or the integrity of the case, or our own or the victim's safety." In this case strong leadership allowed both expectations to be met. He believed that the accountability to clients took priority except in special circumstances. Currently in the DVU, there is strict confidentiality between the counsellor and the woman, which is only broken if there is a danger to the woman's safety. In this case, the counsellor would go to their supervisor on how to best address the issue.

3. Review your work on a regular basis.

The partnerships we spoke with had reviewed their work in various ways to get a sense of whether they were accomplishing what they had set out to do. Some assessed their work on a case by case basis; some reported on their work to a larger committee a few times a year; others hired an evaluator to do a thorough evaluation at the end of a few years. The evaluator interviewed participants in the partnership as well as clients and members of the community to assess the effectiveness of the partnership. Evaluation is an essential part of getting feedback and changing or adjusting your work in response. Evaluation is a concrete way of demonstrating your desire to be accountable to those you serve and to each other.

4. Be direct with concerns.

Some partnerships we talked to had suffered from the impact of unexpressed frustrations with their partners. Because of lack of time or energy or because of poor communication, frustrations had built up over time. One interviewee wondered whether ongoing tension was a result of philosophical discussions that had not happened at the beginning of the partnership, as well as a lack of clarity about mandates. At the end of the interview, she was considering going back to those basic discussions as a way of increasing understanding and hopefully easing current frustrations.

Responding openly to complaints is, of course, a key part of accountability. But *expressing* complaints and asking for clarification or change can also be seen as an important part of each partner's accountability to each other. If complaints are made directly and with good intentions, they can demonstrate respect for the other partner and faith in their desire to do the best work possible. As well, if complaints are made directly, they provide the opportunity to clear up misconceptions: maybe there is an explanation for the situation that you are concerned about. Maybe your partner was unaware that their actions were problematic and will appreciate the perspective or information that you offer.

When you prepare to talk to your partner about your concern, think about how it relates to your partnership's end goals. What can your partner change in order to better contribute to the work to increase women's safety? When responding to a concern, it can be helpful to remember that listening is key—be as open as possible in exploring the rationale behind why your agency is working in a certain way. This can increase understanding and cooperation and lead to open brainstorming about what is needed. Be aware of how power imbalances may interfere with open communication. Are there ways to reduce these imbalances?

4. Be direct with concerns

For more information on addressing power imbalances see “Tips for Addressing Power Imbalances” on page 27. Are there factors to be aware of that might impact your or your partner’s ability to have open discussion (for example, one partner’s experience of racism and mistrust of “authority” figures may make it additionally stressful for them to contemplate a challenging discussion).

5. Have an agreed upon process for addressing concerns.

It is helpful to establish a feedback procedure at the beginning of the partnership. Sometimes this step is missed because the partners feel so positive and excited about working together that they either don’t anticipate complaints or they don’t want to interrupt their positive connection by implying that there may be problems in the future. We suggest having a clear and formal process in place that includes the requirement that complaints be documented in writing. Establishing this procedure at the beginning can help ensure that important feedback is dealt with in a fair and consistent manner. You will probably need to establish one complaints procedure for *complaints between partners* and another for *complaints about the partnership* from clients of the partnership or from members of the community. When writing the complaints procedures, think about what the next step would be if the complaint were not resolved at a certain level. Who has the final accountability?

6. Build in a formal process for positive feedback and appreciation.

Many partnerships miss this crucial step. It makes good common sense to acknowledge good work where good work was done. Sending letters to agency supervisors/managers or to detachment commanders can go a long way to motivate people.

7. Be aware of rules and regulations that might already apply.

Partners may be employees of agencies that already have clear guidelines for accountability and clear complaints procedures. Whatever process you put in place for the partnership needs to be consistent with legal, policy and ethical frameworks that apply to the various players within their respective systems. These larger frameworks may apply to the partnership as well. British Columbia’s Policy on Violence Against Women in Relationships suggests that justice system personnel should participate in coordination initiatives; the Child, Family and Community Service Act states that all adults have the responsibility to report abuse of children. These can be seen as examples of policy and legislation that affect how accountability is conceived and carried out in your partnership, aside from the decisions of those involved.

Administrative Tasks for Coordination Initiatives

Attention to administrative work is central to the longevity of a coordination initiative. For example, it makes the work more efficient and manageable when there are agendas and minutes, and when contact information is kept up to date. These and other aspects of administrative work such as having names and organizations correct also help build relationships with members. This document details a broad range of administrative work that might be involved in sustaining a coordination initiative.

In the past, some of British Columbia's coordination initiatives have had people who were paid to fulfill administrative tasks such as contact lists, minutes, agendas and meeting logistics. Today, most groups do this work "off the sides of their desks". For many, there is simply not time to attend to it all. Some coordination initiatives are just beginning and have not yet decided how to manage the work or if it can be managed at all. This document is intended to provide assistance to each of these groups.

1. For those doing this work off the sides of their desks or where there is simply not time to attend to it all, the following tool will help to document the administrative workload. This might be used for such purposes as coming to agreement with other members regarding sharing the workload, or when applying for short-term grants to help with specific projects.
2. For those doing this work as part of a paid position, it is an important tool to plan for the broad range of administrative work.
3. For new coordination initiatives, it is a tool to proactively plan for the work ahead.

➤ An Important Note:

One of the most effective strategies for sharing the administrative work of a group is for members to proactively attend to their own tasks, rather than relying on group leaders for reminders.

Following are some examples of items that might be included in a member agreement, and/or in a group discussion about sharing the work:

- Contribute items to the agenda
- Read the minutes ahead of time
- Bring your copy of the minutes to the meeting
- Follow up on your actions as soon as possible
- Notify the appropriate person when your contact information changes

Administrative Tasks for Coordination Initiatives Tool

Administrative Tasks

Communication Technology:

- Decide how materials will be distributed (email, listserv, fax, regular mail);
- If distribution is by email, determine what type of attachments;
- Create distribution lists on computer or fax machine.

Coordination Initiative Documents:

- Determine where the file with minutes and other core documents will be stored,
- Decide who will keep the file updated,
- Decide how the file will be transferred when that person leaves.

Member Contact List:

- Determine format (e.g. all contact info or just phone and email?);
- Distribute attendance sheet at meetings;
- Make changes to member information;
- Distribute updated contact lists regularly;
- Keep copy in main coordination initiative file or binder.

Meeting Logistics:

- Determine venue - adequate space, seating, noise levels, accessibility;
- Book venue for each meeting;
- Arrange equipment - flipchart, overhead, tables;
- Arrange refreshments - water, tea, coffee, other;
- Arrive early - set up room and equipment and refreshments;
- Pay bills if necessary.

Materials Distributed During and Between Meetings:

- Distribute to missing members,
- Keep copy in main coordination initiative file or binder.

Agendas:

- Review minutes and record tabled or ongoing items;
- Receive and record new items;
- Create agenda including date, time and location;
- Distribute to members;
- Keep copy in main coordination initiative file.

Minutes:

- Record date, location, name of coordination initiative, attendees, regrets;
- Take notes during meetings, particularly action items and consensus decisions;
- Clarify notes during meetings;
- Change notes to minutes format;
- Distribute in draft format for review by attendees;
- Make any suggested changes to minutes;
- Distribute final version;
- Bring extra copies to next meeting;
- Keep copy in main coordination initiative file.

Package and Process for New Members

- A package of information is a key tool to familiarize new members with the coordination initiative and increase their comfort in participating. It also helps to avoid valuable meeting time being taken up with providing background information to new members. This package might include the following:
 - Mission statement and mandate of the committee,
 - History of coordination initiative,
 - Affirmation of confidentiality,
 - Mailing list,
 - Group guidelines,
 - Goals of coordination Initiative,
 - Mandates of members.
- Some coordination initiatives also use a buddy system where new members are connected with existing members to orient them to the group and answer questions.
- Another strategy is to have “new member meetings”. Once there are 3 or 4 new members, hold an informational meeting to orient them to the group. This is likely more suited to larger centres as smaller communities may have to wait for some time before they have more than one new member.

Create and Maintain Core Documents:

- Confidentiality forms,
- Member agreements,
- Orientation package,
- Compendium of services,
- Protocol agreements,
- Decision making agreements.

Signed Documents:

- Distribute, collect and store confidentiality forms*;
- Distribute, collect and store member agreements.

* When guests attend, have them sign confidentiality forms and keep the forms on file with minutes from that meeting.

Other Tasks

- Depending on the work the group does, there are many other administrative tasks that may arise. For example if the group uses case conferencing, there are many administrative tasks to attend to such as creating forms for confidentiality, notifying key players and distributing information prior to the case conference.

Doing the Work

Essential Components for Doing the Work:

- The Role of Advocacy
 - Individual Advocacy
 - Systemic Advocacy
 - The Work of a Coordination Initiative in Advocating for Change
 - The Role of the Members in the Implementation of Advocacy Strategies
 - Balancing Your Roles as Advocate and Chair of Your Coordination Initiative
- Identifying Benchmarks for Accountability
- Bringing the Work to the Table
 - The Role of Case Studies
 - Case Conferencing for High Risk Clients
 - Safety Planning
 - Developing Protocols

The Role of Advocacy in Coordination on Violence Against Women

“The feminist principle of advocacy means supporting or recommending a position or course of action that has been informed by women’s experiences in our efforts to bring about equality and inclusion. Advocacy may take place through a variety of actions and strategies, ranging from demonstrations and protests to meetings and dialogue.”

- DisAbled Women’s Network Ontario,
The Feminist Principle of Advocacy, 2003

The Language of Advocacy

The word *advocacy* is often misunderstood. It is a word that is part of the discourse of several disciplines: law, social services, health, child protection, environmental conservation and others. Because of the lack of understanding across disciplines of the meaning of advocacy, it is often misunderstood. We use it to describe this role as one of “working on behalf of” women, and “to promote” improvements in a systemic response for women who have experienced violence. We are not using the term to describe lobbying activities, which are outside the purview of the work.

Advocacy in Practice

Individual Advocacy

Individual advocacy is part of the daily work life of a service provider when she supports a woman to find her own voice or, when requested, advocates with institutions on her behalf. Advocates are continuously making choices about where to direct their energies on behalf of the women they work with. Every day they work within their community with others to address gaps in services, problems with policy

implementation and the need to negotiate solutions at the local level on behalf of their clients.

Systemic Advocacy

When many women experience the same problems we say the problems are *systemic* in nature. Many victim serving organizations believe it is the role of the advocate to question the structures impeding women's access to service. Advocacy can build a critical bridge between theory and practice, and between issues experienced on the ground by women to policies and structures that are producing and perpetuating inequalities.

Some advocates will say that the act of moving an issue "up the line", is reenergizing and supportive to the worker, particularly because it has the potential to impact change for all women. One way for a member of a coordination initiative to move an issue "up the line" is to bring it to the coordination table.

"Advocates must give up the notion that only they care about battered women and that practitioners in the system are personally responsible for failures in the legal system. Practitioners need to give up the myth they as professionals have been trained to be objective and fair (as opposed to advocates) and recognize that bias is built into their training and discipline."

- Ellen L. Pence and Melanie F. Shepard, Editors, *Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence, Lessons from Duluth and Beyond*, Sage Publications, 1999

A coordination initiative should be a systemic advocate for improving women's safety. Just as it is the individual advocate's job to represent the needs of a particular woman and identify when an issue has become systemic in her community, it is the job of a coordination initiative on violence against women to advocate for improvements to the issue.

For example, if a woman has come to an advocate to say that she is attempting to leave an abusive relationship but cannot get emergency funding from the BC Employment and Assistance Program, the advocate may, with the woman's permission, decide to call the worker directly on behalf of the woman in order to sort out the problem. The advocate knows there is a government policy in place that allows for emergency grants to women in this situation. Through her conversations

with the financial aid worker, she is likely able to solve this problem for this particular woman. However, if after several months, she has encountered several women who have been unable to access emergency grants, she recognizes there is a systemic problem with the social assistance office. This situation could be addressed by a coordination initiative and also be identified to CCWS at the provincial level.

For coordination to work effectively, all members must be committed to bringing the work to the table. **Identifying and naming systemic issues are the work!** Social change for gender equality may be a by-product or underlying principle of the work of coordination, but it is not the central focus. The central focus is to improve safety for women and accountability of offenders on the ground.

The Work of a Coordination Initiative in Advocating For Change

When developing a strategy, a coordination initiative will need to consider many things, including the political climate that is affecting the actions of responders. Some of the questions one might ask in a situation such as this include (for a general process see the CCWS Solutions Management Tool on p.81):

- Are all relevant sectors at the table?
- Do we have the correct facts about policies?
- Do all the workers at the table share the same perspective of the problematic practice?
- Is the problem one of a shared attitude?
- What is the work climate of the sector in question?
- If the sector with the problematic practice is not at the table, is there someone who is, who has a strong connection with someone in that sector?
- Do others at the table experience the same difficulties with that sector?
- Do we know what the regional practice is?
- Do we have documentation of the numbers of women who have experienced the problem?
- Could the policy be unclear to workers in that sector?
- Does the problem need to be addressed at a higher level?

The strategy developed collaboratively by the coordination initiative will ideally be one that builds relationships and community capacity rather than blames and isolates one agency or sector. Any time an advocacy action is taken we must consider and plan for potential backlash either on the clients or on collaborative relationships.

“For a coordinated community response to be effective it must institutionalize ongoing feedback from advocates on the effect of any reform on the victim. Though each representative of an agency that comes into contact with the victim can develop a sensitivity to the effects of their individual and agency actions on her, their involvement with her represents only a fraction of her journey through the system. Advocates are uniquely situated to represent the totality of her experience because of their ongoing involvement with her in a variety of settings for an extended period of time from arrest through case disposition and beyond. Additionally, because advocates' primary allegiance is to the victim and because, ideally, they are not employed by the system, they can afford greater objectivity to observe and identify problems still existent in the system. Without centralizing ongoing feedback from independent advocates to identify continuing problems in the systemic response, a coordinated community response will not keep victims safe, hold offenders accountable, nor change the climate in the community.”

- Rose Thelen, *Advocacy in a Coordinated Community Response: Overview and Highlight of Three Programs*, 2010

The Role of the Members in the Implementation of Advocacy Strategies

Not all members of a coordination initiative will be comfortable or have permission from their agencies to sign on to a strategy that advocates for change. For this reason it will be necessary to work with your group to determine who can support the strategy. Sometimes there will be a way to compromise or adjust the strategy so that everyone at the table is comfortable with its implementation.

Balancing Your Roles as Advocate and Chair of Your Coordination Initiative

If you are a woman's advocate and the Chair of your coordination initiative you have a delicate balance to achieve in managing these two roles with grace. As a woman's advocate you will hold the passion to move the work ahead in your community. As Chair of your local coordination initiative you will have to transform your passion into a deeply democratic neutrality that nurtures a collective vision that includes all perspectives. To balance the role of the advocate and the role of coordination, the group will need to form a common understanding of the fact that there will be times when the group will have to work towards changing practice or policy.

Identify Benchmarks for Accountability

Earlier in this guide we discussed the importance of building foundation through developing ground rules for *how* the group will work together (*values*), a Mission Statement to describe the *purpose* of the work of coordination, and finding common ground as a way of coming to agreement on *what* we understand of the issue.

These foundational processes are the first benchmarks the group will develop together in order to begin discussing best practice approaches described in the *external* benchmarks to which we hold ourselves accountable.

One of the most important benchmarks created by coordination initiatives will be a collective understanding of the meaning of “women’s safety”. This understanding will come from the cross-sector dialogue of the group’s analysis of issues. We must bring these issues to the table in order to begin to understand what we mean by “safety” in the varying contexts of women’s experiences.

As discussed earlier, open discussion of issues is crucial to the work of coordination. Without transparency about practices that have the potential to endanger a woman and her children, the work will not evolve and our efforts to create change and enhance safety will not be successful.

When identifying issues in your community response, remember the benchmarks that are guiding your practice and make them transparent in your group. The issues that arise from your understanding of these best practices will enrich the group’s understanding of safety and encourage and foster a learning environment that will benefit everyone in the group and enhance the ability to increase safety for women.

Refer to relevant documents such as curriculum, legislation, policy, etc. as tools to guide you in determining benchmarks. There may be requirements that can’t be negotiated. Your partnership may be guided by provisions in the BC Ministry of Attorney General’s Criminal Justice Branch Policy, the RCMP Violence in Relationships Policy or the rules and regulations of one or more partnering agencies. A school education program will be affected by policies of the school district and individual schools as well as legislation such as the Child, Family and Community Services Act requiring adults to report any suspected abuse of minors.

Benchmarks

Among other benchmarks these include:

- RCMP Violence in Relationships Policy,
- BC Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy,
- Best Practices Approaches Child Protection and Violence Against Women
- Corrections Policies, and
- Victim Services Referral Policies.

Conversations regarding adherence to these benchmarks are made possible through the construction of the group's foundational processes.

Bringing the Work to the Table

Once your committee has developed its terms of reference, philosophy and group guidelines, it's time to begin the difficult work of addressing issues. It is important along the way to celebrate each achievement. This helps to keep everyone engaged and feeling a sense of accomplishment.

As we have mentioned, “bringing the work to the table” is imperative if we are going to be committed to keeping women’s safety at the centre of our conversation. Clarification of the mandates of each partner before beginning the work can go a long way to promoting understanding and building trust among the team.

“We work hard to have laughter and lightheartedness in each session. We have had recycled and re-gifted door prizes on a seasonal theme. We serve good food - usually homemade muffins or scones (you can do this quarterly, monthly would be a killer!) We offer ice breakers and warm-ups of all sorts.”

- Nancy Taylor, Co-chair of the Robson Valley CCWS Initiative, 2010

The use of case studies is a tool used by many communities to create opportunities for current practice to be made transparent so that members can work together to clarify mandates, address gaps, and acknowledge best practices.

Many groups start with generic case studies before bringing specific issues or cases to the table. In some large VAWIR Committees, it may be decided to stay with issues and generic cases while specific case conferencing is done by a smaller sub-group (i.e. police, victim services, corrections and transition house).

In this section we will begin by looking at working with generic case studies, and then move to bringing specific issues to the table. We will also look at solutions management, which is a strategic planning process designed to identify priority issues in the community and begin developing action plans to respond.

Finally, we will look at case conferencing with regard to working collaboratively to identify risks in a particular case and develop safety plans. This sophisticated work demands a group that has built good working relationships and protocols for sharing of information. The 2010 Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) Policy has good information and tools with their Protocol for Highest Risk Cases (see p. 59 of the VAWIR Policy).

Clarifying Mandates, Roles and Responsibilities

In order to work well, partnerships must take the time to clearly define mandates, roles and responsibilities. Before starting a partnership, potential partners will need to be clear about what each of them does in their jobs, the roles of their agency and what each is able and willing to contribute to the partnership. These initial discussions may need to be revisited once the work of the partnership actually starts and again when significant external or internal events occur.

Mandates

Each partner will most likely be a member of a group or agency with a specific mandate. This mandate will have an impact on how the partner participates in the partnership and what they are able to do. There might need to be a delicate balancing act between the mandate of the agency and the mandate of the partnership. Differences in mandates can also be part of the reason to form a partnership: to be able to address the issue of violence against women in collaboration from different angles, to share complementary skills, and to bring the two (or more) mandates together and have access to each other. The partnership will then have its own specific mandate.

It is critical that the mandate of the group is informed by the local context. A model that works in a large urban centre may not work at all in a rural or isolated community. Whereas it makes sense for an urban coordination initiative to narrow its focus, for example to one type of violence because other resources exist in that setting, a rural coordination initiative may cast a wider net to include all forms of violence against women.

Tips for Clarifying Mandates, Roles and Responsibilities

1. Clarify each partner agency's mandate.

Before entering into a partnership, be sure that you are clear on exactly what your partner is mandated to do. This can reduce the chances of unrealistic expectations or misunderstandings.

2. Clarify each individual partner's position in their agency.

It is important that all individuals in a partnership understand each other's position in their agency. For example, within a Violence Against Women Coordination Initiative, partners might include representatives from police, Crown, healthcare providers, women's groups, community-based victim services, and so on. However, representatives will have varying levels of authority and responsibility within their own agency and this may affect their participation in the partnership. As an example, an important point to consider/discuss when forming your partnership might include: finding out if this partner has the authority to speak for their agency or do they need to get approval from a superior before proceeding with any action?

3. Find the level of formality that is right for your partnership.

Some partnerships have an informal way of dividing responsibilities. For example, in a number of cases, partners decide as issues come up who will do what. This may work better in Coordination Committees where there could be a range of projects or tasks. Other partnerships stress the importance of clearly distinct roles and responsibilities and emphasize the need to put these in writing.

4. Do not step on people's toes.

Maintaining distinct roles can be a way of respecting each other's expertise. If you are used to having to do things on your own, it can sometimes be hard to let your partner take on their responsibilities, even though this can help lighten your workload. In some cases, responsibilities may end up divided along gender or other lines. It is important to acknowledge and address any unfair or unreasonable division of labour.

5. Address problems directly.

Many of the partnerships that we spoke with had, at some point, needed to have difficult conversations in which they raised concerns with each other about whether and how the mandate of the partnership was being carried out. Other partnerships have chosen not to address concerns directly and this may have limited their ability to work together.

The Role of Case Studies

“We always do a case study at our Smithers CCWS meetings. Anyone can bring up a case, of course not using names. Answers to issues don’t always come from the group but often the cases serve to educate the members about the complexities of domestic violence. Sometimes people are shocked by the realities described in the case studies, and that there are no obvious solutions.”

- Wanda Watts, Smithers CCWS, 2010

Case studies are an effective way to highlight gaps, systemic problems, or a need for a change in practice, policy, or local protocol. Coordination Initiative members are better able to grasp how issues affect victims through an anecdotal style of presentation, and can see how the various parts of the system work in coordination as part of the total response.

Case studies can be developed by a group using issues the group has experienced, be generic in nature or be one of many CCWS has posted on our website for the use of coordination initiatives. Whatever the method of addressing case studies, they are an excellent way of “bringing the work to the table” to illuminate work that needs to be done in the community.

For examples of case studies please see Appendix VII: “Case Studies”.

Experiences from the Field

“We have come to know that case conferences are a key part of the reason we meet. These allow us to examine current issues, connect with each other, build trusting relationships, and open dialogue and communication to learn about our programs and how we operate.

- When we want to do a case conference we will canvas the committee for current issues that need to be addressed. Then a sub-committee will be created to write a mock case conference scenario. We will set two meeting dates close together so that we have adequate time to review the entire case conference as a group allowing for lots of time to discuss what comes up.
- When we do a case conference we focus on the following points:
 - What went right?
 - What is seen as a systemic problem?
 - Can it be fixed?
 - What were the safety issues? How were these addressed?
 - What safety issues still exist?
 - What can we do to prevent it from reoccurring?

For many years, a number of agencies supported a woman to be safe from her abuser. We identified this as a very high risk situation. We watched her return to the relationship many times. She accessed support from a number of services. Finally, we called a case conference, invited her to attend, and met to discuss her safety. This was one of the best processes that we engaged in. It resulted in us all being on the same page, with the same information and for her to have a safety plan in place.”

- Julie Gibson, Sunshine Coast Prevention of Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee, 2010

“After several roundtable discussions that highlighted the value of using Appreciative Inquiry to increase the effectiveness of teambuilding and moving issues forward, our local Violence in Relationship (VIR) Coordinating Committee chose to look at a case study from the focus of “what went well”, rather than from a gaps analysis perspective. The case study was prepared in advance by a number of the workers who had been involved.

The case study centered around a client experiencing multiple barriers, who had engaged with the system on more than one occasion with negative outcomes. Several agencies were involved with working in collaboration with each other and the client, with both her consent and insistence that we do so. As a result of the collaboration, which spanned 14 months, the RCMP, RCMP Victim Services, Crown Counsel, Ministry for Children and Family Development, STV counsellor, and AXIS Family Resources (Children Who Witness Abuse program as well as Family Based Interventions Counselling Program) were able to share information about the level of risk experienced by the client. Receiving consistent information from more than one source encouraged all involved agencies to work proactively toward increasing and maintaining safety for the client and her children, as well as addressing some of her other issues. One of the issues concerning the client was that she had no heat in her home for the winter; the house was heated with wood, and her chimney was not safe. Axis Family Resources was able to work with MCFD who was able to find funds to build a new chimney for the family.

Although the case study was successful in highlighting the positive aspects of the coordinated response and support provided, it also illuminated the gaps that exist without focusing directly on them. The effectiveness of the collaboration, strengths that can be built on, and the gaps that exist were discussed in an open and appreciative way and one of the key outcomes was that it allowed the committee to talk about other cases where multiple risk factors exist.”

- 100 Mile House & District
Violence in Relationships Committee, 2010

Using Case Studies for Community Coordination Initiatives on Violence Against Women Tool

Some suggestions on how to abide by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) when information sharing:

- Create a generic case example pulling together a number of cases to illustrate an issue;
- Use non-identifying information in the example;
- Use a non-judgmental, non-blaming approach - a “hey we all make mistakes” perspective ~ “let’s work together to improve the system”;
- Accept that Crown may not be able to comment on “prosecutorial decisions”, but encourage their participation to explain points of law, etc.;
- Speak to an issue “hypothetically”.

Bringing Issues to the Table Tool

As Chair or Coordinator of a coordination initiative you will often have issues and concerns brought to you for discussion at VAWIR Committee meetings. It is very important to have guidelines in place for your committee so that issues are brought forward well in advance of committee meetings. This way people do not feel “ambushed” and defensive by having issues brought up in the middle of meetings. It is also important that the issues be systemic or local issues. Issues between individuals or individual agencies should be discussed outside of the meeting setting.

1. Group Guidelines Development

- Introduce the development of group guidelines as a way of establishing agreements/ground rules for working together.
- Lead a brainstorm around ground rules that will facilitate safety and respectful communication among group members. Record the ideas on a piece of flipchart paper.
- At the end of the brainstorm, ask the group to review the points listed and to indicate their agreement with the proposed ground rules.
- Once agreement has been reached, post the list and let the group know that in the event issues arise, each of them has a responsibility to remind the group of the agreement reached.

2. Confidentiality Agreements

As well as group guidelines, many groups have confidentiality agreements that are either part of their guidelines or a separate form that new members sign. While most agencies have their own confidentiality guidelines, it is important to discuss the limits of confidentiality in discussions at the VAWIR table and to create safety for those attending. For an example of a confidentiality agreement, see Appendix VI: Affirmation of Confidentiality.

3. Bringing Issues to the Table

Part of the group guidelines should set processes for bringing issues to the table. These should include the following:

- The designated person contacting those directly involved to let them know the issue is being brought forward in order for them to prepare;

3. Bringing Issues to the Table

- Notifying a designated person (i.e. the Chair or Coordinator of the committee) well before the meeting so that those directly involved in the issue can be notified in order to prepare for the meeting;
- Agreement that issues will be brought forward for discussion, not in a blaming way but to work toward identifying systemic or local issues and how to address any gap identified. Questions that could be asked:
 - Is this a one-time or persistent issue?
 - Do we have the right people at the table to discuss the issue?
 - Is this a local or systemic issue?
 - Does the issue involve a need for training?
 - Does the issue require a change in policy or practice?
 - Who will work on this issue?
 - What are the next steps?

4. Addressing Issues

Many issues can be addressed at the local level by developing or bringing in local training initiatives or practice protocols. For example, in one community monitoring of the accused while on recognizance was problematic. Issues of breaching conditions were exacerbated by a lack of supervision. In that community, the local probation office and police detachment developed an agreement to report conditions being put on all police releases in domestic violence cases. This has helped in monitoring where the accused is living and other conditions of release.

In other situations VAWIR Committees have discussed writing letters regarding issues they are working on - to Ministry officials or others. It is important to remember that not all members of a VAWIR Committee will be able to be part of a letter writing campaign. Representatives from Crown Counsel or Ministry agencies such as MCFD and Corrections are prohibited from signing on to letters to the Ministry or undertaking any public advocacy. It is helpful to discuss this early on with the VAWIR members and decide how this will be handled. Many committees draft a letter together and then have individual agencies/members that are able to participate send their own letters.

5. How CCWS Can Help

Some issues will naturally need to be taken to the regional or provincial level. CCWS can help by bringing policy or practice issues of a provincial nature to our Provincial Working Group. To contact CCWS please visit www.endingviolence.org/ccws.

The Role of the Solutions Management Tool in Bringing Work to the Table

Solutions Management refers to a model for working at the local level to identify, analyze, and resolve issues that impact the safety of women and their children experiencing violence. “Issues” in this case meaning the barriers created by policies, procedures or practices of response systems such as community agencies, police, Crown, corrections, MCFD, Citizenship and Immigration, etc. The model also provides a way to identify and track issues that require action at a regional, provincial, federal or other level.

There are a number of ways issues can be identified and analyzed by coordination initiatives. Each coordination initiative will choose the method or combination of methods that will work best for them. The Solutions Management Tool contains an exercise to assist coordination initiatives to identify, analyze and take action on issues, and a chart that could be used as an overhead to facilitate discussion. It also contains a blank log for coordination initiatives to use in their tracking and analysis of issues.

Solutions Management Exercise

This exercise will assist coordination initiatives to create a plan of action to address issues identified by using the Solutions Management Model. At each stage in the process, your initiative is asked to discuss the suggested questions, allowing each member to offer the perspective and insight of their discipline. At the Visioning for Change stage in the process, you will have each member of your group offer a suggestion for a “best practice” solution. The object of the exercise is to come to consensus on a vision for a best practice based on the full discussion in which each participant’s experience is heard and incorporated into the solution, and then to go on and develop a plan of action to reach that goal.

What is an Issue?

An “issue” is a point of concern that is in contradiction to a defined best practice guideline or policy. Issues identified in coordination initiatives should be those that are “systemic” in that they affect many women and are not just “case specific”.

When we work in collaboration to identify current issues impacting safety for victims of sexual assault and violence in relationships it is important for us to be aware of the benchmarks that define best practice.

For instance, some of the benchmarks we are most familiar with include:

- The RCMP “E” Division Violence in Relationships policy including:
 - Primary Aggressor
 - Victim Referral
- MCFD mandatory reporting of children at risk of violence
 - Best Practices Approaches - Child Protection and Violence Against Women
- The BC Provincial VAWIR Policy (Violence Against Women in Relationships)

Some other benchmarks, not always thought of, but just as important in terms of our accountability to women’s safety, include:

- Local protocols and agreements
- Ground rules, group norms
- A collaborative understanding of “safety”

One of the most important benchmarks created by coordination initiatives will be a collective understanding of the meaning of “women’s safety”. This understanding will come from the cross-sector dialogue of the group’s analysis of issues.

We must bring these issues to the table in order to begin to understand what we mean by “safety” in the varying contexts of women’s experiences.

Identification and open discussion of issues form the foundation of coordination work. Transparency about practices leads to the kind of interactions and problem solving necessary to effectively do the work of increasing safety for victims.

When identifying issues in your community response, remember the benchmarks that are guiding your practice and make them transparent in your group. The issues that arise from your understanding of these best practices will enrich the group’s understanding of safety and encourage and foster a learning environment that will benefit everyone in the group and enhance its ability to increase safety for women.

Step 1 : Identify and Prioritize Issues

1. Distribute post-it notes and 6 data dots to each person. Ask each person to:
 - identify one issue* that they experience in their work that could be addressed through coordination and;
 - write down their issue on a post-it note.

** Some examples of issues: gaps in services, duplication of services, incomplete or inaccurate implementation of policy best practices*

2. Ask each person to read what their issue is (no discussion)
3. As the issues are read, collect the post-it notes and transcribe to flipchart. If there are overlaps/repetitions, include all related post-it notes on that flipchart paper. Cluster the issues where they are similar.
4. Call all of the participants up to the front and ask them to vote for their three top priorities using the data dots: Three data dots for their top priority, two data dots for their second priority and one data dot for their third priority.
5. Count the results and circle the five top items. All of the issues will be addressed by the committee, but these are the priorities.
6. Divide the group into three small sub-groups.
7. Give each group one issue of the top five and proceed with the next steps.

At each stage in the following process, discuss the suggested questions allowing each member to offer the perspective and insight of their discipline.

Step 2: Analyze the Issue

With regard to your issue consider the following questions in your discussions:

- What are the practical problems that impede victim safety/offender accountability?
- Does the issue have to do with lack of policy, policy implementation, administrative process, flow of information, form, etc.?
- Does the issue have to do with the level of understanding about the dynamics of sexual assault and violence in relationships?
- Is the issue related to referral processes?
- Who needs to be involved in addressing this issue?
- Does the problem represent a need for action/response at a Provincial or Ministry level?

Step 3: Vision for Change

What is the best possible solution? At the Visioning for Change stage in the process have each member of your group offer a suggestion for a “best practice” solution. In this exercise “best practice” is synonymous with the solution that creates the most safety for an assaulted woman. The discussion focus may be on offender accountability, but the analysis and outcome must always be from the point of view of victim safety. Notice in your discussions how definitions of “safety” vary.

The object of the exercise is to come to consensus on a vision for a “best practice” based on the full discussion in which each participant’s experience is heard and incorporated into the solution, and then to go on and develop a plan of action to reach that goal.

Step 4: Develop a Plan

The following questions can be used to guide discussion:

- Practical issues: what can we do now (or have we done) to fix the situation, who will take action, by when, what is the agreed upon strategy?
- Systemic issues the problem represents: what long-term improvements can be made at the local level to address the problem?
- Does the problem represent a need for change at another level of authority? Can it be addressed through a regional authority? e.g. Police Boards, Regional Crown, Regional MCFD.
- Does the problem represent a need for action/response at a Provincial or Ministry level?

Step 5: Monitor

- How will we measure our success?
- How will we know when we have improved?
 - It will be useful to determine at the outset what you will look for to determine your successes.
 - You will want to evaluate your progress, and possibly make adjustments along the way.
 - Don't be discouraged if you must revisit your original problem several times before achieving the level of success you had envisioned.
 - A process of monitoring and evaluation is crucial to a substantial change process and may require ongoing work to overcome challenges and obstacles.

Protecting Privacy and Ensuring Safety: How do We Best Serve Victims?

As service providers we need to keep women safe and also protect their privacy. Often these two goals are in sync. For example, when we work with Crown counsel to ensure that the temporary address of a woman fleeing an abusive husband is not released to the abuser by mistake through having this information included on court documents that are disclosed. Here, protecting privacy also protects the victim. But in other situations the goals of ensuring women's safety and maintaining confidentiality may seem to be in opposition, for example, where the abuser has made direct threats or the service provider has information that indicates the woman is in immediate danger. Under what circumstances should this information about risk be shared? (Please see Appendix X: Disclosing Information in Woman Abuse Cases for more information.)

While both privacy and safety issues must be addressed, ensuring the woman's safety is of paramount concern. The partnership between Ninu Kang and Sukhdev Sandhu to facilitate men's treatment groups at MOSAIC, for example, encounters the need to balance safety and confidentiality—in this case, the abused woman's safety vs. the offender's privacy interest. Every member of the men's group is told up front that Ninu and Sukhdev will share information from the group with the group member's probation officer and/or with his wife or girlfriend if this is in the interest of the woman's safety. Both Ninu and Sukhdev are committed to respecting this particular balance of safety and confidentiality.

One of the clearest examples of the tension between privacy rights and safety relates to referrals from police or RCMP to community-based victim service programs. On the one hand, police have an obligation to safeguard victims' *confidentiality* by not releasing personal information without written consent. On the other hand, victims' *safety* can be significantly increased by a referral from police to community-based victim services, which would involve the police sharing information with that agency for the purpose of referral. Sharing information—sometimes seen as breaking confidentiality—may lead directly to increased safety for women.

Under the new Protocol for Highest Risk Cases (p.59, December 2010 VAWIR Policy) “the designation of highest risk is assigned to a domestic violence case where police

believe there is a significant potential for serious bodily harm or death”. Once a case is designated as highest risk, the protocol comes into effect and with it “enhanced provisions for information sharing and case management”. Partners in the case management response are outlined on page 60 of the BC VAWIR Policy (available at www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservices/publications/docs/vawir.pdf):

- Police;
- Crown counsel;
- Corrections staff;
- Victim Service Workers; and
- Child welfare workers.

Legislation also affects how partners deal with confidentiality and safety questions. (Please see Appendix X for a list of applicable information and privacy provisions.) System-based responders such as hospitals, provincial government ministries and municipal police in BC are governed by the provincial Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA). RCMP and federally regulated agencies/businesses such as banks and railroads are governed by the federal Privacy Act. Community-based victim support programs are governed by the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA). Under the different acts, there are slight differences in the powers to release personal information such as the name of a victim and other information about her case to community-based victim services programs. In general, police take the position that they cannot, because of the federal Privacy Act or the provincial FIPPA, release information to community-based programs without the victim’s express or implied consent. Under current interpretations of the existing legislation (federal and provincial), any exceptions to the “consent before release” rule must be decided on a case-by-case basis.

In some communities, community-based victim services workers and police or RCMP have developed protocols together to address the type of consent that is required in order for police to release referral-related information to the community-based program. In the past, operational policies guiding referrals have emphasized privacy concerns, in some cases without appropriate consideration of safety concerns. More recent policies, particularly the 2010 provincial VAWIR policy, attempt to strike a better balance between the need to protect privacy and the need to keep women and children safe through coordinated risk management and information sharing, including referrals.

Exceptions to the “consent before release rule” exist in both FIPPA, PIPA and the federal Privacy Act. These exceptions generally fall under the rubric of health and safety concerns and public interest in disclosure. Under the provincial FIPPA, personal information can only be released with the person’s consent unless the release of information without consent is authorized in the Act. There are specific exceptions that allow information to be shared without consent:

- Where there the public body determines there are compelling circumstances affecting anyone’s health or safety. [FIPPA s. 33.1(1)(m)]
- Where the information is being disclosed for a purpose consistent with the purpose for which it was collected in the first place [FIPPA ss. 33.2 & 34]
- The above compelling circumstances and consistent purpose exceptions provide that the public official *may* disclose without consent. FIPPA also provides that personal information *must* be disclosed to the public, an affected group of people or to the applicant:
- Where there is a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people [FIPPA s. 25(1)(a)]; or where the disclosure is for any other reason clearly in the public interest [FIPPA s. 25(1)(b)].
- Under the provincial PIPA, personal information can only be released with the person’s consent unless release of the information without consent is authorized in the Act. There are specific exceptions that allow information to be shared without consent:
- Information *may* be disclosed if disclosure is clearly in the interests of the individual and consent cannot be obtained in a timely way [PIPA s. 18(1)(a)]
- Information *may* be disclosed If it is reasonable to expect that disclosure with consent would compromise an investigation or proceeding [PIPA s. 18(1)(c)]
- Information *may* be disclosed to assist in an investigation or in making a decision to start an investigation [PIPA s. 18(1)(j)]
- Information *may* be disclosed if there are reasonable ground to believe that compelling circumstances exist that affect anyone’s health or safety [PIPA s. 18(1)(k)]
- Information *may* be disclosed if there are reasonable grounds to believe that compelling circumstances exist that affect anyone’s health or safety [PIPA s. 18(1)(k)]
- PIPA exceptions also allow an organization to disclose personal information to another organization or to a public body without consent if:

the information is being disclosed for a purpose consistent with the purpose for which it was collected in the first place and the disclosure is necessary for that purpose. [PIPA s. 18(4)]

Under the Federal Privacy Act, public officials may release personal information without consent where the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs the invasion of privacy or where disclosure would clearly benefit the individual to whom the information relates. [Privacy Act s. 8(2)(m)]

Under both the provincial and federal privacy laws, exceptions allowing for release of personal information without consent must be decided on a case by case basis.

In some cases, the effect of not releasing victim information may be the protection of her privacy at the expense of her safety: without referrals to community-based programs, many victims will not have the enhanced safety supports that can result from the services these programs provide. There is also less opportunity for police and community agencies to work together and support victims in a coordinated manner.

Another example of where the need to balance safety and privacy concerns arises is when a woman who has experienced violence has accessed services at a community-based agency when the violence is still occurring and she is in physical danger but she does not want to contact the police. The community-based worker may feel caught between the desire to contact the police and the desire to protect the woman's confidentiality. If the worker is providing services within a partnership where the partners hold differing opinions on what to do in this case, this can be a major challenge. This is a situation that highlights the need for a coordinated response to be worked out ahead of time.

In partnerships that are effective in responding to violence against women, the question of how to ensure that privacy rights do not trump safety concerns has been addressed. The 2010 provincial VAWIR Policy Highest Risk Protocol mandates that justice and child welfare personnel provide a coordinated and collaborative case management response in high risk cases. Situations can still occur, however, where unresolved questions arise. How do you keep a woman safe without breaching confidentiality? There is much research to show that leaving the relationship is the time of highest risk for women and their children, so women's fears about contacting police and being forced to leave the relationship can be justified. In situations where the worker is very concerned about safety, many community-based workers contact a police officer they trust with a "hypothetical" to brainstorm ideas for increasing safety for this woman. The worker may also work with the woman to ensure that she is connected with police in a supported way with safety plans proactively in place.

In other situations, protecting the woman's personal information is crucial to keeping her safe. For example, not releasing her address or whereabouts in any court document or other document that might then be accessed by the offender.

Safety Planning

It is a reality that women often do not call police until they have been assaulted many times. It is also a reality that an actual or pending separation, and a history of domestic violence are the two most common risk factors present in a domestic homicide. It is critical that advocates know and identify all the risk factors present in a given case in order to ensure that appropriate safety planning is undertaken and implemented.

A woman's belief that her partner is likely to commit further violence against her after they are separated and his access to her are significant factors to consider and address in any safety plan. Also consider:

- Abuser risk factors
e.g. A prior history of domestic violence including stalking, threats, forced sex, assaults, a history of drug or alcohol abuse, depression, unemployment
- Outside / system risk factors
e.g. poverty, geographical isolation, pressures from family/community
- Woman's individual situation
e.g. She is recent immigrant with language barrier, without independent financial means, with young children
- Woman's support network
e.g. She does or does not have friends, family members etc. who assist and support her decisions
- Level of system response
e.g. threats from child welfare, police response inconsistent, possibly judgmental
- Past experience and knowledge of system
e.g. prior negative involvement with the Court system

All police in BC are required to take an online training on conducting evidence-based, risk-focused domestic violence investigations. As part of this training, a *Summary of Domestic Violence Risk Factors* has been developed as an investigative guide for frontline officers. Local community coordination initiatives can use these risk factors to foster a shared understanding of critical risk factors in domestic violence cases. A copy of these risk factors has been included in Appendix X.

In cases designated by police as highest risk, programs may see the police undertake a risk assessment using the B-SAFER tool (Brief Spousal Assault Form for Evaluating Risk). Note that the risk factors included in the B-SAFER tool are consistent with the *Summary of Domestic Violence Risk Factors* but are organized in a slightly different manner. In either case, the risk factors identified will be of use in safety planning.

Interventions Must Focus on Both the Victim and the Perpetrator

For example, where there are threats of suicide by the perpetrator, mental health professionals should be brought in as part of the safety planning process. Where substance abuse is an issue, conditions should be put into release orders that address this concern and provide for monitoring of the offender. When there are children involved, safety plans should always include safety of the children. Safety plans should not simply focus on steps the survivor can take, but must include steps the system will take to ensure monitoring of the offender, accountability and access to needed resources.

Clients should be encouraged to listen to their instincts and validated for the skills they already have used to keep themselves and their children safe.

For more information on risk and safety planning see Appendices VII, IX, X.

Tips for Balancing Confidentiality and Safety

1. Develop and Use an In-house Policy on Information Management to Help Guide Practice Related to Information Sharing with Other Agencies.

An in-house policy will help staff within your program make consistent decisions about the release of information. If these decisions are challenged, the policy can then be used to provide a clear rationale for why certain actions were taken. Whatever policy you have should be consistent with provincial and/or federal laws related to information sharing and in keeping with any ethical frameworks covering particular sectors. For example, community-based victim assistance programs in BC have province-wide records management guidelines that would apply. Social workers and clinical counsellors have codes of ethics that include principles addressing privacy issues. These frameworks provide a roadmap for practice and policy around information sharing. You should consider larger frameworks in developing your agency's practice and policy around information sharing. Remember to ensure that clients are aware of any limits to confidentiality.

2. Be clear about what “confidentiality” and “safety” mean to your particular partnership. Be open about differing perspectives and find a concrete way to deal with them.

Don't assume that both partners will define these terms in the same way. One partner may believe that no abused woman is safe unless the offender is in jail; the other partner may believe that individual women have different requirements for safety, depending on the circumstances. In a case where police complete an investigation, Crown lays charges, the accused pleads guilty and a conviction is made, systems-based workers may believe that safety has been achieved. However, if the sentence does not include jail time and contact between the abuser and the victim continues due to shared custody, counsellors may be concerned about the ongoing contact and opportunities for continued violence. In terms of confidentiality, one partner may believe that it is acceptable to call 911 against a woman's will; the other partner may believe that this is an unacceptable breach of her confidentiality.

Sit down with your partner and walk through this issue thoroughly. Design a protocol for referrals that will allow you to provide the most seamless process of getting women to the program with the mandate that provides the most comprehensive service. If these are policies that inadvertently get in the way of what all partners feel would be best, raise these concerns at a higher level. Work towards changing policies that are problematic.

3. Address the challenges that small communities create for maintaining confidentiality.

It is a common belief that it is impossible to protect confidentiality in a small community. A “small community” may be a small town or a reserve or an ethnic, cultural or disability community within a larger urban context. In this situation, where all or most of the community members know each other, including service providers and clients, it can sometimes be easier for boundaries to blur and confidentiality to be breached. One of the challenges that workers in small communities experience is intense isolation, due to the small numbers of other service providers in the area. In some cases, workers have shared confidential client information outside of their workplace because they had no co-workers with whom to debrief.

In spite of the challenges, having encountered many rural partnerships that maintain strict confidentiality, we would argue that while it may be difficult to do, it is not impossible. One of the CCWS team remembers being part of a discussion on violence against women that was held in a town so small that there was not much more than a bus stop, a grocery store and a school. The discussion included service providers and survivors of violence. A member of the local school board told a story about a woman who used to hide in the school from her abusive partner. The board eventually decided that they couldn’t allow the woman to do this anymore as it posed a safety risk for the students. The discussion went on for a number of hours. Towards the end of the day another woman in the group identified herself as the woman who had been hiding in the school. She thanked the school board member for the respectful way in which she had described the situation at the school. The teachers had protected this woman’s identity so well that even a board member had never known her name, even though the town was so small that the two women knew each other.

What do you need to put in place to ensure that you have adequate protection for confidentiality as well as adequate means for workers to debrief and gain support? Some strategies might include referring women to agencies in other communities where possible or having workers debrief with a support person outside of the community. These strategies should be included as part of the partnership agreement.

3. Address the challenges that small communities create for maintaining confidentiality.

See these websites for more information about the abuse of women in rural, remote and farming communities:

www.letswrap.com/dvinfo/rural.htm

www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/rural_and_farm_women.html

(Thanks to Nancy Taylor, Chair of the Robson Valley Violence Against Women Coordination Committee, for telling us about these sites.)

The Praxis International website also contains excellent information on this issue: www.praxisinternational.org.

4. Have protocol for what to do when confidentiality is breached or women's safety is not prioritized.

If one partner feels that another partner has breached confidentiality or has not prioritized women's safety in the way that the partnership has agreed upon, it is important to have a procedure already in place ahead of time for dealing with this situation. What are the consequences? How is each partner held accountable to the partnership's agreement on these issues?

5. Don't let good working relationships be an excuse for breaking women's confidentiality.

If partners from different agencies have developed a high level of trust and perhaps even friendships, an expectation may arise that they will share confidential information in spite of agency guidelines. Without any malicious intent, partners may assume that because they trust their partner they can discuss cases with a level of detail that they otherwise might not. It is important to realize the implications that this might have: the client in question has probably made certain assumptions about the safety of her personal information and she has the right to be the one to decide if this information is shared with others. This can also set a precedent for sharing confidential information based on personal relationships as opposed to policy or legislation.

6. Be creative about respecting legislation related to confidentiality while at the same time working to increase women's safety.

In Masset, the RCMP, because of the federal Privacy Act, have been unable to pass on victims' contact information to community services without her consent. Instead, they do their best to ensure that RCMP members are well-informed about community services so that they can give victims appropriate and detailed information about the services and encourage them to contact the services for help.

Partners may also have other concerns about legislation and confidentiality. With thorough training on relevant legislation and appropriate protocols these issues can be worked through. It is important to make sure that everyone in the partnership understands current legislation. Legal language can be confusing and intimidating, and some members of the partnership may have less experience than others in interpreting legislation. Open sharing of information and use of plain language can help ensure all partners are empowered to understand and work with legislation. Using the Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy: Protocol for Highest Risk Cases as a reference can help with information sharing in highest risk cases. Use of risk tools such as the Summary of Domestic Violence Risk Factors (Appendix IX) can help with identifying those highest risk cases.

If there are stumbling blocks within the partnership related to confidentiality, ask the question:

- Is the refusal to release information or share a copy of a document based on assumptions about the case and the applicable privacy legislation?
- Or is it based on an actual understanding of the dynamics of the case (e.g. safety issues) and the legislation and its intentions?

By asking for clarification about the legal authority that is being relied on to support or justify a particular decision, a partner may enhance their own understanding of that legislation and perhaps increase their partner's understanding as well.

Case Conferencing

In this section we are talking about doing case conferencing in a high risk file, where you are bringing together frontline responders to look at risk and safety. Before you can begin to undertake this type of work together there needs to be a maturity in the work of the VAW Committee, with trust and mutual respect established amongst the players. As well, processes for bringing cases forward, confidentiality and working together need to have been developed.

“The overall goals of case coordination are to increase victim safety, reduce risk, and avoid duplication. These are achieved through:

- information-sharing,
- effective planning,
- collaborative action, and
- improved case tracking.

Coordination cannot provide absolute safety, but it can assist to reduce danger.”

- From the Nova Scotia Department of Justice’s
Nova Scotia High Risk Case Coordination Protocol Framework, 2004

Before beginning to look at individual cases in your VAW Committee (or sub-committee) there are many factors that need to be in place. Most important are relationships built on respect and trust. Next is the development of protocols that allow for sharing of information about factors that could affect risk and safety.

The BC Provincial Violence Against Women In Relationships Policy (VAWIR), 2010, “recognizes the severity of domestic violence and the importance of a coordinated response by government, justice and child welfare partners.” The VAWIR policy also states that, “While all domestic violence incidents are a concern, certain cases pose a significant risk of future violence for severe bodily harm or death. Information regarding identified risk factors is critical to safety planning and risk mitigation strategies...”

Tips for Establishing a Team Approach to Risk and Safety Planning

The following pointers will help in establishing the basis of a cohesive team approach to risk and safety planning.

1. Many communities have developed confidentiality agreements that potential members sign on to before participating in case conferencing teams. These agreements outline the limits to confidentiality and that information shared at the case conference table will not be shared outside that process. For a sample Confidentiality Agreement, please see Appendix VI: “Affirmation of Confidentiality”.

Each agency at the table will have different legislation and policies that govern their ability to share information. Federal and Provincial privacy legislation have sections that cover where information can be shared in cases of threat to health and safety. It is important that the case conferencing group explore the various limits to information sharing and set up processes whereby cases are identified as appropriate for conferencing (often high risk cases); decide upon the risk tools that will be used and develop criteria for referral to the case conferencing group. Some groups may decide to conduct case conferencing only in situations where the victim has consented. For more details please see Appendix VI: “Information Sharing in High Risk Cases and Referrals to Community Based Victim Services” on p.130.

2. It is important that the risk indicators include a variety of factors, not just those related to the offender. Systemic factors such as MCFD involvement or threats of MCFD involvement, or pending civil litigation processes such as custody, property settlement or divorce proceedings can elevate risk. Women can be more vulnerable if they have health or disability issues, language barriers or other issues. These should be taken into account in any safety plan. See Appendix VIII: “Aid to Safety Assessment Planning (ASAP)”, for further risk factor information.
3. It is preferable to have permission of the victim to undertake case conferencing, but the group should consider whether and how information sharing would be handled in very high risk situations where permission has not been obtained.
4. A process for the case conferencing itself should be developed. In some committees this begins with the referring committee member outlining the case. In others an interview questionnaire for the victim is developed and the responses are brought to the committee for review.
5. Members of the Case Conference Team are notified ahead of time and bring the information they have on the case to the table. The situation is reviewed for risk factors and safety strategies. It is important that the worker who has the victim as a client be present at this meeting to represent the client’s strengths and needs and to act as a liaison with the client to support safety planning.

Planning for Case Conferencing Tool

To support communities in developing coordinated case conferencing, we have developed the following checklist:

Case Conference Planning Checklist

- Key Members of the Team
 - Police
 - Community Corrections (Bail Supervisors and Probations Officers)
 - Crown (may not be able to speak to a specific case but can provide legal information)
 - Community-Based Victim Services
 - Police-Based Victim Services
 - Transition House
 - Other (list here)
- Applicable Privacy Legislation Reviewed
- Risk Indicators Identified Based on Current Models
 - All parties have agreed to indicators
- Confidentiality Agreement Developed
 - All parties have signed confidentiality agreement
- Member Roles And Responsibilities Developed
 - All parties have signed Member Roles and Responsibilities
- Process for Case Review Developed

Before the Case Conference Meeting:

- Permission has been received from victim for case conference OR alternatively, the case is deemed to be highest risk and privacy legislation exceptions considered to be applicable.
- All members have been notified of the case and are prepared to bring their information to the meeting.

* Please note that where a decision is made to share personal information without consent that decision must:

- be reached on a case-by-case basis;
- be based on a necessity to disclose;
- ensure that only proportionate and relevant information is disclosed in light of the level of risk of harm to a named individual or a known household in each case;
- be properly documented at the time a disclosure decision is made identifying why the disclosures are being made (i.e. what risk is believed to exist), what information and to whom it will be disclosed and what restrictions on use of the disclosed information will be place on its recipients; and
- give consideration to whether notice of disclosure must be provided.

At the Case Conference Meeting:

- one person has been designated to present the case to the group;
- one person has been designated to take notes and document decisions made;
- the case is presented and concerns / plans documented;
- any immediate safety concerns are identified and addressed;
- one person is appointed to meet with the victim and relay information, ideally this would be the community-based victim assistance worker in communities which have that program;
- each person leaves with assigned tasks to complete (i.e. RCMP flagging file, Victim Services following up with victim, etc.);
- time for follow up is set with one person designated to coordinate the next meeting.

Case conferencing has the potential to greatly increase the flow of information and thereby safety for victims of violence in relationship. Lack of information on risk and safety has shown to be direct factors in many high profile murders in our province, including the Lee murders in Oak Bay in 2007 and the death of 2 year old Seth Thornett in 2004. Through the use of case conferencing, with all players involved, we can increase safety for women and children in BC.

External Challenges

All partnerships will face challenges. And as we have seen in other parts of the guide, these challenges can be used as opportunities for the partnership to develop and deepen. Challenges will vary according to the partnership—the partnership type and the particular people involved.

The major external pressure identified by partnerships was the lack of adequate funding. Many partnerships rely on volunteer work by their members, as there is not funding available to pay them. Most funding is project-oriented and short term. The lack of funding can lead to increased territorial feelings and competition with other agencies or sometimes within the partnership as well. At the same time, one of the key benefits of partnerships is that the partnership can act as a place where people can talk and get support and take action for the pressures that they are facing as a result of cuts to services.

The partnerships that we looked at also discussed pressures that came from the general public. On the one hand, some partnerships felt that there was pressure from the community to “solve the problems of the world”. On the other hand, some partnerships had to respond to letters to the editor in the local paper or to other forms of complaints from people who felt threatened by the focus on violence against women and questioned why the partnership was operating at all.

Another challenge can be responding to beliefs about certain cultures that come from within or outside of the culture. For example, when Ninu Kang began developing her partnership of a male and female facilitator for men’s treatment groups, she was faced with the challenge of addressing the belief held by some members of the Indo-Canadian community that men in the group could never respect a female facilitator.

Ninu was faced with the challenge of disagreeing with other members of her community while still being committed to creating effective treatment groups specifically for Indo-Canadian men. Now, ten years after the groups began, Ninu sees more acceptance both in her own community and in the “mainstream” of the idea of a female facilitator.

Tips for Responding to External Challenges

Responding to Financial Pressures

This can be one of the most time-consuming tasks of the partnership. Lack of funding presents massive challenges, and at the same time, funding comes with its own challenges.

In other words, it can be difficult not to get caught up in trying to fit your partnership into a particular funder's requirements as opposed to staying focused on the vision of the partnership.

1. Write funding proposals.

Funding proposals, though often a necessary task, can be time-consuming and stressful to put together. There are a few things that can make it easier. It is helpful to prepare a package of materials that can be cut and pasted into various funding applications so you don't have to reinvent the wheel for every funding application. The package might also include: your mission statement, information about your project's history and structure, bios of members of the partnership, a budget for your proposed activities, support letters, and any information that shows that your partnership is innovative. Most funders prefer projects that are innovative and have strong community support. Once this package is in place, perhaps two or three members of the partnership can each have a copy and take on the preparation of applications. Many funders are willing to spend some time talking to you on the phone or reading a letter of intent before you go to the effort of preparing a full application. This will save you time and help you put together a successful application.

2. Be clear about the particular needs of your rural partnership.

Some funders may not be aware of the needs of rural communities that are different from urban centres. For example, rural projects will probably need additional funds for travel, conference calls or other means of helping partners communicate with each other.

3. Make attempts to get your partnership included as part of existing ongoing funding agreements.

If your partnership is not a one-time task, is meeting a need, and is proving to increase women's safety, is there any way to make it part of ongoing program funding from one of the partners' agencies?

4. Be creative about using resources.

Explore ways of supporting the partnership that don't require increased funding. Perhaps partnership members' responsibilities outside the partnership can be reorganized to support their work inside the partnership? Perhaps there is a way that volunteers can take on some of the work? Perhaps an agency can offer the use of meeting space, phone lines or staff time?

5. In the case of changes to funding policy or legislation, make sure government is aware of the impact of the changes.

If changes occur that affect women's safety, make sure you communicate the impacts you are seeing through your partnership to those who make decisions. Policy makers and legislators would want to know if a change in one area is inadvertently affecting the safety of women. Your partnership might see reporting both positive and negative effects as part of its responsibility.

Responding to Community Pressures

1. Do some education in the community.

The Vancouver Police DVU has reduced misconceptions about their partnership by doing as much community education as possible. This has helped educate other agencies about what the unit does and has improved relationships with these agencies and assisted with referrals. No partnership will thrive and make an impact if no one knows about it. Be sure to build in some promotion and information sessions for other stakeholders in your community.

2. Present a unified front.

If there are negative pressures from outside the partnership or negative assumptions, it is important for the partners to present a unified front or to deal with any tension between them that might prevent the development of a unified front. This cooperation between the partners can, in itself, help address any community concerns. For example, community suspicion about police may be eased by witnessing the police and community-based support workers working together.

3. Demonstrate to the community the benefits of your partnership.

Partnerships have tried various strategies to raise their profile in the community, including instituting an annual award for anti-violence work and hanging the partnership's banner in a prominent location in the community.

4. Identify policies or practices (government or agency) that may be harming the partnership and strategize about how to address them.

Partnerships we spoke with identified challenges such as a lack of adherence to policies that requires systems to participate in community coordination initiatives and turnover within agencies participating in the partnership that can result in a loss of momentum. One of the responses to the latter issue is to prioritize putting minutes, agreements and policies of the partnership in writing in an attempt to minimize the loss of congruence that results from turnover. Another response is to create comprehensive background packages for new members so time in meetings is not continually diverted from the regular work of the group. These and other responses are critical to maintaining momentum, since turnover is inevitable.

Internal Challenges

Many of the potential internal challenges for partnerships have already been discussed in detail. In summary, the key challenges identified in the partnerships we studied were:

- Philosophical differences, i.e. is violence against women gender-based, or an individual pathology;
- Varying levels of commitment and motivation;
- Stereotyping of each other;
- Staff turnover;
- Government reforms and policy changes;
- Need for clarity on roles, responsibilities and mandates;
- Need for formal structure and recording;
- Adherence to best practices and policies;
- Need for balance of task and process;
- Varying degrees of understanding of the need to address diversity;
- Conflict between confidentiality and safety;
- Complex barriers, both legislated and perceived, to information sharing; and
- Power imbalances.

Tips for Responding to Internal Challenges

1. Work at keeping up partners' energy and enthusiasm.

Members of anti-violence partnerships are often overworked and stressed. It can be difficult to maintain interest in the partnership, particularly when working in partnership is stressful, or, on the other hand, when the partnership is not actively working on a particular task. Partners have used various strategies to counter this:

- Keep meetings short and focussed;
- Go back to the basics: If you haven't written a mission statement, values/grounding assumptions, ground rules, goals, etc. begin this process. If you have these in place, revisit them to renew your commitment;
- Stay focused on the work of improving women's safety by being willing to identify and name the problems - work toward solutions;
- Keep vigilant about the balance of task and process;
- Make a point of appreciating everyone's involvement and all progress.

2. Dedicate time to the partnership.

It can be difficult to prioritize the partnership, especially if it is something that you are expected to attend to off the side of your desk. It can help to schedule regular meetings well in advance. For example, one partnership sits down at the beginning of each year and schedules monthly meetings for the next twelve months. Some partners set aside certain days of the week or month for meetings. Some schedule annual planning meetings that take a few days.

It can help to find ways to make your partnership tasks more efficient. Can some meetings be held by email or phone instead of in person? Can some information be distributed via email without having a meeting at all?

3. Make sure that the partners are the right people for the job and don't be afraid to make changes if necessary.

Many partnerships that we spoke with emphasized the importance of having the right personnel. They had had experiences with spending lots of time trying to make situations work when in retrospect they realized that they simply hadn't hired the right person for the job or had the right people at the table. This can be a very difficult decision that sometimes will not be clear except in hindsight. It points to the importance of having a clear and rigorous hiring process and complaints procedure, maintaining good communication and being clear about who needs to be at the table.

4. Maintain ongoing, open communication.

This has been a theme throughout the guide and cannot be overemphasized. In order to do effective planning, build on successes and address gaps, communication is essential. Attention to issues such as power imbalances and diversity as well as the other elements we have listed both requires and supports clear communication.

5. Keep motivation high.

The Partnership Handbook, written by Flo Frank and Anne Smith for Human Resources Development Canada in 2000 lists some of the most common problem areas for maintaining motivation:

- Facilitation and leadership,
- Motivation,
- Managing transition,
- Recognition and celebration,
- Staying on track,
- Asking questions and listening,
- Holding effective meetings, and
- Burnout.

Ideas for motivation from the *Partnership Handbook*: Motivation is ordinarily based on two things: one is the reason for being involved in the partnership; and the other is the amount of energy or enthusiasm we will bring to it. Motivation, or the lack of it, can be a big concern in partnerships. It is important to be very clear about what is motivating each individual's involvement in the partnership thereby allowing everyone to know and understand the direction from which each person is coming. Equally important is openly discussing what is needed to keep members interested in the partnership's work. It is much more difficult to get re-motivated after burning out or losing interest than it is to consider it right from the start. Motivation, much like attitude, is infectious.

Thoughts to be considered and discussed:

- In order to discuss motivation in partnerships it is beneficial to have a fundamental understanding of motivation in general.
- People feel motivated about life, ideas and activities to the degree that we feel we share in them, have a contribution to make or can be useful.
- Recognition and reward, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will go a long way to keeping us interested.

Thoughts to be considered and discussed:

- Mostly we stay motivated as long as we feel satisfied about our involvement or the quality of the job we are doing.
- We particularly like to do things that use and build on our existing skills and help us to acquire new ones.
- Food, fun and companionship work well as motivators. So does the actual work of the partnership - whether it is building a sandbox or putting the world back in order.
- Negative motivation is equally real and is usually caused by fear, guilt, pressure or someone pushing our buttons to get us to do things.
- States of “almost motivated” or “recently motivated” exist and should be acknowledged. Sometimes just mentioning it helps to move it along in the direction you want.
- People have phases of high and low motivation about life in general, relationships or the work in which we are involved.
- We can’t stay highly motivated all the time nor can we be indifferent for extended periods
- The responsibility for motivation is a combination of others doing the right things to keep us encouraged and the personal “do it yourself” method.
- Remember the importance of self-care: How we manage our own health and stresses translates into the kind of energy, care and attention we can bring to the work and our interactions with others.

Quotations from Community Partnerships

Each partnership that we interviewed found that certain factors in particular contributed to their success. We share these quotations from our interviewees with the knowledge that they might not work in every situation.

- “The partnership was not imposed on us. We created and built it. We are committed to it.”
- “I have been a champion for this initiative. I created a sense of urgency.”
- “We have teamwork and open communication.”
- “There is a willingness to work together and we trust each other to follow through.”
- “The partnership came out of a larger group that we are accountable to.”
- “We have healthy personal relationships.”
- “Our service helps women with a lot of things; it’s not fragmented.”
- “The partners work together in the same office.”
- “We prioritize quality of work over quantity.”
- “Our communication and process are structured (meetings, vision days) and recorded in writing.”
- “The partners don’t have a turf war mentality.”
- “We accept the reality of the differences between us.”
- “We have paid administrative support.”
- “All local communities are involved, including the Aboriginal community.”

- “We have an easy camaraderie and we genuinely like each other.”
- “We use a lot of humour.”
- “We’re flexible and informal.”
- “We hired the right people.”
- “We keep reminding ourselves of our goal of keeping women safe.”
- “We made sure that the people at the table were those who could make decisions.”

Final Tips for Successful Partnerships

The following success tips were taken from Justice Canada's 2002, *Partnership Study, National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, Phase II, Summary Report*:

1. **Purpose:** Partnerships that have a clear purpose and a mutual sharing of the benefits of partnership appear to have a greater potential for success. Partnerships that involve creating new solutions are based on sustainable approaches and that encourage empowerment and self-determination within the parameters of the partnership are seen to have particular promise.
2. **Laying the foundation:** When partnerships establish a good foundation, which includes a shared understanding of the purpose and function of partnership, and are built on a shared sense of commitment to and understanding of the need to work together (with clearly acknowledged lines of interconnection and interdependency), they are more likely to be successful.
3. **Shared principles/values:** Shared principles and values that serve to clarify the relationship and foster empowerment, inclusion and efficacy are also cited as characteristics of successful partnerships. Trust, patience, respect, flexibility and pragmatism are also key elements.
4. **Working structure/processes:** Creating an effective structure and process for partners to work together is also seen as important. This includes establishing a mandate and structure for partnership as well as boundaries; ensuring appropriate representation and facilitating the active involvement, engagement and participation of partners; addressing power and decision-making processes (including negotiation and conflict resolution mechanisms); and identifying and using mechanisms to communicate and share information. Ensuring accountability and including mechanisms to evaluate the partnership are also key considerations.
5. **Leadership:** A number of authors suggest that leadership is an important aspect of successful partnerships.
6. **Public and political support** (e.g. "champions") is also considered a key ingredient.
7. **Resources:** To work effectively, partnerships need to have access to appropriate resources including funding, trained staff and volunteers and other skills sets necessary to implement the partnership.

Developing Protocols

As of December 2010, agencies will be guided by the B.C. Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) policy which includes a Protocol for Highest Risk Cases. This will be a helpful guide for communities working toward developing working agreements and protocols.

Prior to developing protocols, some communities start with developing a “Compendium of Services” a document that clearly lists all of the community responders and the type of services they provide to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. This step towards protocols serves to engage members of the coordination initiative in a process of getting to know each other, the work of one another’s organizations and where to refer.

Protocols can be the ultimate outcome of a coordination initiative when developed in collaboration by a group that has a history of working together. Protocols are only viable if they are developed with the intention of being used, kept alive, updated and monitored. They can represent the product of a group’s ongoing dialogue on what in practice will actually keep women safe.

However, the challenges of developing and sustaining protocols are many and must be considered prior to their development:

- How can we ensure the protocol is guided by our values?
- How, in practice, will we be accountable to the protocol?
- What monitoring mechanisms will we put in place?
- How will we ensure the protocol agreement will be carried over in agencies when there is staff turnover?
- How will we ensure feedback from women experiencing the community response gets added to or changes the relevant section of the protocol?

Benefits of a Written Protocol (Sexual Assault VSW handbook October 2005):

- Builds confidence and establishes trust among participating agencies;
- Enhances cooperation and accountability among programs;
- Identifies and reduces gaps in and duplication of services to victims;
- Ensures that all participating organizations are aware of one another's mandates and methods of operation;
- Improves interagency relations, which in turn enhances the referral process and provides higher quality service to victims;
- Provides a more cost-effective and efficient service to victims;
- Provides an agreed upon and consistent process for agencies to use when responding to cases;
- Ensures that the complement of services provided by community responders is coordinated in the most efficient and effective manner so as to minimize any confusion for the victim;
- Ensures that victims receive maximum information and assistance from those agencies best equipped to meet their needs;
- Provides a structured process to help resolve misunderstandings or problems between participating agencies; and
- Establishes initiatives and implements strategies that will enhance the delivery of services in the region.

A coordinated community response to domestic violence must decide what the responsibilities of state and community agencies are regarding an abuse. Because we see that the violence reinforces unequal gender arrangements in society and is not simply a manifestation of individual pathology, the responsibility for addressing violence must be assumed by the relevant social and legal institutions and community organizations rather than left to individual women.

- Ellen L. Pence and Melanie F. Shepard, Editors, *Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence, Lessons from Duluth and Beyond*, Sage Publications, 1999

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Appendices

Appendix I. Statistics

Appendix II. Findings on the Importance of Coordination

Appendix III. Benefits of Coordination

Appendix IV. Best Practices from Communities

Appendix V. Tips from the Field

Appendix VI. Affirmation of Confidentiality

Appendix VII. Case Studies

Appendix VIII. Aid to Safety Assessment Planning (ASAP)

Appendix IX. Summary of Domestic Violence Risk Factors

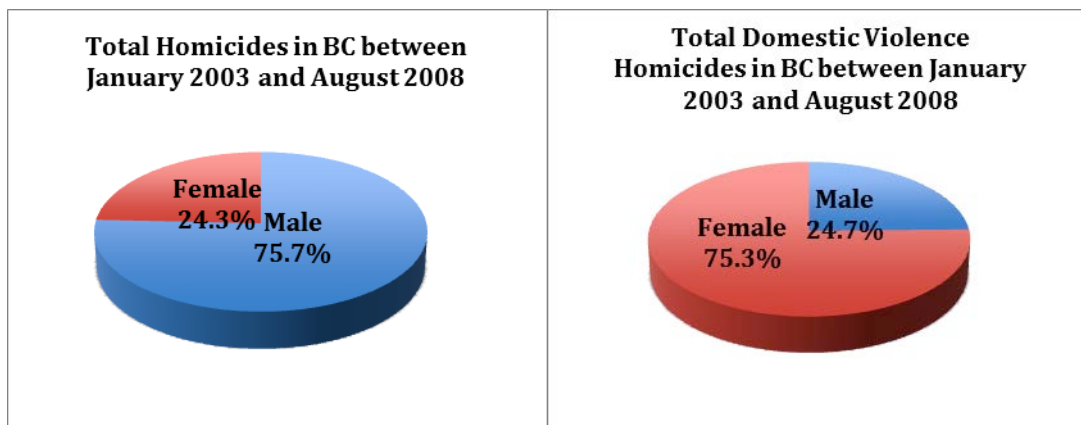
Appendix X. Disclosing Information in Woman Abuse Cases

Appendix I.

Homicide Statistics

In 2008, the BC Coroners Service conducted a statistical review of 605 homicides which occurred in British Columbia between January 2003 and August 2008. Of the 605 homicides, 73 were due to domestic violence committed by a current or former spouse, common-law spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, or other romantic partner of the victim. Individuals killed by other family members were excluded from the statistical report, except in cases where the deceased was a victim of a multiple homicide that also targeted someone with whom the assailant was or had been in an intimate relationship.

- 605 homicides occurred in British Columbia between January 2003 and August 2008*
 - 458 (75.7%) of the homicide victims were male
 - 147 (24.3%) of the homicide victims were female
 - 73 of the 605 homicides were the result of domestic violence
 - 18 (24.7%) of the domestic violence homicide victims were male
 - 55 (75.3%) of the domestic violence homicide victims were female



While males are more likely to be victims of homicide in general, domestic violence homicide victims are more likely to be female than male

* British Columbia Coroners Service (2009), Violence in Relationships in British Columbia: Domestic Homicides and BCCS Recommendations (2003-2008), Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Province of British Columbia.

Appendix II.

Findings on the Importance of Coordination

Specific initiatives will continue to have limited impact without a coordinated and consistent broad-based policy response across sectors. It is recognized that the justice system cannot, and should not, address this problem on its own.

Uncoordinated efforts will continue to result in the waste of scarce resources, duplication of effort, disillusionment of staff working within systems, unmet public expectations and, most detrimentally, compromised victim protection.

It is recommended that jurisdictions support and strengthen, with senior level commitment, coordination of initiatives to respond to family violence within and outside departments of justice that include multiple government and community stakeholders.

Evaluation data in Canada suggest that an integrated strategy has a positive impact on criminal justice system performance. In Nova Scotia, data comparing the performance of the criminal justice system before and after the introduction of a pro-charge, pro-prosecution policy framework (which included training and accountability measures) demonstrated significant improvement in key performance indicators such as charge, arrest and conviction rates.

Excerpts From:

**Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group
Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation, 2002**

In general, the more coordinated the response, the greater the deterrent effect on assailants and the safer the victim.

The evidence clearly indicates that coordination serves to maximize their (victims') safety, and thus is an important element in victim empowerment.

A number of studies have highlighted the need for such coordination to keep victims safe and to assist them to get on with their lives. Several studies have observed that victims were significantly less likely to be re-assaulted when enforcement of pro-arrest policies was coordinated with other criminal justice system responses (Murphy, Musser & Maton, 1998; Steinman, 1991; Tolman & Weiz, 1995).

Furthermore, in a study of Denver domestic violence fatalities it was noted that closer collaboration between the criminal justice system and mental health services,

substance abuse facilities and the medical community would serve to increase victim safety (Abrams, Belknap & Melton, 2000).

Victims thus can benefit from greater access to services when coordination between systems occurs. While police may recognize the necessity of such coordination, their behaviours do not always correspond to this awareness. Brown (1984) found that while over 80% of police agreed that referrals to social agencies should be made, in fact referrals were made in only 4% of cases.

Several studies have observed that victims were significantly less likely to be re-assaulted when enforcement of pro-arrest policies was coordinated with other criminal justice system responses (Murphy, Musser & Maton, 1998; Steinman, 1991; Tolman & Weiz, 1995).

Excerpts From:

Measures of Empowerment for Women Who are Victims of Violence and Use the Justice System, 2001. (Unpublished report prepared by M. Russell for the Victim Services Division, BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General)

A “patchwork” of Victim Services have been formed throughout Ontario due to a lack of communication, cooperation and coordination. In order to provide a seamless program, it would be best if the private and public sectors worked not as competing interests, but together as partners. Their joint efforts would better coordinate all financial and human resources in the common goal of stopping domestic violence, which is at epidemic proportions.

The government of Ontario should establish a committee, including equal numbers of Government and Community based members to oversee the implementation and coordination of the recommendations made as a result of this inquest.

Excerpts From:

Inquest Touching the Deaths of Arlene May and Randy Joseph Iles; Jury Verdict and Recommendations, 1998

We believe that improving our collective response to domestic violence is a long-term process requiring considerable commitment to training, resource allocation and coordination. The responsibility lies with individual service providers, agencies and services, local coordinating committees, communities, professional associations and the provincial government.

Coordination of initiatives and the development of unified intervention and prevention plans must occur at four key levels: 1) within the community, social services and justice organizations; 2) at the community level; 3) between the government and the community; and 4) among ministries of the provincial government.

The opportunity for intersectoral discussion of provincial initiatives and strategies, information sharing and networking and acknowledgement of 'best practices' is rare. However, these opportunities can provide a mechanism for coordination at the provincial level and a vehicle for renewed commitment by communities and services providers.

Excerpts From:

Working Toward a Seamless Community and Justice Response to Domestic Violence, a Five-Year Plan for Ontario. A Report to the Attorney General of Ontario by the Joint Committee on Domestic Violence, Aug. 1999

In rural areas, in particular, where victim access to services may be problematic, the necessity for coordination, and developing and maintaining cooperative relationships between police and community agencies was identified as a priority (Edelson & Frank, 1991).

Steinman (1990) used a before-and-after research design comparing a preintervention period (prior to a coordinated response) to an intervention period (when a coordinated response was being used). ... He found that arrests by police prior to a coordinated response led to more abuse but served as a deterrent after a coordinated response was initiated.

Excerpts From:

Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence: Lessons from Duluth and Beyond, Sage Publications, 1999

That the above agencies continue working towards an integrated and cooperative model in relation to Violence Against Women in Relationships and that funding adequately address the training and resource requirements to accomplish that.

Excerpts From:

Inquest into the murder of Rajwar Gakhel and 8 of her family members by Mark Chahal in Vernon, BC, April 5, 1996. Inquest: September, 1996 - Recommendation 9 a)

That police, government and community-based victim services agencies work together to develop inter-agency information sharing protocols and coordinated risk management strategies in violence in relationship cases.

Excerpts From:

Inquest into the deaths of Seth Thornett and William Bethell, Nanaimo BC (2006)

Work with organizations and individuals with expertise and training in the dynamics of spousal assault to develop a coordinated community response.

...Victims often underestimate the danger they are in and offenders often minimize the seriousness of their actions. Timely, effective intervention by individuals and organizations trained in the dynamics of spousal violence is required.

Excerpts From

Inquest into the death of Tammy Lynn Miller, Victoria, B.C. (2000)
Recommendations to: Solicitor General; RCMP “E” Division; President, B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police.

Contributing factors to an uncoordinated response by the systems involved included:

- *the narrow lens applied by the child welfare system;*
- *inadequate communication and collaboration between MCFD and police;*
- *absence of a specialized prosecutor or domestic violence court, and;*
- *the lack of consistent policies and tools for responding to domestic violence situations between all of the systems.*

That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General take the lead in a special initiative that focuses on the issue of safety of children and youth in domestic violence situations, by ensuring a coordinated, effective and responsive system in Greater Victoria and throughout British Columbia.

An effective response requires that all systems work together in a coordinated manner, supported by effective and systematic assessment and planning tools, and that they consider the cultural and language needs of the individuals they serve.

That the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General establish a joint community, police and government team to undertake a community safety review to identify best practices and make recommendations to enhance responses to victims of violence in relationships...”

Excerpts From
Honouring Christian Lee, No Private Matter: Protecting Children Living With Domestic Violence, September 2009, Office of the British Columbia Representative for Children and Youth.

Two of the 8 Highlighted Recurring Themes:

Collaboration:

Victims and perpetrators of domestic violence encounter a number of service providers as they progress through the legal system. It is absolutely critical that there be a standardized, collaborative approach to domestic violence by all agencies, ministries, and support networks reinforced by enhanced public awareness of the risks for families in distress.

Information Sharing:

The panel recognizes that agencies and ministries engaged in a collaborative process often experience challenges with the operational sharing of information obtained under their respective legislation. In accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, information sharing agreements are required to facilitate the exchange of relevant information between collaborating agencies.

Excerpts From
Report to the Chief Coroner of British Columbia, Findings and Recommendations of the Domestic Violence Death Review Panel, May 2010

...the report and the authors speak to the importance of coordinating efforts between divisions of government, coordinating efforts between investigative authorities and prosecutorial authorities and the agencies that exist at the community level to prevent and counsel families who are victims of domestic violence. [Hansard, DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Excerpts From
Hon. M. de Jong, Solicitor General of BC speaking in the Legislature in response to the “Government Action on Domestic Violence”, June 2, 2010

Appendix III.

What are the Benefits of Community Coordination to Women's Safety?

1. Identifies players in safety/anti-violence against women network in a community.
2. Identifies and acknowledges the existing work in a community and brings relevant players together, thus breaking isolation and ensuring duplication of effort does not occur.
3. Provides opportunity for meaningful partnerships to grow from relationships developed through this networking. It is from solid partnerships, built on trust, accountability and reliability, that significant safety measures are developed and implemented at the local level.
4. Teaches players to analyze their response/service from the point of view of women's safety:
 - to learn to define what "safety" means, using the woman's "lived" experience through fictional, non-identifiable case examples, solutions management and discussions of issues affecting women's safety;
 - to broaden a responder's perspective of safety beyond their professional notion of what it might be because victim safety often depends on,
 - who's defining it (what system or filter),
 - what we are trained and therefore expect to see (i.e. isolated incident vs. pattern of abuse),
 - what is emphasized i.e. offender's criminal past (or lack thereof) or relationship to the victim,
 - the language we use to describe the incident, i.e. "spousal assault" does not describe the context in which the violence occurred in the same way the word "battering" does. (Pence and Lizdas);
 - to develop "best practices" from the experiences gained from the analysis of safety through the work of cross-sector solutions management which could include new processes, agreements or protocols for more consistent and supportive responses to battered women and increased offender accountability;
 - to analyze and improve (or make recommendations for improvement of) systemic processes such as information links and flow, policy implementation and legislation (a commonly cited example of such a problem is the flawed process for communication between the criminal and civil justice systems;

this particular problem often results in a lack of information about existing protection orders by one court who may be drafting a contradictory order);

5. Empowers members of a professional community to make substantive changes in their practice or policy that will make a difference to battered women in their community and in many cases, in the province.
6. Connects the response work to ending violence against women province-wide, and provides potential for an informed coordinated perspective regarding issues affecting battered women in other areas, i.e. restorative justice, child protection, etc.

Appendix IV.

Best Practices from Communities

There are many communities throughout BC who are working collaboratively to address issues of violence against women. The examples given below are just a sampling of the innovative projects occurring around the province.

“Our CCWS has really benefited women’s safety in our community in sustainable ways, largely through the collaborative relationships we have established.”

- Carol Seychuk

Smithers CCWS and The Bulkley Valley Lakes District Domestic Violence Justice Response Project

The Smithers Community Coordination for Women’s Safety Committee

The Smithers Community Coordination for Women’s Safety Committee has been in place since 1999. Over the years since its inception it has sustained its membership and been successful in developing programs to meet the needs of women and children experiencing violence in the Bulkley Lakes District of BC. It has been rigorous in its dual focus on offender accountability and victim safety, always advocating for ethical offender treatment as an integral part of their local safety net. Among many of its successful accomplishments, the Smithers CCWS has developed model sexual assault protocols, as well as a domestic violence emergency response program to provide silent alarms for women in high risk domestic violence cases. More recently, it has completed excellent tools on information sharing for the private and public sectors (see “Red Light, Green Light” in our tools section).

In 2004, the Smithers CCWS began a process of collaboration with their local Judge in a group formed separately from their main committee called the Bulkley Valley Lakes District Domestic Violence Justice Response Project. Their goal over the years has been to develop a specialized court response to domestic violence that would include ready access to offender treatment for men accused of violence in relationships and improved, immediate safety measures for victims of domestic violence. Due to a shortage of resources it has not been easy, but they have sustained their membership’s interest and in 2010 completed the first of 6 stages with another cross-sector protocol model on Domestic Violence Incident Investigation.

See the Northern Society for Domestic Peace website at www.domesticpeace.ca click on “About Us” and then on “Partnerships” for more information about this work.

Vernon Violence Against Women in Relationships Committee and the Integrated Case Assessment Team (ICAT)

Vernon VAWIR has been in place since the late 90’s with many of the same members attending over the years to address local issues. Among many of the committee’s accomplishments has been the collaborative development and implementation of an operational integrated sexual assault response. And in December 2008 a partnership was formed between the Vernon Women’s Transition House Society and the Vernon - North Okanagan RCMP to work toward a comprehensive safety assessment and planning process. The development process was funded by a grant from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General - Domestic Violence Response Fund. A protocol was developed to create a “wrap around” process where agencies can work together to provide optimal safety and service by sharing relevant information within the parameters of Federal and Provincial privacy laws and legislation.

A collaborative approach is employed to assess the risk of serious bodily harm or death to victims of domestic/intimate partner violence or stalking. The committee is called the Integrated Case Assessment Team (ICAT). As well, the same collaborative approach is used to provide an enhanced safety and support system to the victim and proactive interventions to the alleged offender.

The ICAT began accepting referrals in February 2010 and has reviewed more cases than anticipated. Partners in the process include MCFD, Community Corrections, Crown Counsel, Mental Health and Vernon Jubilee Hospital, Ministry of Housing and Social Development and local community service agencies.

“Development of the ICAT and the ability to do high risk case assessments and safety planning as a team means we are able to tangibly improve women’s safety... When it’s working well, coordination is so much fun! It has so much energy of its own and becomes bigger than the sum of all its parts.”

- Debby Hamilton, Executive Director,
Vernon Women’s Transition House Society

Duncan Designated Domestic Violence Court:

Starting as an expedited case management approach to domestic files, the Designated Domestic Violence Court has evolved to provide a number of specialized responses to this challenging issue.

In 2006, in the Cowichan Valley, the Domestic Violence Designated Court was proposed as a strategy for improved DV criminal justice proceedings. It was initially proposed through discussions held between Inspector Linton of the RCMP, Judge Keith Bracken and Crown Counsel. After changes in personnel and under the guidance of Judge Josiah Wood, the idea was brought to an advisory group of criminal justice and social service partners and brought to fruition in March of 2009.

Domestic Violence cases are redirected at first appearance to a designated bi-weekly court day. This administrative change in the handling of cases was informed by promising research in a number of jurisdictions that supports evidence of the increased effectiveness of specialized criminal justice responses to domestic violence crimes.

The Domestic Violence Designated Court Project is the first of its kind in BC and has been in operation for a year. The Court initiative seeks to promote an effective and coordinated social response in order to reduce the incidence, severity and recidivism of domestic violence offenses in the region.

Comox Valley Domestic Violence Section:

Comox Valley Detachment has created a Domestic Violence Section so a level of quality is maintained in all domestic investigations. Our goal is to set aside our previous piecemeal approach and work collaboratively with our partners to provide victims and offenders with the resources needed to help them and ensure their safety. **Personal safety is our number one priority and criminal punishment is recommended only when other means are ineffective.**

We are working to help our clients before their situation becomes high risk. If we can support a family at the first report of a slap or a push, maybe we can prevent the black eyes and broken bones domestic assault that might be coming in the future.

DVS reviews all domestic files regardless of whether it is a serious incident or a simple verbal dispute. In some cases, high risk files in particular, DVS will take over the investigation. In less serious incidents, DVS will assist as much as possible. As an example of what DVS may do on a file: offenders in custody will be interviewed and released, show cause information will be prepared, photographs and witness statements will be taken and 911 audio tape requests made.

Members on DVS work Monday to Friday which makes them much more accessible to other agencies, as well as to the victim and the offender. Other agencies know that they can contact DVS on any domestic violence case and get assistance in a timely manner. A victim who wants to recant their statement is referred to DVS so that their reasons can be considered for an informed decision. Often victims don't understand the process and think their partner is going to go to jail, when all they want is for them to get help to cope with substance abuse and anger. By explaining the process and providing access to resources, DVS is able to relieve a lot of the concerns that keep victims in violent relationships.

We compile a complete background history on the victim and the offender, which is a short synopsis of all relevant interaction with the police. This provides us with a better picture of what is happening in their lives. Significant trends, such as a victim or offender who has had previous domestic violence cases with other people, are brought to the attention of the investigator. Substance abuse and criminal activity quickly come to light and provide insights that allow us to support the people involved. Having no criminal record, no history of criminal activity, a dated history or a criminal history with no violence, also helps to make a more accurate risk assessment.

Partners:

- General Duty Members

The members initially on the scene deal with the urgent, immediate need for safety. They try to quickly gather as much information about the situation as they can and deal with it as effectively as possible, while keeping in mind that the radio is still calling for clear members to go to the next call. The version of events that the general duty member receives on the scene is often tainted by: anger, fear, intoxication, mental health issues, money problems, urgency or personal agendas. Sometimes, as a result, the decision made in the first instance is not necessarily the decision that would best help the people involved. The general duty members are doing the best they can, but the reality is that they are busy and often don't have the necessary time available to properly investigate a domestic assault. This is why DVS has been created: to assist or take over general duty investigations and to ensure that the police are providing the best service possible to the people in our community.

- Community Based Victim Services

Almost all files are referred to Community Based Victim Services (CBVS) so that they can offer support. The referral is done by the general duty member. The support CBVS offers depends completely on the client and their needs. The CBV worker is security cleared and we consider their role to be an important part of the process. The information regarding a call for help goes through many different levels of our

organization and through many different people: the call taker, the dispatcher, the members on scene, the supervisor, the watch clerk, and the file reviewer. We consider CBVS one more level to the service we provide.

The CBVS position is a paid position that is not subject to the fluctuations that we see in the police based program, which is staffed by volunteers. Our CBVS worker is dedicated to domestic and sexual assaults, and knows what resources are available. The victim deals with one person and the bond they develop is very important in the trust process. Because of the nature of domestic assault and the high incidence of repeat victimization, a lot of clients are already familiar with CBVS. We often refer files to CBVS with a request that they let us know if we are missing something. A victim who is intimidated by police or scared of the offender, will often tell the CBVS worker the truth. With their permission, the CBVS worker provides that information to the DVS members and the file is reassessed.

When an offender asks the court for a change in their bail conditions, the CBVS worker is consulted and prepares a risk assessment report. In the past, they relied on information provided by the victim. In our detachment, they now rely heavily on the information from DVS and are able to provide a much more informed recommendation.

- Crown Counsel

Crown Counsel is a big part of the collaborative approach. When an offender acknowledges that they need help, and a conditional discharge or a peace bond will allow them to access substance abuse counseling or resources to deal with anger, our Crown supports that recommendation in the courts. On serious assaults, our Crown Counsel does what they can to follow our suggestions with respect to bail and sentencing. For long term domestic abuse, if we can provide evidence of previous domestic assaults from doctor's reports or transition records, they will lay an indictable charge. Police are presenting more evidence to Crown for evidence-based prosecutions (pictures, 911 tapes, interviews, witness statements).

- Probation

Adult Probation works closely with DVS throughout the probation process. Unless there is a specific reason to have them not report, a reporting condition is put on domestic offenders in every case, especially when they are on conditions to stay out of the home. A no firearm condition is also automatically included unless there is a strong reason not to do so. This allows the Probation Officer to start working with the offender at an early stage. After sentencing, the conditions are usually subject to approval by the Probation Officers who determine what programs the offender attends. By sharing information with Probation, they are able to assess whether this is an isolated incident or if this is a long term offender who needs more structured rehabilitation.

- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)

Previously, members provided a brief report over the help phone, which was then relayed to our local office the following business day. MCFD rarely took action on domestic files unless they already had open files on the people involved. DVS refers all domestic files, where children are involved, directly to MCFD. It became evident very quickly that these files were falling through the cracks prior to DVS referrals.

- Transition Society

Our DVS member works closely with members of the Transition Society and the women's shelter. When transition workers are working with a victim, they can now encourage the victim to speak with police, knowing who the victim will be speaking with at the police station. They know how the DVS members treat people and what can be expected. They convey this confidence to their clients and it has resulted in an unprecedented level of trust.

We are not trying to force people to end relationships in the name of safety. We support people to help them make good decisions that will make them safe.

Cst. R.L. DOWNEY
Comox Valley Detachment
Domestic Violence Section

Appendix V.

Tips from the Field

Nancy Taylor

Co-chair of the Robson Valley CCWS Initiative

The Robson Valley CCWS has been meeting since 2003. Systems based and community based service providers, representing a 200 kilometre stretch of Highways 5 & 16 in the Central Interior of the province, meet quarterly to coordinate services to end domestic violence (victim safety, offender accountability). Our area has two RCMP Detachments, one in Valemount and the other in McBride.

The following is a list of ideas we came up with to share with others working in coordination.

- Two of our participants have been trained with SWOVA (Salt Spring Women Opposed to Violence and Abuse, see www.swova.org) in the Respectful Relationships model and volunteer to facilitate some of the violence prevention exercises they use with youth in the community. This familiarizes the CCWS participants with the material local youth are getting as well as providing interactive, values-based exercises to inform our group.
- Atira Society Barriers Exercise - this was offered at a BCTHS conference one of our members attended and she generously volunteered to facilitate it for our group. The instructions for the exercise are on the Atira website. Participants found the activity generated empathy for women in transition as they jump through all the hoops to begin again. We plan to adapt the exercise to fit our community, i.e. women needing to travel great distances for court, medical treatment, lack of anonymity, dual relationships, etc.
- We have a group email address that includes service providers that do not attend our meetings but are interested in ending domestic violence. Some are regional service providers like Crown Counsel and Probation. Others are local physicians and the court registrar who are unable to attend due to time constraints.
- We maintain records of all our meetings and activities in a manual that is copied and distributed to new members. There is a big turn over in a rural community with systems based service providers changing positions frequently. The consistent participants have a responsibility to keep new comers up to speed. Ensuring that everyone feels they have something to contribute and that there is a welcoming and accepting atmosphere is a priority for our Co-chairs. We ask for three volunteers at each meeting: timekeeper, note taker

and vibe watcher. The vibe watcher monitors and comments on group process.

- We work hard to have laughter and lightheartedness in each session. We have had recycled and re-gifted door prizes on a seasonal theme. We serve good food - usually homemade muffins or scones (you can do this quarterly, monthly would be a killer!) We offer ice breakers and warm ups of all sorts.
- We have had great participation from faith communities.
- We rotate the Chair position to model equality.

We include anti-violence volunteers i.e. safe home operators, and we usually have equal representation from both men and women.

Appendix VI.

Affirmation of Confidentiality For Members of the Coordination Initiative

By signing this Affirmation of Confidentiality, I hereby affirm that I understand and will respect the fact that my position as a member of the Coordination Initiative is of a confidential nature.

I agree that any knowledge gained with regard to specific individuals as a result of my work with the Coordination Initiative will remain confidential between members. I will exercise due care that any information I provide to the non-members is the information they are entitled to know. If any question arises as to the entitlement of information to particular individuals, I will refrain from providing the information until clarification is obtained from the Coordination Initiative.

I further affirm that I will not discuss Coordination Initiative work, specifically naming victims or offenders, with any members of the media. I will also ensure that any information given to the Coordination Initiative or anyone else does not reveal the name of the victim(s) and witnesses or other data that could lead to the identification of the case, except when I need to discuss a specific case within my agency.

I understand that once signed this Affirmation is irrevocable and continues to apply to me even when I am no longer a member of this Coordination Initiative.

I have read the above “Affirmation of Confidentiality” and hereby affirm that I will abide with same.

Member Name

Signature

Date

Witness

Signature

Date

Appendix VII.

Case Studies

Case Study 1

Carol Smith is 60 years old and came to Canada from the Philippines. She met Fred Smith 35 years ago while he was vacationing in the Philippines, they fell in love and Fred sponsored Carol to come to Canada. They were married a few weeks later. On their wedding night Fred told Carol that he was now in charge of her life, that she would focus her life on taking care of him and that if she stepped out of line he would have her sponsorship withdrawn.

Carol was terrified of returning to the Philippines, she had no family left and knew she had no future there. She took care of Fred for many years, cooking, cleaning and anticipating his needs. They moved to a farm 30 miles from the nearest town and Carol took care of all the farm work. Fred wanted to have children but they were unable to conceive. He blamed Carol, saying she must be doing something to ensure she didn't get pregnant. He told her she was too thin to get pregnant so Carol ate more to gain some weight. Fred then began telling Carol she was too fat, and that she was useless to him.

After 8 years Carol became pregnant. Fred accused her of cheating, saying it couldn't be his because they had not been able to get pregnant for so many years. He assaulted her, beating her severely and threatening to kill her if she told anyone. Carol had a miscarriage later that night but did not get any medical assistance. Over the next 27 years Carol was subjected to ongoing abuse from Fred, put-downs and insults were part of her life every day. He kept her isolated on the farm, refusing to allow her to get a driver's license. Fred assaulted her physically on many occasions; Carol never got medical attention and suffers from long term injuries.

Carol woke up one morning to the sound of a gunshot. She ran downstairs and outside to find Fred had killed her favourite dog, saying it was barking too much. Carol waited until Fred went to work, and then ran 2 miles to a neighbour's house. The neighbour drove Carol to the transition house in town.

Scenario #1: Problems, Barriers - From Her Perspective

I am very worried about my horses and cows; I hope that Fred won't hurt them because I left. Yesterday I went to the police after staying at the transition house for a week. I couldn't hear the police officer very well but I thought he said he couldn't do anything to Fred. I went back to the transition house and the police office called later to say that Fred had been arrested and released with an order not to contact me or go to the farm. I guess I heard him wrong the first time. Ever since Fred punched me in the side of the head I have been having difficulties hearing people. The transition house told me some names of people I should contact for some help with money and other stuff but I was too upset and forgot to write down what they said. I also miss lots because I can't hear very well, but I don't want to keep asking them to repeat things. Now I am not sure if I should go back to the farm but I think I will go because I don't have any money to stay anywhere else and someone has to take care of the animals. I just don't know how I will get there.

Exercise:

Describe how your program would work with this client.

- What is your mandate? What do you do regarding VAWIR cases?
- What information would you have in this case?
- What information would you not have?
- What risk factors can the group identify?
- How could your community ensure that important information related to risk and safety could be shared in a timely efficient manner?
- What factors would cause this client to be reticent to engage with helpers?

Case Study 2

Identifying the Primary Aggressor

Treat this case study as an excerpt from a police report on the incident (the “I” refers to the investigating officer’s actions or observations).

I attended the home of Lucinda and Darrell Jacobs after a 911 call reporting spousal assault. I interviewed the two parties separately.

I spoke with Darrell first; I noticed he had scratches on his face and forearms. He presented as very calm and reasonable. He stated that Lucinda is often out of control and attacks him for no reason. He states she not only attacks him, but he worries that she might attack the kids. He states that this evening Lucinda was angry about him working late and got out of control and that he was forced to restrain her, as he was afraid she would hurt herself. I asked Darrell why he stays with Lucinda and he says that he loves her and she needs him to take care of her.

I asked Lucinda Jacobs to tell me what had happened. She was angry and belligerent. She said her husband Darrell Jacobs had come home late after work and was nasty and demanding. She said he told her “that people were reporting on her”.

I asked what he might have meant by that. She said she feels like everybody is keeping watch over her, so she very seldom goes out. She believes he is obsessed with the idea that she is having affairs with other men. He says his friends will let him know about this and she’ll be sorry.

Lucinda reported that Darrell grabbed her by the throat and pushed her into the fridge door. She was unable to breathe and began to black out. She says she was scratching at his arms and face to get him to stop, but he didn’t let go until she began to lose consciousness and slide to the floor. Lucinda said Darrell then started calling her names like “whore” and “bitch”. He grabbed her by the hair, pulling her towards the bedroom. She was able to get away and get to the phone. She says when Darrell realized she had dialed 911 he grabbed the phone from her and told the operator he had been attacked. He told Lucinda no one would believe her, as he was the one that was bleeding.

I asked Lucinda if she had ever been violent towards Darrell in the past. She said she sometimes threatens him. She said she does this so he will leave her alone.

I could see no marks on Lucinda’s throat. The only person present who showed injuries was Darrell. Our police records indicate that Lucinda has called the police on numerous occasions. Charges have never been laid.

Using “Identifying the Primary Aggressor” worksheet, work through this case looking for the following:

3. What do you think the police will base their assessment on?
4. What risk indicators do you see present?
 - For Darrell?
 - For Lucinda?
5. Who would you determine to be the primary aggressor in this case?

Case Study 3

I met a woman who was fishing with her son at a public dock near my cottage. She was not part of my church community. Her son was the same age as mine and the two boys were enjoying fishing together and we saw them every morning for 10 days. They were planning on staying the whole summer, and her husband would come as often as his work allowed him to get away. On the 10th morning the woman told me that her husband had thrown a coffee table at her that day, and she was afraid of provoking him any further. She said he had gone back to the city to work. I just listened and invited she and her son to come for supper that evening, which they did. Fishing as usual continued for a few more days. One morning there was neither Jane nor her son, Tommy. I thought it strange but did nothing, for something else may have come up for her. A second morning she did not come, so on my own I decided to stop in at her cabin to see if she was all right. Her vehicle was in front. When I knocked, she peeked through the curtains and then quickly ushered me in and fell on me in tears. For two days she and her son had been behind locked doors as her husband threatened her with mental games. He sat for a time on the front step playing with a noose, or would tap on the walls of the cabin with a big stick. She was terrified and alone and did not have a phone. He did not appear to be around when I arrived. After calming her down, I said I would go for help.

I went across the street to the local restaurant and asked if this man had been in. I was told he had got on the bus for the city that morning. I came back to tell Jane and Tommy. They were able to relax and Jane got some composure. I called the RCMP and told them the story. They said they would keep an eye out for his return, but they could do little at that point if she was unwilling to lay charges.

Jane told me she and her husband had been in marriage counselling with a Catholic priest in the city. She had been told that she had made a lifelong commitment to this man when she married him and that things would get better if she prayed and did not do things that would provoke him.

- What would the role of the intervener continue to be?
- Where does the responsibility for Jane and her son end?
- How can this woman be truly helped?

What role should the church play in helping women and children in violent situations?

Case Study 4

Note: The Community Based Victim Assistance Program has brought this case to committee with the consent of the client. Appropriate notices and releases concerning confidentiality have been obtained.

- Mary and Bob were married in 1985. Over the next 7 years Bob became increasingly controlling about Mary's friends and activities. Bob assaulted Mary for the first time when she was pregnant with their son Tad in 1992. The assaults increased in severity during her pregnancy with their daughter Penelope who was born in 1995. Bob threatened and assaulted Mary regularly for the next 4 years. The children were often present during the assaults. An assault in 1999 resulted in police and the Ministry for Children and Families being involved. Although no charges resulted from this incident, the child protection worker told Mary that if she didn't leave Bob her children would be apprehended. Mary moved into a one- bedroom apartment with the children. Penelope and Tad spent every weekend with Bob, who verbally abused Mary while picking up and dropping off the children. The children returned from each visit angry with Mary for breaking up their family and for provoking Bob's anger.
- January 2003. Penelope and Tad are now 8 and 11 years old. In January, Tad was suspended from school for pushing another student down the stairs. When Bob arrived to pick up the children that weekend Mary said that she wanted to put Tad into counselling. Bob got angry and accused Mary of trying to turn everyone against him. He forced his way into the home, punched Mary in the chest, threw her across the room, and put his hands around her throat. Penelope entered the room to witness Bob choking Mary; she called the police. The police attended and Bob was arrested and taken into custody. The police released Bob from their custody on a Promise to Appear with an Undertaking, with a court date for March 2003. Bob was ordered not to communicate with Mary and not to go to the residence. No other conditions were checked off on the Undertaking and Mary did not receive a copy.
- March 2003. The first appearance for Bob arrived, but the attending officer had not forwarded the completed police report to the courts in time for the Promise to Appear date. The protective conditions of the Undertaking were cancelled and the accused was summonsed for a new court date two months from the original appearance date. The police-based victim services worker notified Mary that the conditions were no longer in effect and suggested she contact a lawyer to get a restraining order. Mary didn't do this as she heard from a friend that there was no more Legal Aid. Bob continued to harass Mary through letters, on the telephone and while picking up and dropping off the children.

- April 2003. The police-based victim services worker made some inquiries as to the status of the case and discovered that Crown counsel had not approved charges, as the file had been lost after being forwarded by the police officer. Crown counsel stated that they would follow up with the police officer.
- May 2003. Bob had his first court appearance on the charge. Crown counsel had just received the file that morning and had not reviewed it so the date was adjourned. In the end, it took 135 days before Bob had his first court appearance from the date of the alleged assault. He pled not guilty and a trial date was set for late August.
- August 2003. Mary attended court to testify about the assault. After waiting for the morning, Mary approached the Court Registry where a court clerk told her that Bob had changed his plea to guilty a week earlier. Bob was sentenced to a 9-month conditional discharge requiring him to report to a probation officer, provide his address and to participate in anger management counselling. Bob's probation officer contacted Mary and told her that her lack of assertiveness had led to Bob's violence. He suggested she get counselling and referred her to the community-based victim services worker to get more information about counsellors.
 - Discuss the case and identify the gaps.
 - Describe how the gaps affect the victim's safety.
 - Which of the gaps would you consider to be systemic (having to do with many cases)?
 - What considerations regarding these gaps would you need to make if Mary were a woman who faced particular discrimination?
 - What recommendations would you make for systemic improvements?

Case Study 5

Erin

Erin is 30 years old and has a one year old daughter, Lisa. Erin has been married to Allen for 6 years.

When Erin met Allen it was a whirlwind courtship. She says as soon as they met they agreed to be exclusive and Allen was attentive and caring. He proposed after they'd been going out only two weeks, saying he knew that she was the one and that they would be together forever. They were married a few weeks later.

Erin says looking back she realizes things became bad pretty quickly. Although she says Allen wasn't physically violent, he would insist on sex even when she was tired and didn't want to. He would put her down and he gradually came to control every decision she made. When he is angry he throws things and has smashed many of her precious keepsakes. She says he's always been extremely jealous and she has to be careful when they're out in public not to talk to male co-workers or acquaintances or he becomes angry.

Erin says his put downs increased while she was pregnant. He would call her a "whore" and forced her to have sex. She thought that when the baby came things would get better, but they didn't. Things escalated when Allen grabbed her by the throat while she was holding Lisa and tried to throw her out a plate glass window. She left with the car and the baby, but no belongings and went to the police. Allen was arrested and released with a no contact order. She says there were no bruises or anything to prove what happened and she doesn't know what's going to happen next.

Erin is currently staying with a friend and is trying to figure out what to do. She is afraid to go home as she says when she saw the look in Allen's eyes she thought he was going to kill her. She is still afraid he might. She says Allen calls her on her cell many times a day, even though there is an order that says he's not supposed to. She says she knows he's looking for her and is very afraid.

Info police have:

There is little information to substantiate Erin's claim, but the officer who attended stated that she was very upset and seemed genuinely frightened. A report to Crown is going forward, but there is no certainty that there will be a charge.

While Allen has no criminal record, there have been complaints where he has been suspect in the past. This has included harassment of a former co-worker.

Allen also has several 24-hour suspensions due to alcohol use.

Information the Mental Worker has:

Allen was in the care of a psychiatrist for a few months, after receiving a head injury in a serious car accident. The psychiatrist has diagnosed Allen with low impulse control and narcissistic tendencies. Erin had assumed this would get better as he healed, but it has not. The worker worries about what this will mean if he ever gets visitation alone with Lisa.

- What are the risk factors you see here?
- What other info do you need?
- Who would you need to get that information from?
- How could the safety issues for this woman be addressed by the different sectors?
- Where are the opportunities for interagency collaboration in this case?

Appendix VIII.

Aid to Safety Assessment Planning (ASAP)

The Aid to Safety Assessment Planning is a manual that was created as a result of a partnership between the Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, BC Ministry of Public Safety and the BC Institute Against Family Violence. The objective of this manual is to reduce the risk of violence by providing a comprehensive and coordinated safety management strategy that victim service workers can use in cooperation with other relevant justice agencies to support women in making safety assessment decisions.

It was designed to examine the risk factors from the victim's perspective and emphasizes the need for relevant agencies and the victim to work together and share information on known risk factors, where appropriate. The manual and sample worksheet incorporates items from established tools such as the Spousal Assault Risk Assessment (SARA) and the Brief Spousal Assault Form for Evaluation of Risk (B-SAFER) to create appropriate safety plans. The ASAP manual outlines eleven (11) Abuser Factors that identify the abuser's actions that increase a woman's risk of being abused or decrease her level of safety.

Abuser Factors

1. Abuser's Violence
2. Violent Threats, Ideation and Intent
3. Escalation of Physical/Sexual Violence or Threats
4. Violations of Civil and Criminal Court Orders
5. Negative Attitudes about Violence against Women in Relationships
6. Other Criminality
7. Response to Shifts in Power and Control Dynamics
8. Employment or Financial Problems
9. Substance Use Problems
10. Mental Health Problems
11. Other Abuser Factors e.g. Access to Firearms, Significant Life Change

It also includes twelve (12) Safety Support Factors that outline what a victim needs to ensure the best possible safety plan while identifying barriers to her safety.

Safety Support Factors

1. Level of Personal Support
2. Living Situation
3. Level of Fear
4. Barriers Created by Social Attitudes or Beliefs
5. Impacts of Abuse
6. Employment and Financial Concern
7. Child-related Concerns
8. Substance Abuse
9. Access to Services
10. Responsivity to Services
11. Provision of Information
12. Coordination of Services

The ASAP manual is currently being used by victims' advocates and Victim Services in New Brunswick. In British Columbia, collaborative efforts between Victim Services and criminal justice personnel have been established locally in some areas of the province. To order a copy of the ASAP manual, please visit the Centre for Counselling and Community Safety, Justice Institute of British Columbia web site: <http://www.jibc.ca/cccs/CustSol/Publications.html#asap> (date accessed: April 10, 2009.)

Excerpted from:

Canada. Department of Justice Canada. Research and Statistics Division, *Inventory of Spousal Violence Risk Assessment Tools Used in Canada*, written by Allison Millar. (2009), 9-10.

Appendix IX.



SUMMARY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RISK FACTORS



This is a summary of some of the risk factors that have been associated with an increased likelihood of future violence in relationships. This document is intended to assist police with conducting evidence-based, risk-focused domestic violence investigations.

Legend	
	Indicates a risk factor associated with increased severity (escalation) of future violence.

1. Relationship History		
	Current Status of the Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there past, recent or pending separation in the relationship? <p>Note: Social science experts say that where there are controlling coercive behaviours, the intensity and lethality of violence often escalates after the victim leaves the relationship.</p>
	Escalation in Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there escalation in the frequency/intensity of violence or abuse towards the complainant, family members, a pet or another person?
	Children Exposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there children, under 19 years of age, in the family who are living in the home? Who are the parents and is there a custody dispute? (Note: Contact the Ministry of Children and Family Development.)
	Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect ever threatened to kill or harm the complainant, a family member, another person, children or a pet?
	Forced Sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect ever forced sex on the complainant?
	Strangling, Choking or Biting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect ever strangled, choked or bit the complainant?
	Stalking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect displayed jealous behaviours, stalked or harassed the complainant or a previous intimate partner?
	Information on Relative Social Powerlessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are marginalization factors present (i.e. disability, immigrant or Aboriginal background, addiction, poverty, pregnancy, lack of transportation, literacy issues, mental illness, elderly etc.)? Are cultural factors present (i.e. family pressures/shame, religious beliefs, unwillingness to report, language barriers, isolation etc.)?
2. Complainant's Perceptions of Risk		
	Complainant's Perception of Personal Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the complainant believe the Suspect will disobey terms of release particularly a no contact order?
	Complainant's Perception of Future Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the complainant fear further violence if the Suspect should be released from custody? What access is there to the Victim and what is the basis of the Victim's fear?

SUMMARY OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RISK FACTORS

3. Suspect History		
	Suspect's Criminal Violence History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Suspect have a history of threats, violence, sex assaults, and criminal harassment? <p>Note: One of the most common research findings is that Offenders with a history of violence are much more likely to engage in future violence.</p>
	Previous Domestic Violence History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a history of stalking, violence or abusive behaviour in a previous Intimate Partner Relationship? Is there any history of threats or actual violence or abusive behaviour against children, other family members, friends, co-workers or family pets? Is there any history of stalking, threats or violence from the suspect, against other intimate partners of the complainant?
	Court Orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect ever violated a Court Order? Is the Suspect presently bound by any Court Orders? Is the Suspect in a reverse onus situation for bail?
	Alcohol/Drugs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Suspect have a history of drug or alcohol abuse?
	Employment Instability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the Suspect unemployed or experiencing financial problems?
	Mental Illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Suspect have a history of mental illness (e.g. depression or paranoia)?
	Suicidal Ideation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect threatened or attempted suicide? (If YES, when and how?)
4. Access to Weapons/Firearms		
	Weapons/Firearms (Used or Threatened?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the Suspect used or threatened to use a firearm or weapon against the complainant, family member, children or an animal?
	Access to Weapons/Firearms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the Suspect have access to weapons/firearms?

Appendix X.

DISCLOSING INFORMATION IN WOMAN ABUSE CASES: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ANTI-VIOLENCE PROGRAMS WORKING WITH HIGH RISK CASE MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Please note: This document is for general information only. It is not intended to be and cannot be relied upon as legal advice.

A. Purpose

These Guiding Principles can help ensure that local information sharing practices in woman abuse cases:

- help maximize safety for women and children
- are consistent with federal and provincial privacy laws.

These Guidelines can be adapted by community-based antiviolence programs who are members of local violence against women in relationships coordination committees to form part of a local protocol or high risk case management process, such as the establishment of a high risk case management team.

B. Background

In cases flagged as potentially high risk, it may be necessary to pro-actively share key details of the case to keep the survivor/victim, her children, or other involved people safe:

...proactive, timely information-sharing...among sectors is a crucial component of a coordinated response to risk assessment and women's safety at the local level. (Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2010 at p. 7)

If you are designing a local protocol for sharing information with other provincial or federal agencies, be aware that they will be governed by privacy legislation that is different than the privacy legislation which covers your agency or program. These Guidelines are meant to be used by community-based antiviolence programs governed by the *Personal Information Protection Act*. System-based responders, such as

hospitals or government ministries will be governed by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. RCMP are governed by the federal *Privacy Act*.

Federal and provincial privacy laws allow for personal information to be shared *without consent* where it is in the public interest (*Privacy Act*) or there are significant health or public safety concerns (*Personal Information Protection Act*; *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*).

Refer to the Appendix of this document for a list of applicable legislative provisions.

Victim advocates will likely already know about risk factors associated with an increased chance of further violence in woman abuse cases. *All* responders, whether they are based in systems or in the community, must make themselves aware of the safety implications of certain risk factors:

Information about risk should be communicated in a timely manner among responders on an ongoing basis. Responders need to be aware of evidence-informed risk and safety factors and use validated approaches as a structure to inform their professional judgment and act as prompts for further questioning, analysis and risk management. (Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, 2010 at p. 7)

The presence of these risk factors will result in a more pro-active approach to information sharing and risk management in a particular case.

C. The Legal Framework

Generally, consent is required before personal information about a survivor/victim, perpetrator or involved family members can be shared with other agencies. However applicable privacy laws allow personal information to be shared without consent in certain situations including the following:

- *Federal Privacy Act* (RCMP, Parole): where in the opinion of the head of the institution, the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy that would result from disclosure or disclosure would clearly benefit the individual to whom the information relates.
- *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (Municipal Police, Crown Counsel, Community Corrections, Local Health Authority): if the head of the provincial public body determines that compelling circumstances exist that affect anyone's health or safety.

- *Personal Information Protection Act* (Community-based antiviolence programs): If there are reasonable grounds to believe that compelling circumstances exist that affect the health or safety of any individual.

These are the main privacy laws that apply. There may also be more specific laws involved for certain bodies such as hospitals and Ministry of Children and Family child protection social workers.

Be aware that any legislation cited in the Appendix to these Guidelines is subject to periodic amendment. Amendments can be checked by accessing the BC Laws website at: <http://www.bclaws.ca>

D. Guiding Principles

1. Determine whether information about the case should be disclosed to the high risk case management team

Community-based antiviolence programs collect¹ information (with consent) from the survivor/victim for a number of different purposes including to: offer information and support about the justice system, provide advocacy, and counseling services, provide safety planning, determine appropriate referrals, and offer resources etc. The information gathered is used to deliver the service or perform the function of the agency. In woman abuse cases, community-based antiviolence programs also use the information to determine whether there are indicators of further violence which suggest that the survivor/victim or her children may be at risk of harm.

If there are sufficient indicia of risk, then the community-based victim serving program should disclose relevant details of the case to the designated contact person on the high risk case management team. Often, this would be the police representative on that team.

2. Ensure disclosure of information is made in accordance with privacy laws

a. Information about the survivor/victim

Information the survivor/victim provides to the community-based antiviolence program can be disclosed to the high risk team with her express or implied consent if the information in question is about her.

¹ Each agency or program should ensure that it has the authority to collect personal information about the survivor/victim and perpetrator.

If possible and if it is safe to do so, every effort should be made to obtain written consent from the survivor/victim before disclosing her personal information to the high risk case management team.

There may be situations where the community-based program is unable to get the survivor/victim's consent, for example, she may have fled the community and her new contact information is unavailable.

In the absence of the woman's consent, the community-based program must be able to justify release of information to the high risk team on other grounds.

b. Information about the perpetrator

The survivor/victim may also provide information about the perpetrator. Normally, disclosing this information would require the consent of the person whom the information is about, e.g. the perpetrator.

Since it is likely not practical or safe to seek the perpetrator's consent for release of information about him, the community-based antiviolence program must be able to justify disclosing this information on other grounds.

c. Disclosure of information about the perpetrator to assist law enforcement or for safety planning/risk management purposes²

The community-based antiviolence program may disclose personal information about the perpetrator without consent to the high risk case management team to assist in an investigation or in making a decision to start an investigation.

The community-based antiviolence program may disclose personal information about the perpetrator if disclosure is for the purposes for which the information was collected (e.g. risk management) and if the disclosure is necessary for those purposes.

² Please note that municipal police and RCMP have specific and separate authority under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the federal *Privacy Act* respectively to collect, use and disclose personal information for law enforcement purposes.

d. Disclosure of the survivor/victim's information on the basis of compelling circumstances affecting health or safety

The community-based antiviolenace program may disclose personal information about the survivor/victim without consent to the high risk case management team if there are reasonable grounds to believe that compelling circumstances exist that effect the health or safety of any individual.

Compelling circumstances exist where there is a necessity to act to avert imminent danger to someone's health or safety or to protect someone's health or safety.

If possible and if it is safe to do so, every effort should be made to obtain written consent from the survivor/victim before disclosing her personal information to the high risk case management team. When making difficult judgment decisions about whether to disclose personal information *without* consent, the paramount principle guiding this decision is that the preservation of life trumps privacy.

E. Disclosing Information in Compelling Circumstances: Steps for the Community-based Program to Take

1. Decisions to disclose to be made on a case-by-case basis.
2. Only release information relevant to the health and safety concern in question.
3. Designate someone in your agency who makes the decision.
4. If time permits, have this person consult with a supervisor.
5. Have the person authorizing the disclosure keep a confidential file containing a brief record of the disclosure decision.
6. Develop an overarching information sharing agreement with the high risk case management team which outlines restrictions on the use that will be made of the disclosed information, its secure storage and its safe disposal.

7. When transmitting the information, make reference to the conditions of disclosure contained in the information sharing agreement.
8. In appropriate circumstances, provide notice of the disclosure to the survivor/victim by mailing a notice to her last known address.

F. Where to Go for more Information and Support

More resources related to information sharing and the establishment of high risk teams can be found on the Ending Violence Association website at: www.endingviolence.org.

You can also contact the Community Coordination for Women's Safety Program directly by phone or email. Contact information is provided on the website. Information on risk factors associated with an increased likelihood of future violence in woman abuse cases can be found at:

- www.jocelyncoupal.com
- <http://www.mcscs.just.gov.on.ca/stellent/groups/public/@mcscs/@www/@com/documents/webasset/ec083081.pdf>

DISCLOSING INFORMATION IN WOMAN ABUSE CASES: APPENDIX

APPLICABLE INFORMATION AND PRIVACY PROVISIONS

Please note that these are excerpted provisions, not the complete pieces of legislation.

PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION ACT (BC) *(Generally applies to community-based antiviolenence programs)*

Definitions

1. In this Act

"**employee personal information**" means personal information about an individual that is collected, used or disclosed solely for the purposes reasonably required to establish, manage or terminate an employment relationship between the organization and that individual, but does not include personal information that is not about an individual's employment;

"**personal information**" means information about an identifiable individual and includes employee personal information but does not include

- (a) contact information, or
- (b) work product information;

Collection of personal information without consent

12. (1) An organization may collect personal information about an individual without consent or from a source other than the individual, if

- (a) the collection is clearly in the interests of the individual and consent cannot be obtained in a timely way,
- (l) the personal information is collected for the purposes of the organization providing services to a third party if

- (i) the third party is an individual acting in a personal or domestic capacity,
- (ii) the third party is providing the information to the organization, and
- (iii) the information is necessary for the purposes of providing those services.

Disclosure of personal information without consent

18. (1) An organization may only disclose personal information about an individual without the consent of the individual, if

(a) the disclosure is clearly in the interests of the individual and consent cannot be obtained in a timely way,

(c) it is reasonable to expect that the disclosure with the consent of the individual would compromise an investigation or proceeding and the disclosure is reasonable for purposes related to an investigation or a proceeding,

(j) the disclosure is to a public body or a law enforcement agency in Canada, concerning an offence under the laws of Canada or a province, to assist in an investigation, or in the making of a decision to undertake an investigation,

(i) to determine whether the offence has taken place, or

(ii) to prepare for the laying of a charge or the prosecution of the offence,

(k) there are reasonable grounds to believe that compelling circumstances exist that affect the health or safety of any individual and if notice of disclosure is mailed to the last known address of the individual to whom the personal information relates,

(4) An organization may disclose personal information to another organization, or to a public body, without consent of the individual to whom the information relates, if

(a) the personal information was collected by an organization under section 12 (1) (k) or (l),

(b) the disclosure between the organizations, or between the organization and the public body, is for the purposes for which the information was collected,

(c) the disclosure is necessary for those purposes, and

(d) for each disclosure under this subsection, the third party referred to in section 12 (1) (k) or (l), as applicable, consents to the disclosure.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (BC) *(Applies to Municipal Police, Crown counsel, Community Corrections, Local Health Authority)*

Information must be disclosed if in the public interest

25. (1) Whether or not a request for access is made, the head of a public body must, without delay, disclose to the public, to an affected group of people or to an applicant, information

(a) about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health or safety of the public or a group of people, or

(b) the disclosure of which is, for any other reason, clearly in the public interest.

(2) Subsection (1) applies despite any other provision of this Act.

(3) Before disclosing information under subsection (1), the head of a public body must, if practicable, notify

(a) any third party to whom the information relates, and

(b) the commissioner.

(4) If it is not practicable to comply with subsection (3), the head of the public body must mail a notice of disclosure in the prescribed form

(a) to the last known address of the third party, and

(b) to the commissioner.

Disclosure of personal information

33. A public body must ensure that personal information in its custody or under its control is disclosed only as permitted under section 33.1 or 33.2.

Disclosure inside or outside Canada

33.1 (1) A public body may disclose personal information referred to in section 33 inside or outside Canada as follows:

- (m) if
 - (i) the head of the public body determines that compelling circumstances exist that affect anyone's health or safety, and
 - (ii) notice of disclosure is mailed to the last known address of the individual the information is about, unless the head of the public body considers that giving this notice could harm someone's health or safety;

Disclosure inside Canada only

33.2 A public body may disclose personal information referred to in section 33 inside Canada as follows:

- (a) for the purpose for which it was obtained or compiled or for a use consistent with that purpose (see section 34);
 - (i) to a public body or a law enforcement agency in Canada to assist in a specific investigation
 - (i) undertaken with a view to a law enforcement proceeding, or
 - (ii) from which a law enforcement proceeding is likely to result;
 - (j) to the archives of the government of British Columbia or the archives of a public body, for archival purposes;
 - (k) in accordance with section 35 (disclosure for research or statistical purposes).

Definition of consistent purposes

34. (1) A use of personal information is consistent under section 32 or 33.2 with the purposes for which the information was obtained or compiled if the use

- (a) has a reasonable and direct connection to that purpose, and
- (b) is necessary for performing the statutory duties of, or for operating a legally authorized program of, the public body that uses or discloses the information or causes the information to be used or disclosed.

(2) [Repealed]

Privacy Act (federal)*(Applies to RCMP, Parole)*

Disclosure of personal information	8.	(1) Personal information under the control of a government institution shall not, without the consent of the individual to whom it relates, be disclosed by the institution except in accordance with this section.
Where personal information may be disclosed		<p>(2) Subject to any other Act of Parliament, personal information under the control of a government institution may be disclosed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) for the purpose for which the information was obtained or compiled by the institution or for a use consistent with that purpose; (b) for any purpose in accordance with any Act of Parliament or any regulation made thereunder that authorizes its disclosure; (m) for any purpose where, in the opinion of the head of the institution, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy that could result from the disclosure, or (ii) disclosure would clearly benefit the individual to whom the information relates. <p style="text-align: center;">***</p>
Notice of disclosure under paragraph (2) (m)		(5) The head of a government institution shall notify the Privacy Commissioner in writing of any disclosure of personal information under paragraph (2) (m) prior to the disclosure where reasonably practicable or in any other case forthwith on the disclosure, and the Privacy Commissioner may, if the Commissioner deems it appropriate, notify the individual to whom the information relates of the disclosure.