

Could a Lawyers for Victims Program Work at my Agency?

Program Elements:

- Agency determines a need for their clients to have a specific type of assistance from attorneys (for example, civil protection orders, evictions, consultations, etc)
- Agency contracts with local attorneys to provide limited-scope representation to victims for a flat fee
- Contract attorneys have relevant experience and are trauma-informed
- Advocates complete an intake and when appropriate, refer victims to their Lawyers for Victims Program Director, who refers the case to a contract attorney
- Program Director and Advocates provide wraparound services to the client and support to the contract attorney through completion of the case
- Attorneys and clients are provided with brief surveys when the case is completed

Ideal Scenario:

- Established legal advocacy organization
- Attorney already on staff and/or solid relationships with attorneys in your community
- Legal advocates in courthouses that have positive relationships with Judicial Officers/courthouse staff

Minimum Requirements:

- Established advocacy organization
- Leadership familiar with the legal system and dedicated to getting victims access to civil legal services
- Advocates that can act as the gateway to your Lawyers for Victims Program and can provide or refer clients to wraparound legal services

Potential Pitfalls:

- Does not guarantee a positive legal outcome
- Lack of attorneys in your community
- Untrained advocates/advocates unfamiliar with the legal system
- Finding attorneys who are proficient in languages other than English

Common Questions:

Q: Does this work for legal needs other than Civil Protection Orders?

A: Possibly. Other options might include attorney consultations, mediations, immigration issues, evictions, etc. The civil legal service has to be tied to the client's victimization and it has to be somewhat predictable in the amount of work required by an attorney for the flat fee structure to work.

Q: How do you decide how much the flat fee should be?

A: This will depend on the legal service being provided and the availability of attorneys in your area. The flat fee that Project Safeguard pays is significantly discounted from what most attorneys in the Denver Metro Area charge for a Civil Protection Order, but we have a large pool of attorneys who want to serve victims and are willing to do so at a discounted rate.

Q: Do we need an attorney to oversee our Lawyers for Victims Program?

A: Yes, but you don't need to hire a full-time attorney as part of your staff. You could contract with an attorney or partner with another agency that has an attorney on staff.

Q: Is this the only way to get VOCA funding for attorneys for victims?

A: No. The Lawyers for Victims Program is just one model. Other options for which you can apply for funding include hiring a staff attorney or contracting with attorneys on an hourly basis instead of a flat fee.

More questions? Contact Alexis Freet, Legal Director at Project Safeguard at (303) 317-4157 or at alexis@psghelps.org.