

First Responders:

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND VICTIM COMPENSATION



Training Video Companion Guide

Introduction

ABOUT THIS VIDEO

The International Association of Chiefs of Police produced this video in partnership with the Police Foundation and the National Center for Victims of Crime. It was created to improve law enforcement's knowledge and understanding of crime victim compensation programs in their states, allowing them to support and increase the number of victims who are informed about victim compensation.

ABOUT CRIME VICTIM COMPENSATION

Each year, almost \$500 million dollars are paid to victims of crime by victim compensation programs across the United States. All federal funds (and most state funds) supplying the

compensation fund come from convicted offenders—through fines, fees, assessments, or restitution. Every state throughout the U.S. has a crime victim compensation program. Programs reimburse eligible victims of violent crimes—such as assault, homicide, rape, drunk driving, domestic violence, and more—for some of their crime-related expenses. These could include funeral costs and arrangements, counseling, lost wages, and medical and other expenses. Each compensation program has different deadlines, qualifying crimes, and reimbursable services, so be sure to work with your state or county compensation office to verify all information. Law enforcement officers can help victims of crime recover from crime by referring them to the compensation program and responding to requests from the compensation program.



Use the video and this accompanying discussion guide in your agency to expand and enhance the conversation regarding crime victim compensation.

Using the Video

- The IACP recommends that commanders, supervisors, and training officers review the video several times before presenting it, to become familiar with the content and prepared to guide training and discussion.
- While the video can stand alone, the IACP recommends using the screening as an opportunity for follow-up discussion. It is recommended that commanders, supervisors, and training officers set aside at least 45 minutes to review the video and its accompanying materials and an additional 30 to 45 minutes for discussion with others.



Refer to the following key points and suggested or anticipated questions to help you guide a meaningful discussion.

Key Points – Crime Victim Compensation

- I. Each state defines the rights of its crime victims, and many include the rights to resources and services to facilitate their recovery. (For more information, visit the National Crime Victim Law Institute's [Victim's Rights Law by State](#).) Some victims are eligible for financial assistance through crime victim compensation programs. It is important for first responders to have a basic understanding of these programs.
- II. It can be very difficult for victims to participate in the criminal justice system if they are concerned about their basic physical and emotional needs. Crime victim compensation is designed to address these needs, support victim healing, and promote the ability and willingness to participate in the criminal justice system.
- III. For many victims, justice begins with knowing their community cares about their experience. Participating in a victim's healing process improves the victim's success, enhances community-police relationships, and leverages law enforcement's ability to respond successfully to crime.
- IV. Many states require law enforcement to refer victims to victim compensation and support services. There are numerous ways to make these referrals. Referrals by first responders during the initial contact with the victim ensure that (1) this obligation is met, and (2) victims receive vital information during what may be their only contact with the criminal justice system.
- V. Positive interactions with victims support community policing and trust-building and have a cumulative effect on improving community-police relationships.
- VI. The trauma of crime affects victim behavior and memory in a variety of ways. Law enforcement officers must understand this and be alert and informed in order to support the victim, recognize their trauma, improve the investigation, and provide appropriate follow-up.
- VII. Actively listening to—and demonstrating compassion for—victims improves outcomes for the victim and the entire investigation.
- VIII. Thorough, detailed, professional report writing supports victims' access to compensation and improves follow-up investigations. Law enforcement reports should be fact based and detailed to ensure the compensation office, investigators, prosecution, and courts have a clear, unbiased, and accurate understanding of the crime.

Questions – General

1. *What are some important reasons and benefits for law enforcement to talk to victims about crime victim compensation?*

- Many states require it.
- This is often the only contact the victim has with the criminal justice system and may be the only opportunity for the victim to learn about crime victim compensation.
- Compensation can be provided even when there is no arrest or conviction for the crime.
- If victims are able to take care of their financial needs, they are better able to recover from crime and are more likely to participate in investigations, improving investigative results.
- Showing that law enforcement cares about victims can help develop rapport.

2. *Why do compensation programs need police reports?*

- To confirm that the crime was reported and verify the date reported
- To verify the identity of the victim and witnesses
- To determine the type of crime committed
- For indications of certain injuries (teeth lost, glasses broken, etc.)
- To determine if the victim had a role in the crime
- To reach out to victims (in some areas)

3. *What local organizations can you direct victims of crime to for support?*

- State or county crime victim compensation programs
- Local, county, or state victim services programs and organizations
- Crime specific victim services programs and organizations (e.g., domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, homicide survivor, human trafficking, family justice centers)
- For further recommendations, contact the [VictimConnect Resource Center](#)

4. *Why is it important to connect victims with an advocate?*

- Increase follow-up, support, and resources
- Increase community partnerships
- Improve community relations
- Improve investigative results
- Improve victims' relationships with law enforcement

Video Questions – Crime Victim Compensation

1. *What is crime victim compensation?*

Crime victim compensation is financial assistance to victims for losses sustained as a result of a crime. Some programs also offer victim compensation to witnesses, such as children who saw domestic violence, someone who discovered a body (homicide), or someone who heard a crime occurring and feared serious harm.

2. *Does every state have a victim compensation fund? Are the programs all exactly the same?*

Each state has a fund, but the terms, rules, and coverages for crime victim compensation programs vary from state to state. It is important that all law enforcement professionals and leaders familiarize themselves with the details of the victim compensation program in their own states and communities. Most crime victim compensation programs make decisions about eligibility and payments at the state level, but Arizona and Colorado do so at the county level. Find your program through the [National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards](#).

3. *What costs may be covered by crime victim compensation? What costs are typically not covered?*

Some of the most common costs covered by crime victim compensation include (but are not necessarily limited to in every state) medical bills, funeral costs, counseling, lost wages due to the crime, and crime scene clean up. Most crime victim compensation programs do not cover costs for lock changes; lost, damaged, or stolen property; or other costs not covered by insurance or other sources of payment.

4. *Is there is a time limit on how long the victim can receive services?*

Yes, but the time limit varies by program. It is important that all law enforcement professionals and leaders familiarize themselves with the details of victim compensation in their own states and counties.

5. *When should law enforcement discuss victim compensation with a victim?*

Law enforcement professionals should discuss victim compensation at the first encounter (such as when taking the initial report) and at follow-up interactions (such as during investigative interviews and case updates). Many states require notice be provided to victims of victim compensation programs and specify the timing of the advisement.

6. *Why is it important to follow up with the victim about compensation and available resources?*

Trauma can affect memory—the victim might not remember the exact details of the crime immediately after the incident. The victim also will likely not absorb all of the information about available resources when first informed about them.

7. *Will a victim have the same needs immediately after the crime and a few weeks later?*

No, a victim's identified needs change in the hours, days, and weeks after the initial crime. This may include realization of the emotional effects of surviving a crime, the discovery of new injuries (physical and emotional), incurrence of additional medical costs, and so forth.

8. *Do compensation offices keep police reports confidential?*

Yes, victim compensation programs keep police reports confidential.

Questions – Interacting with Victims and the Community

1. *What are law enforcement's priorities when first meeting a victim?*

After ensuring that all victims are safe and the scene is secure, it is critical for law enforcement to establish a relationship with the victim and compassionately assure them that they are there to help. Next, complete a detailed, impartial report with all information that the victim can provide. Finally, give the victim information about available services, including crime victim compensation.

2. *When a victim receives help on-scene, what is the major benefit to law enforcement and the larger community?*

The victim is more likely to participate in the remainder of the investigation and to share their positive experience with community members.

3. *Who is the main person or group that helps the victim move through the process to obtain victim compensation?*

Victim advocates and local organizations that work with the police department help the victim move through the process to obtain victim compensation.

4. *Many communities have organizations that provide victim services, but, for those communities that do not, who has the responsibility to inform victims of their resources?*

First responders and law enforcement have the responsibility to inform victims of their resources, especially in communities that do not have organizations focused on victim services. Regardless, it benefits the victim and the investigation if first responders are informed about victim resources.

5. *Why is it important for first responders and law enforcement to have close relationships with community organizations, such as local service organizations, shelters, and support groups?*

Connecting with community organizations prepares and informs law enforcement to make helpful referrals to victims, get timely assistance to community members who need it, and build trust with victims.

6. *What are some traits first responders can demonstrate to victims on the first encounter to reinforce that law enforcement is there to help?*

First responders should actively listen to victims and embody respect, compassion, and kindness. Active listening involves paying close attention to what victims say and withholding judgement, reflecting, clarifying, and summarizing.

Supplemental Materials and Resources

- Additional materials and links available at www.theiacp.org/LE-Role-in-Victim-Compensation
- Directory of Victim Compensation Programs, by the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards: www.nacvcb.org/index.asp?sid=5
- Victim Resource Map, by the National Crime Victim Law Institute: www.law.lclark.edu/centers/national_crime_victim_law_institute/for_victims/self_help
- Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims: A 21st Century Strategy & Implementation Guide, by the International Association for Chiefs of Police: www.theiacp.org/Portals/0/pdfs/responsetovictims/pdf/pdf/IACP_Strategy_REV_09_Layout_1.pdf

Contact Information for Project Team

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