

NCVPP

National Centre for
Violence Against
Women & Girls and
Public Protection

Using the Experience of Victim/Survivors to Improve Police Practice

Stage 2 – Inviting Participation

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Executive Summary

- Invitations to participate in voice of the victim/survivor (VoV/S) practices should ensure diverse voices are included, focusing on safety and risk assessment without excluding certain groups.
- Outreach and engagement strategies should be culturally sensitive and should balance inclusivity with the individual needs of victim/survivors, particularly for minoritised communities and children.
- Approaches must mitigate re-traumatisation risks, offer appropriate support and address resource gaps which may limit engagement.
- Invitations for participation can be direct or indirect, but should have flexible timescales, clear eligibility criteria and agreed-upon contact strategies to support safe and timely participation.
- Informed consent is essential for transparency and trust, ensuring victim/survivors understand the ethical boundaries of the engagement process.
- Innovative ways of inviting participation, such as through social media and community apps, can broaden reach, especially among younger audiences. Clear communication strategies with strong data protection and safeguarding measures are essential.



2.1 Who and How to Engage

When deciding who and how to engage for voice of the victim/survivor (VoV/S) practices it is important that the focus on safety, risk assessment, and the feasibility of conducting the practice within allocated resources does not lead to the exclusion of certain groups. This can limit the representativeness of responses and risk further harm to victim/survivors by silencing their voices. It is essential to consider implementing thoughtful engagement approaches which ensure diverse voices are captured in VoV/S practices.

Safe inclusion should be at the heart of engagement practices. Victim/survivors should be able to choose whether they take part and never have to share anything they don't want to.

2.1.1 Inviting participation from minoritised communities

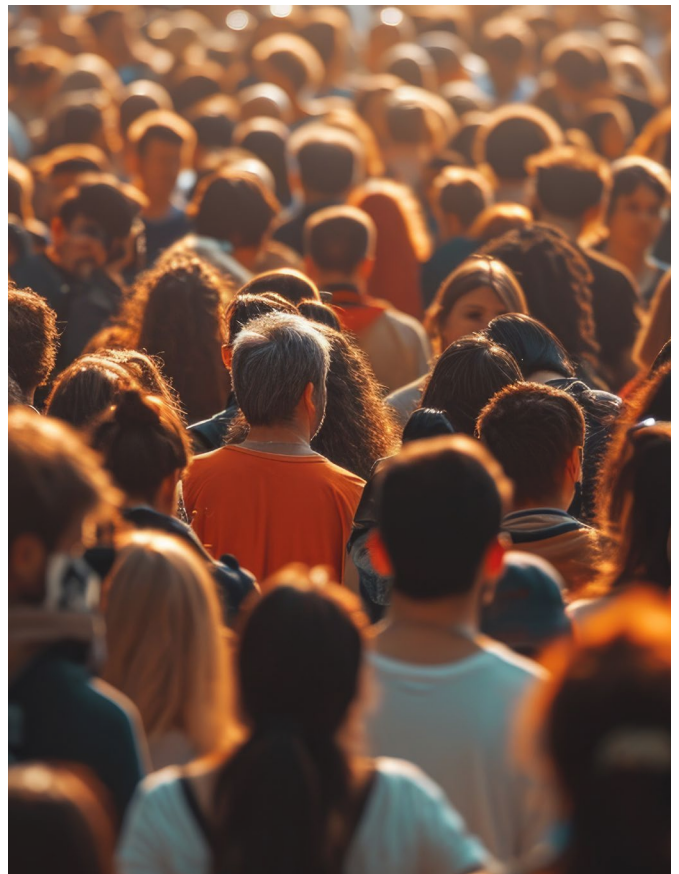
'Minoritised communities' may include individuals from minoritised groups, vulnerable populations, or those with specific experiences of victimisation. It is important to develop outreach strategies for engagement which are accessible and culturally sensitive. Examples to consider adopting include:

- Carrying out work to understand the diversity of the local population to inform engagement work.
- Outreach work, including community visits, workshops, events, or one-on-one engagement.
- Campaigns aimed at those with protected characteristics.
- Commissioned research into the barriers minoritised groups face.
- Working strategically with partners to access minoritised groups and/or those perceived as particularly vulnerable.



Good Practice:

The College of Policing's [Race Action Plan](#) outlines an approach for engaging with people from Black ethnicities that could serve as a model for engaging with a range of groups, including vulnerable victim/survivors.



2.1.2 Inviting participation from children and young people

It is valuable for forces to include young people in engagement practices. Concerns around safeguarding should not exclude or minimise the ability for under-18's to participate in wider VoV/S practices. When designing strategies which prioritise the engagement of young people, it is important to consider the following:

- Clearly define the purpose of engaging with children and young people from the outset, specifying what is being asked of them.
- Take care not to let a risk-averse approach undermine children's ability to participate in order to capture the voice of the child. Recognising and respecting children and young people is crucial in enabling their voices to be heard.
- A balance must be struck between safeguarding young participants from harm and providing them with opportunities to meaningfully engage. Some topics may be inappropriate or distressing for young people and should be restricted when necessary.
- Ensure children and young people have support and advocacy throughout the engagement process, such as through parents or professionals.



Good Practice:

The VKPP's [Voice of the Child Briefing Paper](#) outlines police responsibilities when engaging with children and young people. This provides forces with strategies and tools to build confidence and support them in engaging with children in the most appropriate way.

2.1.3 Consideration of criminal convictions

VoV/S practices can involve engagement with perpetrators, victim/survivors, or those who fall into both categories. It may be decided to exclude all individuals with a criminal record from working with victim/survivors to balance safety, inclusivity, and the specific needs of victim/survivors. Consider:

- Evaluating the suitability of engagement by considering criminal records checks and thorough risk assessments on a case-by-case basis to determine if involvement is appropriate.
- For roles involving engagement with children or young people, ensure that DBS checks or vetting processes are in place to identify any criminal histories and assess risks accordingly.
- If exclusion is necessary, explore alternative opportunities for involvement, such as separate engagement or referrals to other engagement practices.



2.2 Managing the Risk of Re-Traumatisation

One of the most significant challenges in this area is managing the risk of re-traumatisation when engaging with victim/survivors. In some circumstances, this may lead to their automatic exclusion from participation due to the perceived risk of re-traumatisation and the aim of protection from further harm. However, strategies should be designed and implemented to address these barriers. This can help ensure that police services are able to understand and meet the needs of victim/survivors.

2.2.1 Providing appropriate support

When engaging with vulnerable victim/survivors, it is crucial to carefully assess potential risks, offer appropriate emotional support, and balance the need for inclusivity with safeguarding considerations.

Challenges:

- Concerns may exist around re-traumatising victim/survivors by asking them to recall distressing experiences, and the need to offer appropriate and timely emotional support in response.

Considerations for Practice:

- Victim/survivors should be able to decide what they share, based on an informed understanding of what the engagement practice may involve and with safeguards in place to support them. For example, it may be unsafe to engage with victim/survivors of abuse where a perpetrator could still be present, while others may find it traumatising to be excluded from all participation opportunities. Before engagement, ensure the necessary support structures are in place (see Stage 3.8). Victim/survivors should also be aware they are under no obligation to engage or revisit traumatic experiences



Good Practice:

Ensure appropriate language is used when engaging with vulnerable individuals, such as children and people who have been exploited or abused or who are at risk of exploitation and abuse. The [Child Exploitation and Abuse: Appropriate Language Guide](#) provides advice around suitable terminology for police and other professionals to use in such cases.



2.2.2 Intersecting vulnerabilities

Some victim/survivors may have multiple intersecting vulnerabilities or access barriers that may create additional challenges for engagement. It is essential to ensure that invitations to engage and subsequent onboarding strategies are inclusive and do not unintentionally exclude some of the most vulnerable victim/survivors. It is essential to ensure that invitations to engage and subsequent onboarding strategies are inclusive and do not unintentionally exclude some of the most vulnerable victim/survivors.

Challenges:

- Managing multiple vulnerability related risks can be viewed as too complex for engagement practices. For example, when there is a need to use translation services for non-English speaking victim/survivors of abuse.

Considerations for Practice:

- Ensure that engagement invitation and onboarding strategies are inclusive of minoritised groups, particularly those facing access barriers or multiple vulnerability related risk. This may involve collaborating with interpreters, trauma-informed staff, local organisations, and community partnerships to establish trust with these groups and to gather cultural insights or linguistic support to assist with service design.

2.2.3 Available resources

Challenges:

- Resource and expertise gaps may limit the scope of engagement of those with additional vulnerabilities, such as victim/survivors with disabilities. This can be influenced by time constraints, capability, and concerns around the ability to allocate appropriate resources.

Considerations for Practice:

- Identify any specific gaps in resource or knowledge within engagement practices and put in processes which help mitigate these. This may involve collaborating with organisations with specialised knowledge (e.g. disability advocacy groups). Regularly review and evaluate practices to ensure resources are being utilised effectively.



2.3 Methods

Invitations to engage victim/survivors may employ direct or indirect engagement methods. Direct methods involve contacting victim/survivors via details recorded at the time of reporting. More indirect engagement processes allow any eligible person to apply, and individuals may be referred by other external organisations.

2.3.1 Timeframes

Timeframes vary according to the type of VoV/S practice and are often dependent on when the victim/survivor experienced the crime. Some practices may involve engaging within a certain time-period, for example within two years of initial contact with the police. Others can engage at regular intervals, such as annually (e.g. for practices that measure changes in perceptions).

Challenges:

- Inviting victim/survivors to engage requires careful timing, particularly for recent or sensitive cases. One challenge is overlooking victim/survivors with multiple experiences with the police who have previously participated in engagement practices. Additionally, ongoing legal proceedings may prevent timely engagement due to concerns about jeopardising any ongoing court cases.

Considerations for Practice:

- Those responsible for inviting victim/survivors to engage should implement flexible timeframes to allow the sharing of multiple experiences. In some cases, it may be appropriate to stagger engagement and outreach for when any court cases approach closure, to avoid potential legal issues. However, it is also important to implement clear set of eligibility criteria, particularly for victim/survivors of violent, serious, or complex crimes. In these cases, it may not be appropriate to engage with them because of the risk of influencing an ongoing investigation.

2.3.2 Direct invitations for participation

Victim/survivors can be invited directly to participate in an engagement practice following interaction with a police force. Typically, this is based on their recent experiences. For example, victim satisfaction surveys may involve forces making contact using the details recorded on their reporting systems. Personnel familiar with the victim/survivor through prior interactions can be used to facilitate this process. Contact information may be shared with appropriate consent with third-party organisations conducting VoV/S practices.

Challenges:

- Directly engaging victim/survivors for policing practices can present challenges. For example, changes in contact information over time, ethical issues such consent, and the risk of alerting perpetrators in cases such as domestic abuse where safety is a concern.

Considerations for Practice:

- It is crucial to ensure that victim/survivors give explicit permission for their contact details to be shared with third parties, and that clear, agreed-upon contact strategies are in place to protect their safety and privacy.

2.3.3 Indirect invitations for participation

Indirect invitations for participation involve opening opportunities to all who meet the inclusion criteria, often through referrals from external organisations. Some practices also blend indirect invitations with direct applications, referring individuals but also allowing individuals to apply directly based on their specific passions or interests.

Challenges:

- Partners/external organisations may refer individuals who do not meet the scope or criteria of the engagement practice.

Considerations for Practice:

- Consider signposting individuals to other organisations that may be more suitable and could offer alternative engagement opportunities.

2.3.4 Informed consent

Transparency and trust are crucial when engaging victim/survivors and gathering their voices. To build this, informed consent must be obtained, ensuring participants understand what their involvement entails and allowing them to make informed choices. This should include:

- **Communication:** Communicate to victim/survivors how they can share their perspectives and experiences, what will happen to the information they share, including their right to pause at any time. Explain how their information will be handled, including recording, storage, confidentiality, and anonymity (see Stage 4 for more details about managing information). Ensure they understand their right to withdraw from the process at any point and offer information on available support resources.
- **Processes for obtaining informed consent:** These may vary by practice. However, it is encouraged to employ more formal methods such as written or electronic consent forms, especially within research-based practices.

- **Ethical boundaries:** Although offering confidentiality and anonymity can reduce the potential for participant withdrawal, in some cases there may be a requirement to breach confidentiality if safeguarding concerns arise during engagement. This must be included in informed consent forms or processes. Ensure victim/survivors are aware of this and establish clear escalation processes and procedures to address such situations, ensuring potential harm to victim/survivors is minimised and trust is maintained.



Good Practice:

The Department for Education [User Research Manual](#) provides further information on how to prepare for potential safeguarding concerns.



2.3.5 Alternative methods of inviting participation

Social media: Social media is an effective way to engage, especially with young people, but can be challenging and should only be undertaken by experienced practitioners. Therefore, it is important to implement communication strategies which allow for engagement activities to be undertaken on social media. Forces can use their existing social media channels to reach young people, however it is recognised that not many young people follow adult based police social media channels. The NPCC National Digital Youth Engagement Team provide support to forces in this area, by providing advice and expertise and being available to undertake the engagement.



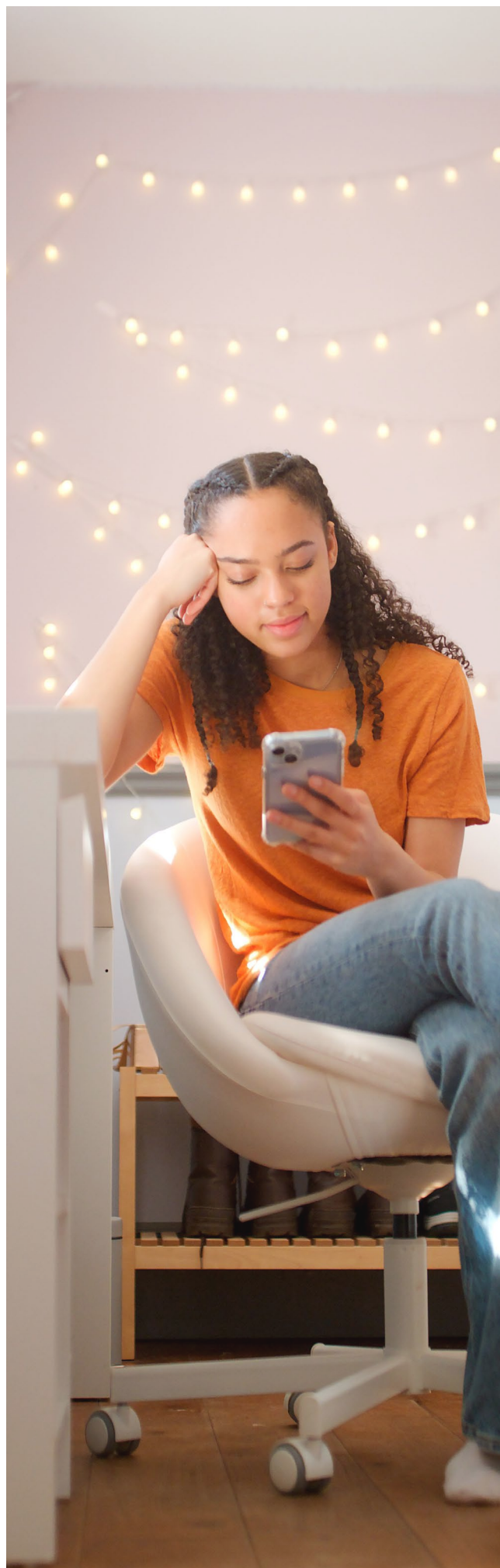
Good Practice:

An example of practice developed by the NPCC National Digital Youth Engagement Team includes [YourPolice.UK](https://www.yourpolice.uk), a national digital youth engagement programme to provide safeguarding tools for children and young people who use social media.

It is essential to establish robust processes that address data protection, privacy, and safeguarding, alongside effective governance mechanisms to ensure these processes are implemented successfully.

Community messaging systems/apps:

New and innovative engagement practices may include utilising community apps, like Neighbourhood Alert Systems. This can be a useful platform for disseminating surveys and information and communicating with the public. It also may offer an opportunity for centralising and standardising processes given the potential to be used by multiple forces while still being able to disaggregate the results.



Glossary

Term	Description
Data Disaggregation	Disaggregating data refers to breaking down information into smaller subpopulations. For example, a victim satisfaction survey may collect extensive data on victims' demographic information. Disaggregating such data allows analysts to look at responses from specific populations in isolation from the rest of the dataset, such as (though not limited to) victims of a particular crime type, victims with a specific gender identify, or both combined.
Good Practice	Practice referred to as 'good practice' reflects positive processes, approaches and useful resources. This is intended to provide examples that could be considered by forces but may not have been evaluated.
Intersectional / Intersectionality	Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (for example, gender, sex, race, class, sexuality, religion, disability, physical appearance, height and so on) combine to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege. (College of Policing, n.d.)
Minoritised communities / groups	The term minoritised communities usually refers to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority within the population. It emphasises that these communities are minoritised by societal structures and systems, rather than inherently being minorities. (Durham University, n.d.)
Representative	The degree to which the characteristics of a study (notably, of study subjects and setting, but sometimes also of exposures and outcomes) are similar to those of an external population that did not participate in the study. Representativeness is time, place and context specific.
Re-traumatisation	The re-experiencing of thoughts, feelings or sensations experienced at the time of a traumatic event or circumstance in a person's past. Re-traumatisation is generally triggered by reminders of previous trauma which may or may not be potentially traumatic in themselves. (GOV.UK, 2022)
Trauma-informed	Trama-informed practice is an approach which is grounded in the understanding that trauma exposure can impact an individual's neurological, biological, psychological and social development. The approach aims to increase awareness of how trauma can negatively impact on individuals and communities. It also aims to improve the accessibility and quality of services by creating culturally sensitive, safe services that people trust and want to use. It seeks to prepare professionals to work in collaboration and partnership with those people. (GOV.UK, 2022)

Term	Description
Victim/survivor	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a vulnerability related crime. The term represents a continuum for where people may find themselves, and recognises the fact that people with lived experience of victimisation may prefer one term or the other, and each journey from ‘victim’ to ‘survivor’ is unique.
Voice	The term ‘voice’ covers both the verbal articulation of wishes, experiences, and needs, alongside non-verbal indicators and features of the individuals’ context, environment, and relationships. ‘Voice’ not only means capturing and recording wishes, experiences, and needs, but also listening to and considering voices to influence and inform decision making.
Voice of the Victim/survivor (VoV/S)	‘Voice of the victim/survivor’ refers to the perspective of individuals (adults and children) who have been impacted by crime or harm: either through lived experience, as a witness, family member, friend or colleague. The perspectives, opinions, rights and non-verbal cues of victim/survivors and their advocates must be heard, respected, prioritised and actively sought during investigations, enquiries and interactions. They must also be embedded within policy, practice, and support provision. In turn, this will aid in strengthening investigations, shaping and developing current and future policy, practice, response and support of policing and wider agencies to victim/survivors, for those who need support.
VoV/S Practice	A Voice of the Victim/survivor Practice refers to any engagement process through which agencies collect feedback from or collaborate with victim/survivors to gain insights into their perspectives, experiences, and rights. The information gathered should be used to inform future discussions, enhance responses, and strengthen practices moving forward.
Vulnerability	A person is vulnerable if, as a result of their situation or circumstances, they are unable to take care or protect themselves or others from harm or exploitation. (VKPP, 2025)

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About the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection

We're a collaboration between the
College of Policing and the National
Police Chiefs' Council.

We work across law enforcement,
the third sector and government to
professionalise public protection and
strive for a whole systems approach to
prevent harm, give confidence to victims,
survivors and witnesses to come forward
and bring more offenders to justice.

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**Vulnerability Knowledge
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