NCVPP

National Centre for
Violence Against
Women & Girls and
Public Protection

Using the Experience of Victim/Survivors to Improve Police Practice

Stage 3 – Gathering Voice

December 2025

College of Policing

NPCC
National Police Chiefs' Council

Contents

Executive Summary

- Data collection methods for voice of the victim/survivor practices can be categorised into customer service, transactional, and collaborative approaches, each offering different levels of participation. Engagement should promote equitable and collective involvement, while maintaining a strong focus on a victim-centred approach.

- Determining the appropriate sample size for victim/survivor engagement practices requires careful consideration of the aims of data collection, type of data, available resources, and capacity.

- Engagement should promote equitable and collective involvement, while maintaining a strong focus on a victim-centred approach.

- Effective and ethical data collection requires careful consideration of several factors, including compensation for victim/survivors and other participants, accessible practices, safeguarding measures during data collection, and thoughtful selection of who is best placed to collect the data.

3.1 Data Collectors

Effective data collection for voice of the victim/survivor (VoV/S) practices requires thoughtful consideration of who collects the data and how it is conducted. It may be carried out by a range of people, including police personnel, partner agencies, university academics and researchers. The responses of victim/survivors can be heavily influenced by who is collecting the information, therefore it is important to consider who is most appropriate to do so depending on the practice and its focus.

3.1.1 Independent collectors

Utilising or outsourcing to independent collectors may be beneficial for some practices where there is a perception that victim/survivors may feel more comfortable feeding back to a third-party.

Benefits may include:

- Impartiality which can be key in encouraging more honest opinions, including criticisms levelled towards the police.

- Reduced bias.

- A potential pre-existing strong relationship with victim/survivors, where independent collectors can assess who can safely be involved and can provide or signpost to appropriate support.

- Collectors who are better trained in how to appropriately speak to people, particularly those from vulnerable and diverse groups, including young people and children, about sensitive topics.

3.1.2 Partner agencies

It may be appropriate for police to commission partner agencies to carry out data collection, particularly for forces that lack the necessary internal skills.

The benefits of collaborating with partner agencies for data collection may include:

- Expertise in particularly specialist areas or dealing with particularly vulnerable victim/survivors.

- Cultural competence around ensuring the data collection process is sensitive to the socio-demographic characteristics of victim/survivors.

- More knowledge and awareness of ethical considerations such as consent.
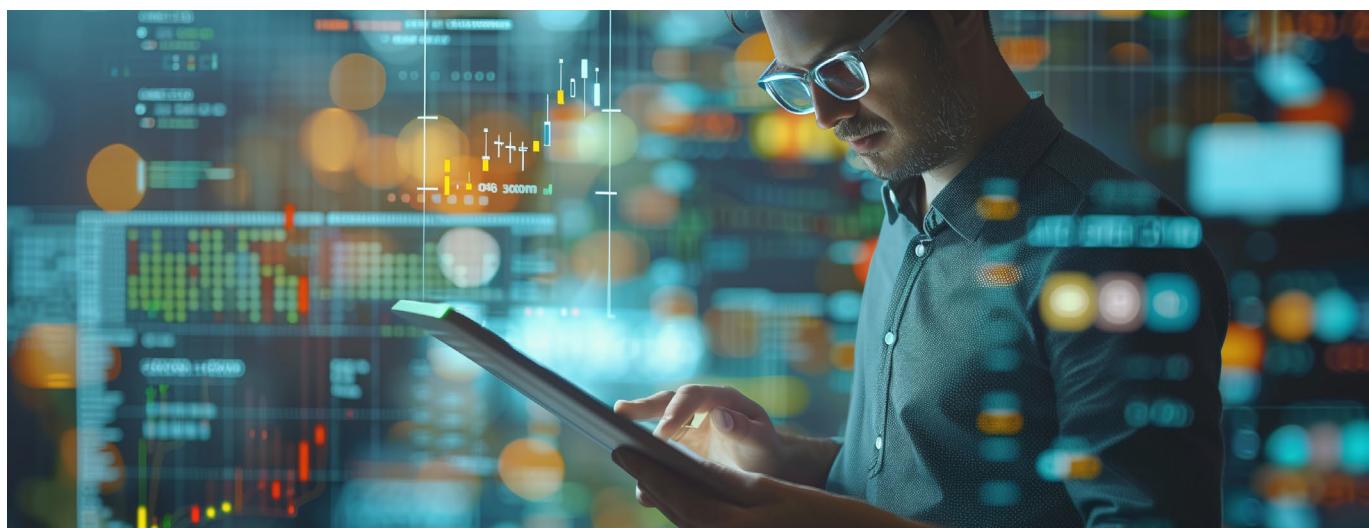
3.1.3 Police personnel

Police may not always have the option of commissioning out external data collection activities. It may also be considered important for police to hear victim/survivor voices firsthand. In these cases, it is necessary for police personnel to have the requisite skills and expertise to collect the information directly.

It is important to consider:

- Upskilling police personnel who engage directly with victim/survivors to ensure they have received training in relevant areas, such as trauma-informed approaches, active listening skills and cultural sensitivity. They should also be specialised in the area of focus for the practice.

- Train personnel to navigate challenging conversations calmly and professionally, avoiding defensiveness or attempts to justify police actions.

- The value of having senior police personnel present, particularly for more collaborative approaches such as forums, meetings, and conferences. Their presence could help people with lived experience to engage, as it can offer assurance that their voices will be heard and acted upon.

- Taking measures to help break down barriers to engagement. Examples may include police not wearing uniform and ensuring cameras are turned on during online meetings.

- Having conversations with victim/survivors about what is needed to ensure their safety and comfort to help establish what steps need to be taken.

3.1.4 Data collector welfare

Working with victim/survivors and listening to their experiences can sometimes mean hearing distressing information, which over time can lead to burn-out or vicarious trauma. It is essential for leaders to put in place welfare processes to support data collectors.

Consideration could be given to:

- Providing access to formal support services, such as occupational health, counselling, and employee assistance programmes.

- Encouraging regular check-ins with line managers and conduct risk assessments for personnel involved in VoV/S practices.

- Allowing informal support measures and flexibility, such as colleagues checking in with one another, regular breaks, or time off if needed.

- Recognising that support may be less accessible for those working from home and provide alternative avenues of support for remote colleagues.

- Emphasising the importance of resilience, listening, being receptive, and maintaining a willingness to learn from victim/survivors experiences.

3.2 Methods of Data Collection

Forces are encouraged to collaborate closely with victim/survivors, ensuring that engagement methods allow them to work together in an equitable and collective manner, with a focus on maintaining a victim-centred approach. However, data collection methods vary in how participatory they are. Some entail a greater degree of collaboration, which can offer victim/survivors more control and choice over how they participate and enable more decision-making powers and influence.

3.2.1 Approaches to gathering voice

Methods can be grouped broadly into three categories: customer service approaches, transactional approaches, and collaborative approaches.

- **Customer Service Approaches** involve a one-way flow of information, whereby police learn about victim/survivors' experiences, directly or through a third party. These approaches can be structured, meaning they follow a set format and engage with specific groups of victim/survivors (in a more prescribed way) or unstructured , meaning they are more flexible in how information is gathered and who is involved.

- **Transactional Approaches** involve an exchange of information, often with victim/survivors receiving some information and being asked to respond.

- **Collaborative Approaches** involve practices where police and those with lived experience work together to lead service improvement and change. They are often referred to as 'victim-led', 'youth-led' or 'lived experience-led', to emphasise that those with lived experience are the driving force behind service development.

The benefits and challenges associated with each approach and methods that can be used with each include:

For more information about the methods outlined above, see Appendix B.

Approach	Benefits and Challenges	Methods
Customer service	**Benefits:** • Enabling forces to be flexible with methods that can be more or less prescriptive in terms of who they engage when, how, and the types of information collected based on the purpose of the practice and method chosen. • Empowering victim/survivors by enabling greater control in how they engage with unstructured practices. **Challenges:** • Fewer opportunities for victim/survivors to know what has happened to the information that they share. • Less opportunity to build relationships between the police and victim/survivors.	Structured methods: surveys, interviews, focus groups, feedback, and mixed methods. Unstructured: ad hoc and introductory meetings, victims voices through third parties, training, and conference presentations.

Approach	Benefits and Challenges	Methods
Transactional	**Benefits:** • Enabling individuals to gain knowledge of how the police work, including insight into police demand, capacity, and resourcing. • Providing insight into areas of public protection that often operate behind the scenes, allowing victim/survivors to better understand police actions and rationale. • Revealing issues overlooked by police and encourage individuals to offer suggestions for improvement. • Providing developmental opportunities, gaining experience of helping to deliver events or chair forums. This can potentially be empowering for victim/survivors. **Challenges:** • The success of transactional approaches can depend heavily on the people involved. Police representatives must build trust and rapport with victim/survivors and encourage productive discussions and accountability through constructive criticism.	Engagement forums, networks and events, independent advisory groups (IAGs) and other advisory boards, scrutiny panels and oversight.
Collaborative	**Benefits:** • Rebuilding trust and fostering mutual empathy between police, victim/survivors, and the wider community, breaking down barriers and humanising the police. • Offering flexibility for victim/survivors in terms of their engagement. They can choose how, when, and on what topics they engage, allowing them to focus on issues they are passionate about and ensuring their involvement aligns with personal interests and availability. • Individuals with lived experience can gain valuable skills, such as training others, public speaking, and presenting to senior personnel, with some receiving specialised 'train the trainer' programs. • Collaborative approaches create opportunities for mutual learning, where those with lived experience can bring their understanding and contribute to strategies for improving community safety. **Challenges:** • Collaborative approaches are often led by partner agencies or third-sector organisations, rather than the police. This can limit the interaction between police and victim/survivors, reducing opportunities for shared learning. • Collaborative approaches can be more time and resource intensive than transactional or customer-service models. • High levels of engagement and time commitments may not appeal or be suitable for all individuals.	Co-production, expert panels, lived experience advisors, peer research and youth engagement groups.

3.2.2 Sample sizes

The level of victim/survivor engagement will vary widely across methods. Depending on the aims of data collection, type of data, resource, and capacity a larger or smaller scale sample may be more appropriate. Consider the points below to determine the most suitable sample size.

Large-scale samples

If the aim is to achieve an extensive reach using less time consuming and resource-intensive methods, surveys (particularly online surveys) might be the most appropriate approach. Large sample sizes tend to provide a broad overview by capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences, rather than in-depth knowledge.

Challenges:

- It is not always possible to know the response rate or even where participants are located, particularly for open access surveys. Additionally, using large-scale samples are less likely to enable an in-depth understanding of perceptions.

Considerations for Practice:

- To increase response rates, it can be helpful to offer options for engagement (e.g. both online and telephone response options).

Smaller-scale samples

Using methods with smaller samples sizes, for example group-based or 1:1 practices such as focus groups or interviews, may be more appropriate to gather an in-depth, more nuanced understanding. Smaller samples may also help create greater engagement.

Challenges:

- Smaller groups can limit representation particularly in certain forums if dominant voices discourage others from speaking out.

Considerations for Practice:

- Consider changing membership over time to mitigate limited representation from small samples, enabling new voices to be heard. It is important to plan careful facilitation and offer alternative methods of engagement. For example, allowing individuals to provide written answers if they do not feel comfortable talking during the engagement practice or enabling conversations after the event. Consider using purposive sampling (where individuals are invited to engage based on specific characteristics) if seeking representation from minoritised communities.

3.3 Safeguarding Victim/ Survivors

Collecting data from vulnerable victim/survivors must be handled carefully to avoid re-traumatisation (see Stage 2.2). It is important to be aware of the risk factors associated with data collection:

- Asking victim/survivors for information that they may find distressing to relay.

- Requesting feedback on multiple occasions.

- Not having a safe space for relaying their perspectives and experiences.

- Safeguarding concerns, such as additional disclosures which may be made.

- Being unable to provide appropriate support, particularly when practices take place online.

Decisions on whether to engage with vulnerable individuals are often informed by these risk factors. However, it is advisable to consider this on a case-by-case basis, especially since some victim/survivors may feel that not being heard could be more harmful than sharing their experiences. Putting mechanisms in place to make practices safer for victim/survivors can also help mitigate these risks.

3.3.1 Safeguarding survey respondents

Considerations

- Providing contact details for those involved in the delivering the engagement practice.

- A content warning at the start of surveys and throughout, plus a question to check if the respondent wishes to proceed.

- Enabling a quick exit option from surveys to a generic website should the respondent be interrupted or need to exit in a hurry.

- To ensure confidentiality, the data collector should ensure responses from incomplete surveys are deleted. This prevents others who may share the digital device or email account from following the link and being able to view partial responses.

- Including a question with a free text response at the end of the survey requesting feedback on the individual's experience of the engagement, such as whether they found the experience distressing.

- Providing details of available support services at the beginning and end of the survey.

3.3.2 Safeguarding victim/ survivors participating in verbal or group feedback

Measures to Adopt

- Using pre-recorded feedback to avoid victim/survivors having to recount their experience multiple times.

- Offering attendees at forums and events the option of feeding back via other means, such as a survey, if they are not comfortable sharing their experience publicly.

- Helping focus discussions by sending out information beforehand about topics that should be discussed through other mechanisms, such as details about ongoing investigations or complaints.

- Having advocates or specialist support present for victim/survivors to ensure that risks can managed, and support is available.

- Providing materials with available support services, such as leaflets.

- Disguising support information from perpetrators, such as offering hand sanitisers with a bar code that contains a number the victim/survivor can call for support.

3.3.3 Minimising harm

It is crucial to have processes in place for victim/survivors to address ethical concerns and mitigate risks associated with emotional distress during data collection, especially when dealing with sensitive topics. These ensure that individuals are informed of the potential risks beforehand and that appropriate support mechanisms, such as access to counselling or emergency contacts, are readily available. It is important to ensure that victim/survivor well-being is prioritised and that they are not further harmed during data collection.

3.4 Accessibility

To enhance accessibility for victim/survivors, various measures can be integrated into the data collection stages of VoV/S practices. Using a variety of data collection methods to capture the voices of victim/survivors can help ensure that diverse perspectives and experiences are properly represented.

Making engagement practices accessible for individuals with multiple intersectional needs can be challenging, as some modifications may benefit certain groups more than others. For example, some data collectors may possess the cultural competency and language skills to access people from diverse ethnicities but find it more difficult to engage with those experiencing hearing loss, impaired sight, or who are neurodiverse.

Improving accessibility for certain groups or individuals may require intersectional approaches, for example by navigating both language and cultural differences. Utilise the skills of staff to tailor approaches to meet the needs of underrepresented groups. This could involve working with individuals who have relevant cultural competency skills, language skills, or those with lived experience to understand barriers and co-develop solutions. It may also be useful to partner with local organisations and advocacy groups to expand resources and improve outreach.

Considerations for Improving Accessibility	
Online Practices	Offering online practices can help: • Provide opportunities for those unable to access physical venues to engage virtually. • Appeal to young people who are more likely to use social media. • Reduce travel time, expenses, and potentially allows for more opportunities to engage. When offering an online practice, consider: • Providing support such as access to equipment (e.g. phones or laptops) to help participants overcome barriers like digital poverty. • Providing reasonable adjustments. • Offering technical support for participants using assistive technologies. • Providing tutorials or guides on how to use online engagement tools. • Ensure that online platforms and materials comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) to accommodate users with disabilities. • Use screen reader-friendly formats and provide alt text for images. • Alternative engagement practices for individuals without accessible internet connection or equipment.

Considerations for Improving Accessibility	
Hybrid Approaches	• Offering people choice and variety (e.g. online or in-person attendance) to participate in their preferred way.
Flexibility	• Adjusting meeting times for those with work or school commitments, or who rely on public transport.
Accessible Written Materials	• Printing information and paper surveys in larger text or adjusting font sizes for digital practices. • Providing easy read versions and/or plain English versions.
Interpreters	• Offering interpreters for online or in person practices. • Offering written materials in sign writing.
Translation	• Translating materials into relevant languages. • Consideration of bi-lingual services, for example, for surveys. • Proactively consider the availability of suitable translators at the earliest opportunity.
Assistance	• Assisting people to fill in surveys. • Having a family member assist with completing surveys. • Having support workers attend groups with victim/survivors.
Feedback Mechanisms	• Implement accessible feedback mechanisms to continuously improve accessibility practices based on victim/survivor experiences. • Use anonymous surveys or feedback forms to gather insights on accessibility barriers.

Good Practice:

The NPCC have introduced the Police Approved Interpreters and Translators Scheme (PAIT) to ensure all translators and interpreters have the vetting clearance, qualifications and experience required. Forces should utilise this scheme to help obtain suitable translators.

3.5 Compensation

It is important to make sure that victim/survivors and other participating stakeholders are appropriately compensated or reimbursed for their time. This can vary depending on the level of commitment required in each practice.

3.5.1 When to offer compensation

Low-Commitment Activities (e.g. Surveys): Compensation is rarely offered within low-commitment activities but can be considered.

High-Commitment Practices (e.g., Forums, Meetings, Groups): Consideration should be given to cover expenses such as travel, accommodation, and food. Vouchers, childcare support, or hourly payments can be offered for extensive engagement.

Challenges:

- It's important to consider whether compensation is appropriate for all participants, whilst ensuring that everyone receives the same treatment within the same practice. For example, considering the appropriateness of financial compensation for those with addiction issues, people receiving benefits or those who do not have the right to work in the UK.

- Payment could also lead to perceptions of bias, where responses might appear influenced or coerced (e.g. paying someone to provide certain feedback).

Considerations for Practice:

- Victim/survivors sometimes dedicate significant personal resources (e.g. annual leave or personal funds) to engage, especially in higher-commitment practices. Therefore, offering compensation or payment, including paid work opportunities, recognises the value of participants' time, knowledge and contributions. This enables those who might struggle financially to take part, supports inclusion and treats participants equitably alongside paid staff.

- To maintain transparency, it is important to clearly communicate the purpose of any compensation or payments to avoid concerns about bias.

3.6 National Stakeholder Engagement

At the national level, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) has a range of working groups that cover different thematic areas. Engaging with these groups where appropriate can be particularly useful for listening to victim/survivor perspectives and experiences. Whilst voices of victim/survivors are not always directly included within these groups, it is often represented by third sector organisations that work closely with victim/survivors of crime and represent their views. Staff in these organisations are sometimes experts-by-experience themselves and can bring their personal and professional experience to the role. Some of the working groups have close relationships with these organisations and use them as a means of accessing victim/survivors.

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Good Practice:

Forces should consider consulting the NPCC website or contacting committee and working group leads to find more information about ongoing work and opportunities to engage.

Glossary

Term	Description
Coproduction	Co-production refers to a way of working where service providers and users work together to reach a collective outcome. The approach is value-driven and built on the principle that those who are affected by a service are best placed to help design it. (Involve, n.d.)
Cultural Competence	The knowledge, attitudes and skills required to demonstrate sensitivity and empathy when working with others from different backgrounds, and the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures, in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person being served. (IOPC, 2024)
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.
Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs)	Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) are a network of individuals independent of the Police who meet to advise and offer ideas to police forces on a wide range of activities relating to local policing.
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.)
Needs Assessments	Needs assessments are commissioned assessments of need and demand for victim services to establish an independent assessment of current levels of delivery to victims and understanding local need to inform subsequent plans for service delivery. This includes, though is not limited to, police forces within the territorial area(s) that the needs assessment is commissioned. The resulting report may be informed by a combination of desk-based research looking at local crime data, agency data and/or scientific literature, though can also extend to obtaining feedback from victim/survivors by means of surveys or interviews.
Public Protection	Public Protection is a core policing function to prevent and reduce harm through safeguarding, investigation, tackling perpetrators and working in partnership. (VKPP, 2025)

Term	Description
Reasonable adjustment	A reasonable adjustment involves making a change to the way that things are usually done things to ensure a service is accessible to all. For example, this might mean providing information in a different format, or communicating with a service user through their representative or advocate. (IOPC, 2024)
Representive(ness)	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)
Semi-structured	Qualitative research method using a pre-determined set of open questions.
Stakeholders	An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organisation.
Third-sector organisations	Non-governmental and non-profit organisations that undertake activities for social benefit, including charities.
Tokenism	Tokenism is the superficial inclusion of minoritised individuals or communities to give the appearance of diversity, while ignoring the deeper inequalities tied to intersecting identities like race, gender, and class, ultimately reinforcing systemic injustice. (Adisa et al., 2025)
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)
Vicarious Trauma	The process whereby one experiences a trauma response when exposed to another's traumatic experience that has been retold. (AYM, n.d.)
Victim/survivor	Those who have been subject to, or have witnessed, a vulnerability related crime. The term represents a continuum upon which people may find themselves, in recognition of 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.

Term	Description
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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