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Appendix A. Developing Customized Protocols: Considerations for Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions starting from scratch in developing their own exam protocols are encouraged to consider the recommendations in this national protocol in their entirety and tailor them to fit local needs, challenges, statutes, and policies. Jurisdictions that have existing protocols can consider whether any of the protocol recommendations or the tasks below could serve to improve their immediate response to sexual assault or address gaps in services or interventions.

Form a protocol planning team. At the least, this team should include those responders involved in the exam process, including health care personnel, exam facility administrators, law enforcement representatives, victim advocates, prosecutors, and forensic laboratory personnel. Organizations serving specific populations in the community should also be involved at some level to make sure the protocol speaks to the needs of victims of diverse backgrounds. Team participants should have authority to make policy decisions on behalf of their agencies. Bringing together such a team can be challenging, particularly in jurisdictions with multiple sexual assault victim advocacy programs, exam facilities, law enforcement agencies, prosecution offices, and court systems (or where several levels of government may be involved in investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases). Although representation from all involved disciplines and agencies is encouraged, at some point the team assembled will have to move ahead with planning efforts. Try to keep those absent informed of team activities and offer them opportunities to provide feedback on protocol development and revision.

Assess needs. Before initiating policy changes, it is important that the planning team assess the jurisdiction’s current response to sexual assault, with a focus on the exam process. Some activities that may help:

- Compare statistics on sexual assault within the community as captured by represented agencies.
- Identify community demographics, including the various populations that make up the area.
- Review existing feedback from victims about their experiences and satisfaction with immediate response.
- Seek input from professionals involved in the exam process on current gaps, problems, and challenges.
- Evaluate the adequacy of policies pertaining to each aspect of immediate response.
- Review systemic breakdowns that have occurred in immediate response.
- Evaluate the capacity of each discipline to support a coordinated immediate response.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of response to victims from diverse backgrounds or in certain types of cases.
- Evaluate the adequacy of related trainings and resource materials.
- Identify related jurisdictional statutes and evaluate their adequacy in supporting effective response.

Devise an action plan. The protocol planning team can take what it learns through needs assessments and translate it into an action plan for improving the exam process and creating a protocol. The plan should clearly identify what needs to happen, who is responsible for coordinating or carrying out each action, possible resources, desired outcomes, and how the effectiveness of the action will be evaluated. The plan can be revisited periodically to assess progress and evaluate outcomes.


Funding under the STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grant Program and the STOP Violence Against Indian Women Discretionary Grant Program may be used to cover costs related to protocol development and implementation. For more information, see http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov.