



TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Creating Safety, Justice & Equality

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, TRAINING & RESOURCE CENTER

Peer Dialogue:

National Examples of Using Cost-Framing for Domestic Violence Prevention

TC-TAT hosted a peer dialogue on May 3, 2010 to discuss how advocates across the country are using cost-effectiveness framing to gain support for domestic violence (DV) programs, including direct services and/or prevention. During the call, participants shared successes, challenges and lessons learned and provided examples of cost-framing tools and resources they had used or developed.

Participants included Faye Kihne and Julie Christianson, Community Violence Intervention Center (CVIC), Grand Forks, North Dakota; Liz Richards, Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women (MCBW), Minneapolis, Minnesota; Chevon Kothari and Allison Tudor, Mountain Crisis Services, Mariposa, California; and Donna Garske, Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS), San Rafael, California.

Organizational background and history using cost framing

CVIC: CVIC provides a unique combination of crisis and long-term services for victims of domestic violence along with community-wide prevention activities, offering a holistic model that enables individuals to overcome barriers and end violence in their individual lives and concurrently works to prevent violence on a societal level. These services include primary prevention activities with youth and young adults, advanced training for professionals, Coordinated Community Response Project, offender treatment, supervised visitations/exchanges, transitional housing and others. About six years ago, facing significant budget shortfalls, we determined that we would have to eliminate three of our five programs – or find new sources of revenue. Because we offer public safety services that are integrally involved with law enforcement and other governmental agencies, as well as violence prevention services that directly impact local government, we asked ourselves: ***What would happen if we cut these DV services? What expenses would the city and county governments be faced with if we no longer provided these services?***

MCBW: The Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women (MCBW) only recently started to think about cost-framing. A few years ago, we were involved with some state legislative funding policy work and all the community-based agencies were competing to maintain existing funding dollars. We had to ask ourselves: ***How do we justify and quantify what we're doing?***

The Minnesota Sexual Assault Coalition soon came out with a report of the costs of sexual assault in Minnesota; this report received good coverage and reception. So we thought about applying this to our DV prevention work. We wanted to justify our work with solid numbers and with localized cost data. MCBW developed a *Toolkit* for our members to calculate localized DV costs and describe the services their programs were offering.

MAWS: Marin Abused Women's Services (MAWS) is the main organization in Marin County providing DV services and overseeing the CCR (Coordinated Community Response) team. We have mainly used cost-framing to "make the case" for core funding in support of our direct services. We had opportunities in our communication activities to donors to promote the *value of investment in prevention* and to evoke the framing and language on prevention and present the cost of each incident of domestic violence. Every time there is a law enforcement response, it costs the county system an average of \$27,354 per incident. It captures people's attention when they can see the bigger ripple impact of the problem if we don't do at least as much as we're doing. When we frame it in this way, people then understand that there are opportunities to save more with the types of services that we offer.

The use of cost-framing in our prevention work is timely given the scarcity of funding and the sense of competing with other safety net providers in our community such as the fire and police departments and other social services, all of whom are struggling for funding.

MCS: Overall, at Mountain Crisis Services and Mariposa County Project Respect we are still figuring out how to use the cost-effectiveness model in different ways. We have used it to gain support from some community stakeholders and are hoping to use it when applying for future grants. We developed a marketing tool for Mariposa County Project Respect that includes a break-down of the cost-effectiveness model we created with the help of TC-TAT. This sheet was sent to teachers and administrators in the school district and we recently gave it the school board during a Project Respect presentation. We plan to include this tool when applying for future funds related to Project Respect.

How have your community members and other stakeholders responded to using cost-framing in your work?

MCBW: In Minnesota, we are working on DV prevention in 87 counties and are still in the process of developing a composite picture. So far, 30 counties have conducted some cost-framing work in collaboration with local funders and media to educate the community of the value of our services. Some of the counties outside the larger metro areas and in the rural regions have experienced more success. Using the tools the coalition developed, DV programs are able to provide localized data which quantifies their DV work, including the number of women and children who have been served, probation numbers, and arrest numbers, along with other data.

We have just started using cost-framing for some of our statewide lobbying efforts, but it's too early to draw any conclusions about its success.

CVIC: In Grand Forks, we did extensive research and developed proposals specific to the city and county, detailing how CVIC services save significant local government funds and the dollar amount that each governmental body would have to pay if we cut three of our programs. Our calculations included areas such as advocate assistance in domestic calls, provision of state-mandated services such as upholding fair treatment standards for victims, costs saved through prevention and many other categories. We requested contracts for safety services from each entity; we have developed partnerships to contract with the county initially and then the following year developed a contract with the city also. Last year, we applied a similar approach at the state level, exploring questions such as: ***What would it cost our state if DV services were not available? How much is the state saving by having DV agencies provide these services?*** We calculated cost savings specific to state agencies, working with legislators to demonstrate that a state investment would save significant funds in the

future, and we were successful in securing \$1 million in state funding for the biennium distributed to 21 DV agencies. We are continuing our work in this area.

MAWS: California has been in such bad economic shape. When the Governor cut the DV shelter programming, we ran a big editorial in our county newspaper that described some of the costs the community saves when there are DV services available. As a result, we had a donor who responded with a challenge grant and we received match contributions from the community.

I also serve on a funding committee with our state coalition, the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (CPEDV) and we worked together to develop talking points that incorporate some of the cost-framing and language. We encouraged CPEDV to work with us to integrate some of these points into the lobbying platform. Our proposal to be reinstated into the state budget was passed by the State Assembly Budget Committee with full bipartisan support.

MCS: Although we are still trying to find ways to use cost-framing for the greatest impact, the ways we have used it so far have really given credibility to our work. When sharing our materials that include the cost-savings to teachers, administrators, and the school board, it shows that we have done our work and that the program is effective. We are continuing to focus on evaluating our prevention work through Project Respect so we can really demonstrate outcomes that can then be measured in terms of cost. All of this evaluation information helps the school district to see the validity of Project Respect and increases the school district's interest and support of the prevention effort.

What were some of the main reasons your organization became interested in using cost-framing?

CVIC: We knew that many of our services were unique in that they were integrally involved with governmental responsibilities such as public safety and the provision of services mandated through state statute. We also knew that we couldn't continue to provide the full extent of our services without a monetary partnership with local government. We began to frame our services in this way, focusing on contracting with local government to provide public safety services, which is a governmental responsibility. Including a specific dollar amount that government saves because of our services was a key to our success. In addition, partnering with our local CCR was critical; the support of this effective, multi-disciplinary group lent credibility to our efforts and led to our success.

MCBW: We initially were responding to outside pressures for funding and seeking to justify the value of our services. It's difficult to describe the impact or value of a lot of the work that we do. We need to position that DV prevention work is *providing a core government function*. As budget cuts are being made, we need to protect core government functions. We are making the case that DV agencies are responsible stewards for public money, safety and protection.

Across all of our work, we need to be strategic about the message that we're putting out there and how we are integrating cost-framing into bigger messaging. Others have been more successful at messaging; for example, child custody agencies have developed the message "every child needs a father." Our DV response is much more complicated and cannot be simplified into a sound bite that can be easily marketed. *As we talk about the financial aspect of our work, we need to determine how do we want to message generally and what kind of face do we want to put out to the public?*

MAWS: We get excited when we have such a great story to tell about the difference that we are truly making – from saving people's lives to radically influencing choices on that long-term prevention

level. The cost-framework is an opportunity for us to sharpen our saw, to make it more precise and more compelling.

What messaging has really resonated for different audiences?

MCBW: Safety and protection – working in partnership for core government functions. At the same time, we are trying to hone in on what will really resonate for funders and legislators. A big selling point is when you can use framing that becomes personalized for the decision-makers by making it localized. We want people to go to their local counties and assess the localized impact of DV.

MCS: It is very difficult to measure the true effectiveness of prevention. It seems very nebulous to most folks; however, when you attach a dollar amount to things, people tend to perk up and listen...especially decision-makers and funders. The cost-framing tools are attractive because they give a “legitimacy” to work that advocates know is imperative, but whose benefits may be unfamiliar to those who are outside of our field.

What needs to be in place in terms of skills, time or organizational commitment to use cost-framing? What was your staff’s level of commitment to learning and integrating this into their work?

MAWS: More conversation is needed to infuse the cost-framework throughout the organization and community and then to look at all the communication vehicles where there’s an opportunity to use this framing. The most obvious place is public policy and funding efforts, but there are other opportunities as well, such as volunteer recruitment or collaboration efforts.

CVIC: We have three full-time staff members that spend a significant amount of time *collecting data for our agency* and our community. We utilize a database, the Domestic Abuse Information Network (DAIN), purchased from the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN, and enter data from incident reports, prosecutor’s documents, and observations from court hearings. The data identifies trends which gives our agencies direction in improving our response to families experiencing domestic violence. When cost-framing, it is important for CVIC’s staff to not only have the ability and skills to collect and analyze data, but to also be able to weave the data analysis into a story that includes the problem, as well as the proposed solution and benefit. For example, we were able to determine how many warrants have been served, how many days were served in jail by offenders, and other information to establish direct costs incurred by the city and county because of DV-related crimes. Without this data, it would be very difficult to accomplish cost-framing.

MCBW: We have used part-time student interns with some staff supervision to support our data collection. However, we need to do more and find consistent places where the state already collects DV-related data that can be used by local programs. The local programs can then supplement this data with their own numbers related to services provided and people served. The state typically organizes data according to the crime convicted. But there are real gaps, especially since DV is such an underreported crime.

We’ve also found that when we describe our DV intervention and prevention work using multi-colored graphs and engaging print presentations, it catches people’s attention. It’s important to be able to offer some technical support for DV programs to format the data into compelling graphics that they can use consistently in their communications strategies.

Once you have the data, who in your organization uses it to advance your work?

CVIC: Our Director of Program Operations leads the effort, identifying CVIC services and how they monetarily impact various governmental agencies. Working with CVIC program coordinators, we develop tools to collect and analyze specific in-house data. Our CCR specialist collects and analyzes data from external agencies such as law enforcement, courts, prosecution and other agencies. Significant time is spent reviewing data and ensuring that we are accurately defining the issues; further, we tend to provide conservative estimates whenever an issue is in question, to ensure that our information will be taken seriously. Before we make our results public, we share the information with our partners for review and to obtain their approval, ensuring they are fully apprised of our efforts and are on board with the results we have found. Our Executive Director then conducts a final review before we provide our proposals to the governmental entities.

MCBW: Where we started this effort we worked with a summer intern and asked her “what DV cost data can you come up with?” We reviewed and discussed the information she collected and made a conscious decision to leave indirect costs associated with pain and suffering out since we thought that some policy makers might question those figures. Instead, we decided to focus on direct costs such as lost work time, emergency medical care, damaged property, etc. – all costs that could be localized. For example, we wanted to calculate the cost for law enforcement to respond to a DV call when no arrest is made. We reviewed law enforcement salaries, the number of hours staff spent on cases both with and without arrest, and probation and court processing costs on criminal cases.

The bottom line was to make sure we had a way to defend the numbers we are putting out and to make the numbers as localized as possible. We know that there are all sorts of other costs, such as civil court costs – that have not been factored in since they are difficult to calculate. Even without them, the numbers are still incredibly high. We are constantly refining the data with staff so that we can publicly say that these are strong, accurate numbers.

MCS: When I first started working at MCS, the baseline cost-effectiveness model developed by Chevon and TC-TAT was already completed. It was great to see that model applied to the work that we do because it gives a powerful message to funders and the organizations that we work with. Because our prevention work is always evolving, we recognize that the numbers and data in the cost-framing need to be updated on a regular basis. With so few staff and changes in leadership over the past two years, it has been hard to find the time or commitment to update the data and tools.

What organizational or programming changes or adjustments did you make after doing your analysis?

MCBW: We track service numbers – how many men, women and children are being served. We created a chart where those services are broken down since not everyone talks about services to men in the same way. We also track data for shelter programs such as number of beds and number of days in shelter beds. For the past four years, we’ve heard from some DV programs that the number of people served has decreased but the number of bed days lengthened. We weren’t sure how to use this finding and had to ask ourselves, ***if the numbers collected aren’t helpful for the argument we want to make, do we include the information or not?***

CVIC: We have been able to sustain and/or enhance our services. In reviewing the data, we always ask ourselves, ***how can we better use our resources to achieve our goals?*** For example, we recently added a law enforcement advocate after our data analysis revealed a gap between the number of victims

referred by law enforcement to our agency and the number actually contacting us for services. We also use data results to influence professional training provided by our agency.

MCS: We integrated some of what we have learned about evaluating prevention efforts into the current evaluation of Project Respect. For example, we started asking participants about how their behavior has changed as a result of participating in this program. We also learned that costs needed to be tracked differently and that we needed to account for in-kind as well as cash contributions to the project.

What are the challenges in using cost-framing? What have you been learning?

MAWS: *We need to get clear on the added value of the cost-framing exercise – otherwise it feels like more work.* If it makes sense to us, it's more likely that we will be able to convince our partners, community members and funders that this work is worth their investment and support.

CVIC: The first word that comes to mind is engagement. Staff members are excited when they see that others value their contributions, and that the data they have worked hard to collect and analyze is actually being used to effect change or ensure sufficient funding to continue our efforts. The *challenge is figuring out how do we know if something is truly working?* For example, you would think DV numbers would decrease through our efforts, but they have been increasing locally. However, we have also enhanced our outreach efforts, so more victims are being connected with services that might not be otherwise. It is difficult to pinpoint specific results in these cases. At the same time, our data analysis has shown incredible results in our community response, offender treatment effectiveness and other areas, so we are able to demonstrate clear positive results, as well.

MCBW: I echo this statement. We have to make it as easy as possible for people to participate in our efforts, especially when they are asking “Why should I prioritize doing this over the 18 other things sitting on my desk?” What has really worked for us is to develop a user-friendly, two-page framework for advocates to use that doesn't oversimplify the data but is concise and impactful enough. For example: *If you put x number of dollars in we can save y number of lives.*

How does your CCR and other community partners support your cost-framing efforts?

CVIC: Initially, when we started data collection there were many questions from our partners regarding how the data was being collected and entered. However, for the past several years, we worked hard to identify sound methods for collecting and analyzing data, and have always ensured that we obtained buy-in from our CCR agencies, emailing information to stakeholder committees to get their comments and feedback before making information public. CCR members consequently have learned to trust the data and are willing to use it to enhance our community's response and therefore, were willing to support the cost-framing figures.

MCS: The challenges are mainly taking the time to update the tools and numbers. We recognize that this is a work in progress and a constantly changing document, but unless we attend to them they can lose their value over time. We learned a great deal during the process and would like to learn more about strategies for effective use of this cost-framing information.

What are some of the tools and resources that you've developed or used?

MCBW: We created a *2-page framework* that identified estimated costs of DV to our county and the estimated yearly cost of DV in our service area. We described how we came up with that number, what kind of services a program is providing, and why the program is efficient. We also developed a *10-*

page Toolkit, PowerPoint presentations, and webinars that we shared with our member programs describing how they can use these tools to gain support for their programs. We are currently analyzing how to take this cost-framing work to the next level.

CVIC: We developed documents specific to the organization we are working with – city, county or state – providing calculations and cost breakdowns that apply to each entity. For example, with the city, we specify services with breakdowns of costs saved the previous year, such as law enforcement time saved when advocates are involved in DV calls (using updated city salary information), number of hours and cost of training provided by CVIC to city employees, and many other areas. With the county, we focus on state-mandated services for upholding fair treatment standards to victims, child visitation/exchange services provided and other areas. For the state, we focus on state-related costs, such as reduced offender incarceration costs with violence prevention.

What kind of support do you need to continue this cost-framing work?

- **National template** so that DV organizations could frame our work in similar ways
- **Updated data and research lists** with national numbers and ways to figure out local numbers. For example, the cost of a volunteer or staff hour will likely change from year to year. It would be great to have a centralized clearinghouse where updated data are available so everyone doesn't have to search for relevant statistics.
- **Accessible tools for cost-framing.** We need accessible tools where we can plug in our own numbers and then use the data to gain support in our communities and states.
- **Examples of how others have used cost-framing.** How have you laid things out? How are you calculating numbers? How are other people doing more complex thinking around this?
- **Opportunities for peer learning, trainings, and dialogues.** Talking with others who are using cost-framing helps us to refine our case and create better products. It's a way to streamline our work while still recognizing that this is a complex issue and needs to be tailored for different audiences and communities.

What's the main message you would like to share with other advocates to inspire and keep this work moving forward?

- *Using cost-framing gives a solid base for being successful in fundraising.* Funders are being challenged to articulate the benefit of their strategic investments – we can help our funders to stay current and competitive by providing them with these numbers and arguments.
- *We need tools to do a critical analysis* to determine if we're using our resources in the best way to achieve our ultimate mission – which is to put ourselves out of business for all the right reasons.
- *It's important to find different ways of telling our story.* In the past, we talked mostly about how “people have the right to be safe” – but there are other messages that can reach different audiences. Using the cost-framing is one way to reach some of those people.
- *When we use the cost-framing tools to describe the costs of DV and the impact of DV programs in a local community,* it helps people to see and measure at least one aspect of the work we're doing. Then, they are more likely to want to take the next step of analyzing their work and impact in deeper ways.

- *Cost-framing is useful not just to gain funds, but also to gain community support and awareness. It's important to train DV organizations' staff and community partners alike about the power of the cost-framing.*
- *These tools can help us describe our story of social change. When community partners who share their data with us notice that they played a role in raising money for this important issue, it decreases resistance and strengthens our collaborative efforts.*
- *We need more support and tools to think about how to talk about our prevention work along with our direct services. It would be great to get some national dialogue going around using the cost-framing for our prevention work.*

To obtain copies of the resources and tools mentioned in the dialogue, please contact TC-TAT at info@transformcommunities.org or call (415)526-2546.