

Engaging Survivors of Crime with Empathy and Compassion

A Toolkit for Establishing
Homicide Support Groups



How to Use This Toolkit

 **CLICK HERE TO NAVIGATE**

- Buttons with this location icon enable you to navigate through the toolkit.

 **CONCEPT AREAS**

- Buttons with this bookmark icon direct you to specific concept areas.

 **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

- Buttons with this page icon direct you to embedded information on specific program activities.

 **EXTERNAL RESOURCES**

- Buttons with this link icon direct you to external resources.

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About This Toolkit

- CNA—in collaboration with the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office); the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department (RPD); and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department (CMPD)—developed this field-friendly resource providing law enforcement agencies with guidance on how to implement an effective Homicide Support Group (HSG) program in their jurisdictions.
- HSGs offer a programmatic structure for agencies to provide much-needed support to secondary crime victims, improving their cooperation in the investigatory and prosecutorial processes to increase clearance rates, community cooperation, and community safety.
- Existing research has established that effective law enforcement requires engagement with and cooperation from the communities they serve.
- Voluntary support and cooperation from the community is essential for law enforcement agencies to maintain order and solve crimes.
- This work by CNA will provide agencies with the foundational knowledge needed to implement an HSG program.



CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE

History of HSGs

Secondary Victims & Survivors

A homicide is a traumatic event that leaves family members and close friends of the victim (also known as co-victims, homicide survivors, and secondary victims) in a state of shock and uncertainty over the violent and unexpected loss. Survivors may experience a range of short-term and long-term psychological effects in the aftermath of a homicide, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. Survivors may also experience a range of emotional states (e.g., rage, guilt, isolation), as well as negative impacts on their productivity (e.g., academic, vocational, social).

Recognizing the Impacts of Homicide on Survivors

- By design, the focus of homicide investigations is on apprehending the individual(s) responsible for the crime; historically, agencies have not had the capacity to provide integrated support across policing, victim services, and prosecutorial services.
- HSGs provide a foundation for establishing a collaborative partnership that unifies the investigatory, victim service, and prosecutorial processes to form a more holistic approach to crime solving through community partnership and engagement.



CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE

History of HSGs

The First HSGs

Prior to the HSG model, survivors could seek support through U.S. Attorneys' Offices, District/Commonwealth Attorneys' Offices, victim advocates, courts, nonprofit organizations, and their own communities. This support was often not coordinated among the various service providers, and access to services depended largely on the survivors' ability to navigate these systems. The HSG model provides a collaborative, unified, and service-centered approach engaging survivors from the moment of impact and throughout the criminal justice process.

Since the inception of the first HSG, a growing number of police departments have adopted similar approaches to supporting survivors. Some of these departments include those serving the following communities:

- Fayetteville, North Carolina
- Boston, Massachusetts
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina
- Louisville, Kentucky

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

*Richmond (Virginia)
Police Department*

The RPD implemented one of the first HSGs in 2006.



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Toolkit Home Page

This toolkit is organized by the five **core concepts** that will help your agency to develop, implement, and sustain an HSG program. Click on an element below to learn more about each component and to access additional resources to help you to build your HSG program.



BENEFITS OF HSGs



ESTABLISHING AN HSG



KEY PARTNER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



FACILITATING HSG MEETINGS



SUSTAINABILITY AND MEASURING SUCCESS



GO TO SUMMARY OF KEY COMPONENTS

Benefits of HSGs

An HSG, if implemented properly, can be beneficial to law enforcement and the community alike. These benefits range from potential crime reductions to improving police-community relationships. Click on a button below to view activities in that topic area.



IMPROVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



PROMOTE EMPATHY



FOCUS RESOURCES



IMPROVE HOMICIDE CLEARANCE RATES



IMPROVE COMMUNITY'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



WATCH A WEBINAR WITH THE CMPD ON IMPROVING SERVICES FOR VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE



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Benefits of HSGs

Improve Community Engagement

HSGs provide an opportunity for law enforcement agencies to build partnerships and relationships with families in a more informal and collaborative setting, provide timely and thorough information regarding the status of investigations, and reform departmental policies to be trauma-informed.

- Through the partnership provided by the HSG, family members can become ambassadors who share with their communities the benefits of working with the law enforcement agency.
- These enhanced relationships with the community can encourage individuals to share additional information with detectives, and to be more cooperative with homicide investigations.
- Ongoing communication between detectives and victims' families can strengthen trust between the community and the agency, turning prior challengers of the police into allies.
- Increased dialogue between police and families, through the HSG, can prompt internal policy review and change that gives victims and their families the respect and consideration they deserve.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

HSGs allow departments to ensure that their standard operating procedures are more trauma-informed and respectful of the emotional impacts of the trauma on the community. Prior to the HSG, it was standard practice in a homicide investigation to work a path around the victim. This would result in the victim being left on the scene for hours. After hearing from HSG victims' families about the emotional impacts of seeing their loved one left in this condition, the CMPD changed how detectives work a crime scene that is visible to the public. Detectives now start with the victim and work their way out. A CMPD detective stated that conversations with victims' families "directly changed our philosophy to respecting the victim lying there."



GO BACK TO BENEFITS OF HSGs

Benefits of HSGs

Promote Empathy

Police departments can become so focused on investigating and solving homicides that the victims' families and the pain they are suffering become afterthoughts.

- Implementation of an HSG demonstrates a broader cultural shift for an agency that fundamentally changes how the department treats and interacts with victims' families.
- HSGs teach law enforcement personnel to separate their views of families from the circumstances that may have led to the victim's death.



GO BACK TO BENEFITS OF HSGs

Benefits of HSGs

Focus Resources

Traditionally, detectives are the main point of contact for survivors in the aftermath of a homicide. With the HSG approach, detectives, victim service providers, and prosecutors are immediately on the scene to assist survivors and provide information and assurance. Integrating the investigatory, prosecutorial, and victim services components allows a holistic approach to the survivor's experience while allowing detectives, prosecutors, and service providers to focus on their functional roles.

- HSGs direct survivors to victim advocates, who have been trained to communicate with and assist survivors, to provide case-related updates and information. This delegation allows the detectives to focus their efforts on the homicide investigation.
- Victim advocates build rapport with survivors and integrate them into the investigatory process. These efforts often lead to survivors feeling more comfortable in providing additional information that is beneficial to the investigation. Victim advocates work closely with detectives, who are able to follow up on these new avenues of investigation.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

Regular communication between detectives and victim advocates is critical. One CMPD victim advocate said that when she arrives on the scene of a homicide, she makes herself known to the detectives so that they know her value and that she is there to assist. At CMPD headquarters, the victim advocates and detectives maintain regular communication and make frequent trips to one another's respective floors in the building to discuss families' needs.



GO BACK TO BENEFITS OF HSGs

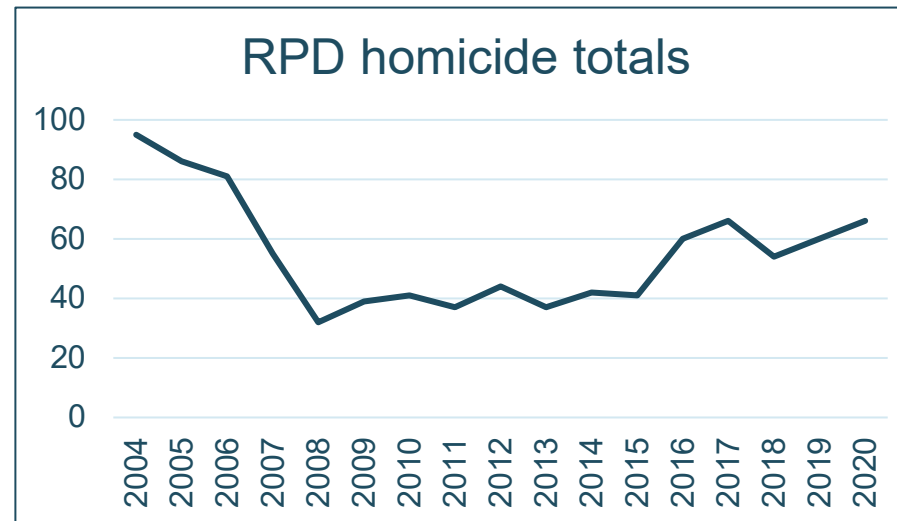
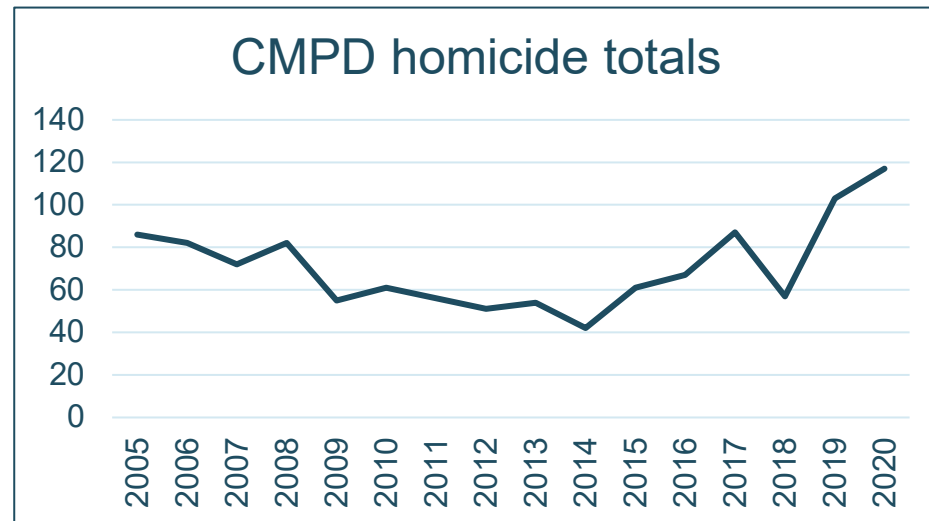
Benefits of HSGs

Improvements in Annual Homicide Rates

Agencies have experienced improvements in annual homicide totals since implementing their HSGs and feel confident that there is an association between the HSG and these results.

In the five years before implementation of the CMPD's HSG (2004–2008), local annual homicide totals ranged from 59 to 85. In the five years directly after the implementation of the HSG (2010–2014), annual homicide totals ranged from 42 to 59.

Upon adopting the HSG program in 2008, the RPD observed a significant decrease in Richmond's homicide rate. In 2006, the RPD experienced 81 homicide incidents. In 2009, a year after implementing the program, homicides dropped to 39 incidents. This represents a decrease of about 52 percent.



 [CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE](#)

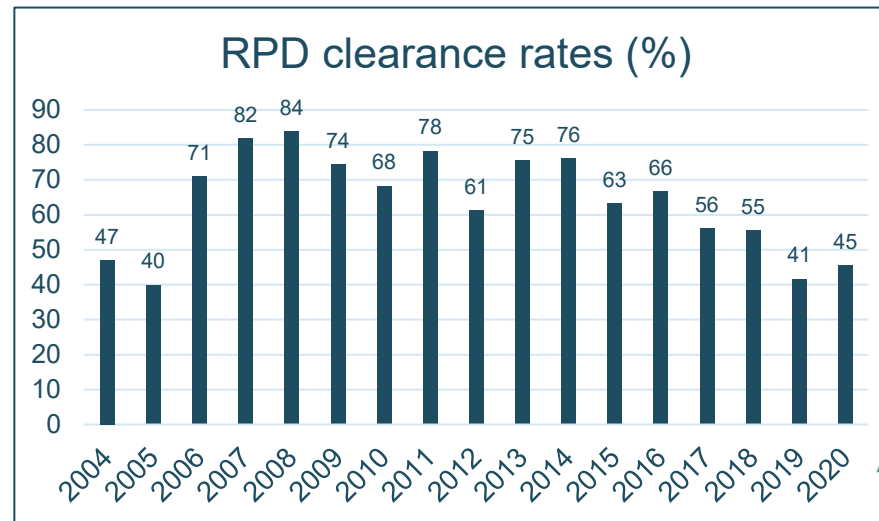
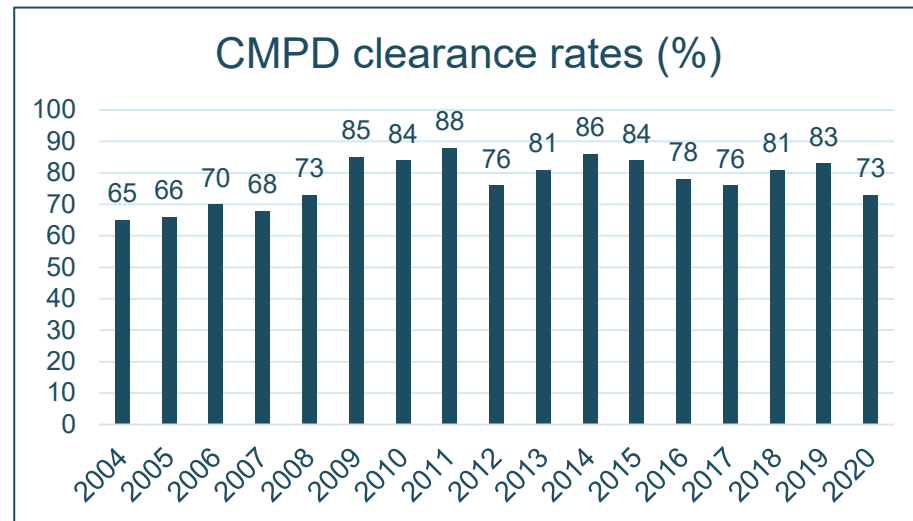
Benefits of HSGs

Improvements in Annual Homicide Clearance Rates

Agencies have also experienced improvements in annual homicide clearance rates since implementing their HSGs and feel confident that there is an association between the HSG and these results.

In the five years before implementation of CMPD's HSG (2004–2008), homicide clearance rates ranged from 65 percent to 74 percent. In the five years directly after the implementation of the HSG (2010–2014), homicide clearance rates ranged from 76 percent to 88 percent.

Since implementing the Richmond HSG program in 2008, the RPD has experienced increased clearance rates. The RPD was able to increase its clearance rate from about 47 percent in calendar year 2004 to 84 percent in 2008.



GO BACK TO BENEFITS OF HSGs

Benefits of HSGs

Improve Community's Understanding of the Criminal Justice System

HSGs help participants gain a deeper understanding of the investigatory and prosecutorial processes.

- HSGs give survivors the opportunity to directly ask questions to detectives and representatives from the local prosecutor's office, which helps them better understand the legal and investigative processes.
- HSG members gain an understanding of what to expect during a trial and other criminal justice processes and proceedings.
- HSG members have access to victim advocates and volunteers to accompany and provide support for all case-related hearings and court appearances.



**CLICK HERE FOR AN EXPLANATION
OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS
INCLUDED IN THE PALM BEACH
COUNTY SURVIVOR RESOURCE
PACKET**



**CLICK HERE FOR AN EXPLANATION
OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS
INCLUDED IN THE CMPD SURVIVOR
SUPPORT MANUAL**

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

A victim advocate from the CMPD HSG stated that victims' families frequently have questions about the criminal justice system process. These families have the opportunity to ask questions directly to prosecutors and detectives who attend the monthly meetings. CMPD also describes the criminal justice system process in detail in its Survivor's Support Manual.



GO BACK TO BENEFITS OF HSGs

Establishing an HSG

Establishing a Homicide Support Group requires five key components: (1) gaining buy-in and support, (2) creating key stakeholder roles and responsibilities, (3) establishing protocols, (4) implementing effective training, and (5) securing designated funding. Click on a button below to view the activities associated with that topic.



[GAINING BUY-IN AND SUPPORT](#)



[CREATING KEY STAKEHOLDER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)



[ESTABLISHING PROTOCOLS](#)



[IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE TRAINING](#)



[SECURING DESIGNATED FUNDING](#)



[ACCESS THE CMPD VICTIM SERVICES POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL](#)



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Establishing an HSG

Gaining Buy-In and Support

Having leadership buy-in and support is the key to building and sustaining a strong homicide support group program. Some members of the agency will have some hesitancy about new approaches for law enforcement and having leadership support helps to legitimize and promote the program. Leadership should express that HSGs better serve the community by helping to build relationships, strengthen trust, and improve cooperation in investigations.

Key elements of a strong homicide support group include the following:

- Supportive department leadership that will endorse and champion the program
- Strong buy-in from stakeholders including local partners, members of the community, and agency personnel
- Internal and external stakeholders to conduct outreach, offer resources, aid investigations, and support families

To learn how to gain buy-in and support for HSGs in your agency, click on this checklist.



ACCESS THE GAINING AGENCY BUY-IN CHECKLIST



GO BACK TO ESTABLISHING AN HSG

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Richmond (Virginia) Police Department

The RPD received buy-in from the heads of its partner agencies. Once the partners were in agreement, the RPD developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that clarified and designated roles across partners. With the MOU in place, the RPD collaborated with victim services to understand the different resources and support that families would need and emphasized establishing strong partnerships.

Establishing an HSG

Creating Key Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Maintaining consistency helps survivors who just experienced a traumatic incident. Detectives' presence demonstrates the department's strong commitment to supporting survivors. Departments should also consider using volunteers as they can be a valuable resource to fulfilling important activities. Volunteer programs have also been created to provide additional assistance for HSG staff.

The Agency

- Take the lead in maintaining the homicide support group.
- Manage funding, provide the meeting location, conduct outreach, and ensure that detectives are well-informed and engaged in the HSG.

Detectives

- Continue to check in with the family and answer questions that they have about their ongoing investigation.
- Attend homicide support group monthly meetings, offer families rides to meetings, and help families receive the answers to questions related to their investigation.

Prosecutors

- Help prepare families for next steps in the criminal justice process.
- Encourage cooperation and information sharing from families to build stronger criminal cases.

Victim Specialists

- Play the role of crisis interventionist, resource provider, educator, consultant, and liaison.
- Support detectives at a homicide scene, comfort families after they arrive on the scene, and offer resources and answers to questions.

Volunteers

- Provide on-scene support (along with victim specialists) and accompany families to court hearings to provide support.
- Provide administrative support by conducting outreach and preparing materials for HSG families.



Establishing an HSG

Establishing Protocols

Creating policies and procedures will help to sustain the HSG by clearly establishing the goals and expectations of the program for staff and volunteers. These documents should include the following:

- Information that describes the duties, knowledge, and abilities of the staff that will be interacting with families (e.g., guidance on the family notification process). Having this information laid out early on will help partners and stakeholders maintain a consistent approach.
- Identify and document available resources for families, such as the following:
 - Advocacy
 - Appropriateness and Accessibility
 - Confidentiality
 - Counseling Referrals
 - Court Accompaniment
 - Crisis Intervention
 - Financial Assistance
 - Safety and Security
 - Support Groups
 - Victims' Rights



Establishing an HSG

Implementing Effective Training

Agencies should think about the individual personality traits, knowledge, skills, and abilities of staff and volunteers assigned to the HSG. Once approved for the program, agencies should provide training on roles, responsibilities, and trauma-informed practices to ensure the program's continued success.

- The training curriculum for HSG personnel includes discipline-specific and trauma-informed guidance to help staff and volunteers to maintain a consistent set of skills, aligned with emerging best practices.
- The HSG curriculum focuses on the different ways that survivors are impacted by traumatic incidents and provides members with the tools needed to respond in an empathetic and helpful manner.

Click below to access sample training curricula.



CLICK HERE FOR THE NCVAN
VICTIM SERVICE PRACTITIONER
CERTIFICATION ACADEMY



CLICK HERE FOR THE OFFICE FOR
VICTIMS OF CRIME VICTIM
ASSISTANCE TRAINING ONLINE



GO BACK TO ESTABLISHING AN HSG

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg
(North Carolina) Police
Department**

Click below to access the CMPD
Volunteer Training Manual

**Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Police Department**



**Volunteer Training
Manual**

Establishing an HSG

Securing Designated Funding

To ensure success, agencies will need to proactively explore options for funding the HSG program. Federal grant programs such as the COPS Office's Community Development Program may be an option for agencies looking to begin an HSG. Departments should also determine the annual costs of continuing the program and work to identify additional funding sources to sustain their program (e.g., asset forfeiture monies or other discretionary funds).

- Costs associated with operating an HSG include paying personnel salaries, delivering training, hosting meetings, and purchasing materials for events.
- In planning for monthly meetings, agencies should plan to pay for meeting space, food and beverages, and guest speakers. These costs will vary depending on what the department plans to deliver during the meetings.
- Departments can also hold fundraising events and solicit donations to for supplies and other goods that can support the HSG meetings and operations. Items that should be considered in purchasing include phones for advocates, vehicles, bottled water, lanyards, blankets, coloring books, polo shirts, and folding chairs.

For assistance with simplifying the budgeting and planning process, your agency can reference the Victim Service Budget Starter Template.



[CLICK HERE FOR THE TEMPLATE](#)



[GO BACK TO ESTABLISHING AN HSG](#)

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Agencies should include and engage external partners in the implementation and operation of HSGs. Having strong partnerships when implementing an HSG will help foster a team effort that works collaboratively to support families. It is important that partners understand and support the defined goals and objectives of the HSG. Some of these key partners could be prosecutors, victim advocates, detectives, family members, experts, volunteers, and community service organizations. Click on a button below to view activities in that topic area.



PROSECUTORS



SERVICE PROVIDERS



VICTIM ADVOCATES



DETECTIVES



FAMILY MEMBERS



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Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Prosecutors

A prosecutor's office has an important role in working closely with families as they navigate the criminal justice process.

- Prosecutors attend HSG meetings to support and engage with grieving families. Prosecutors answer questions and speak to families about the important steps in the criminal trial. During interactions with families, members of the prosecutor's office can offer tips on how to prepare for court proceedings and what to expect.
- HSGs help to fill the communication gap that often exists between families and the prosecutor's office because of the lengthy time period between an arrest and the criminal trial. This ongoing communication between families and prosecutors helps to build trust with family members and helps to ensure their cooperation throughout the criminal trial. Established HSGs have found that as participants become familiar with the prosecutor's office, they often encourage other community members to share information with law enforcement that strengthens criminal cases.



[CLICK HERE FOR A PRESENTATION ON TRAUMA-INFORMED PROSECUTION](#)



[CLICK HERE FOR A WORKBOOK ON TRAUMA-INFORMED PROSECUTION](#)



[GO BACK TO KEY PARTNER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Richmond (Virginia) Police Department

The Virginia Commonwealth Attorney's Office works closely with families to address their questions and concerns relating to the criminal justice process. Prosecutors will speak to the RPD HSGs about important steps in the criminal trial and offer tips on how to prepare for procedures that may be difficult for families. Members from the Commonwealth Attorney's Office will attend HSG meetings to support and engage with grieving families.

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Victim Advocates

Agencies should leverage existing victim advocates' programs and volunteers to support their HSG. Support from these groups will help to legitimize the HSG program.

- Under the HSG model, victim advocates deploy to the scene of a homicide and are immediately involved in the family notification process.
- Victim advocates take the lead in coordinating resources and information for the survivors.
- Victim advocates can also facilitate HSG meetings.



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FACILITATION](#)



[CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE](#)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Richmond (Virginia) Police Department

The Victim Witness Services program works closely with the Richmond Commonwealth Attorney's Office to provide comprehensive services to victims and witnesses to support them as they navigate the criminal justice process. The Victim Witness Services program works with those affected by homicide to identify their needs. This unit has numerous resources available for families and witnesses, such as court accompaniment, burial assistance, medical services, counseling service referrals, and financial assistance through the Virginia Victims Fund.

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Victim Advocates (cont'd.)

- Victim advocates work with law enforcement to assist in a number of critical functions. Victim advocates routinely conduct follow-up with detectives on pertinent case updates, communicate with survivors to provide updates on investigations, assist with completing paperwork, help survivors to access victim compensation, and monitor other needs or requests. Victim advocates work closely with families, serving as one of their key contacts and working to establish and promote strong connections in the community.
- The CMPD created a sample timeline describing what families should expect in the hours, days, and months following a homicide.



[CLICK HERE FOR THE CHICAGO SURVIVORS
GUIDE ABOUT “WHAT COMES NEXT?”
FOLLOWING A HOMICIDE](#)



[ACCESS THE SAMPLE TIMELINE HERE](#)



[GO BACK TO KEY PARTNER ROLES
AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Family Members

Involving family members as partners in the HSG will help the department to connect with others impacted in the community.

- Departments should engage with families early in the process to establish effective outreach and help grow HSG participation.
- HSG family members serve as volunteers for the department, provide comfort to other family members at homicide scenes or at meetings, and provide feedback to HSG coordinators from the perspectives of the family.
- Departments should plan on continuous engagement and collaboration with families to ensure they provide the resources and services needed. Regular engagement also allows group members to build relationships with one another outside of the monthly meetings, which provides ongoing support outside of scheduled meetings.
- Examples of continuous engagement and collaboration include the following:
 - Holiday celebrations
 - Cookouts
 - Bowling outings

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

Victim advocates with the CMPD take turns responding to the scenes of homicides. Upon arriving, victim advocates make contact with family members to provide immediate support. Victim advocates also collect contact information for family members so that they can follow up with information about the homicide support group. Stressing the importance of connecting with families early, one CMPD victim advocate stated, “Meeting them in that moment, they will remember you.”



GO BACK TO KEY PARTNER ROLES
AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Service Providers

Having service providers involved in the homicide support group helps to provide supportive resources for families. Service providers help advance the mission of HSGs by allowing access to organizations and professionals that offer assistance and resources to families.

- Victim and witness service organizations can often provide resources to families and witnesses in the form of burial assistance, medical services, and financial compensation.
- Subject experts from established service providers can also attend meetings and guide family members in managing their grief or offering counseling services.
- Departments should plan to form partnerships with service providers and make referrals to these organizations as families need them. These partnerships will enhance the level of assistance available for grieving families.



[CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE CMPD AND KINDERMOURN'S PAMPHLET FOR THE YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP](#)



[GO BACK TO KEY PARTNER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

Recognizing the distinct needs of children when it comes to providing support, the CMPD partnered with the nonprofit KinderMourn for the operation of its youth homicide support group. The partnership with KinderMourn allows the CMPD to engage youth through age-appropriate group activities and discussion.

Key Partner Roles and Responsibilities

Detectives

Detectives are often the first to have contact with a family following a homicide. They have a key role in demonstrating the department's commitment to supporting victims' families.

- Detectives should refer families to the HSG, regularly attend all meetings with family members, and if possible offer families rides to monthly meetings.
- In Charlotte and Richmond, at least one detective attends monthly meetings to answer non–case specific questions that families may have about the investigation process.
- Detectives engage in regular communication with victim advocates to stay well-informed about families' needs and to share information that may be valuable to the ongoing investigation.
- This consistent presence and support from detectives allows the community to develop strong and trusting relationships with law enforcement.



[CLICK HERE FOR THE OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME
GUIDEBOOK ON FIRST RESPONSE TO VICTIMS OF CRIME](#)



[GO BACK TO KEY PARTNER ROLES
AND RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

In Charlotte, the HSG has been beneficial for detectives not only by enabling them to focus more on homicide investigations but also in securing crucial information for their investigations. Victim advocates know how to talk to families and are able to build rapport and trust. Establishing trust has led to families providing victim advocates with additional information that opens new avenues of investigation. Victim advocates pass this information along to detectives, who are able to follow up and investigate new leads.

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Regularly scheduled meetings, virtual or in person, are the central component of an HSG. These meetings, facilitated by victim advocates who reside within the law enforcement agency, District Attorney's Office, or Family Justice Center, bring individuals who have lost loved ones together to mourn and heal. In addition, the monthly meetings provide an opportunity for survivors to learn from professionals about the grieving process and the opportunity to ask non-case specific questions to homicide detectives and representatives from the local prosecutor's office. Click on a button below to view activities in that topic area.



[MEETING FACILITATORS](#)



[MATERIALS AND AGENDA](#)



[MEETING OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCE](#)



[ATTENDANCE](#)



[FREQUENCY AND LOCATION](#)



[YOUTH MEETINGS](#)



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Facilitating HSG Meetings

Meeting Facilitators

HSG meetings should have designated facilitators who are trained victim advocates from within the local law enforcement agency, District Attorney's Office, or Family Justice Center.

- Depending on the size of the group, it may be necessary to have more than one facilitator at each meeting. The accepted ratio for successful facilitation is generally 1 facilitator for every 15 (or fewer) participants.
- Facilitators play an important role in ensuring that everyone who wishes to speak has the opportunity to do so and that topics of conversation are appropriate for the meeting.
- Facilitators will also be the key points of contact for participants and maintain ongoing communication outside of the scheduled HSG meetings.
- Included in the facilitator guide are a number of factors that should be considered in structuring, running, and managing HSGs (click button below).



[CLICK HERE FOR A SAMPLE FACILITATION PROTOCOL FROM THE VIRGINIA VICTIM ASSISTANCE NETWORK](#)



[GO BACK TO FACILITATING HSG MEETINGS](#)

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Meeting Objectives and Audience

The goal of HSG meetings is to promote and encourage compassion and solidarity. It is important to have a general structure to help guide the HSG meeting to meet this goal. These meetings provide participants a number of opportunities, such as the ability to do the following:

- Meet with other survivors to share their experiences and to build a community support network.
- Receive guidance and suggestions for managing grief.
- Learn about what to expect in navigating the criminal justice process.
- Speak with detectives about the investigative process.
- Connect with service providers to receive resources, such as counseling and financial assistance.

Audience

- The audiences that HSG meetings serve will depend on each agency's resources.
- Some agencies may only have the resources for one HSG group while others may have the resources for multiple HSG groups (see sidebar).

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

It's important for all survivors to be able to access resources to help them heal. The CMPD hosts three different HSGs - one for adults, one for youth, and one for Spanish speakers of all ages. The RPD hosts HSGs which include homicide victims' parents, spouses, siblings, children, friends, and other loved ones.



GO BACK TO FACILITATING
HSG MEETINGS

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Frequency and Location

Frequency

HSG meetings should take place on a monthly basis.

- This regular occurrence allows for consistency and relationship building.
- Monthly meetings are feasible for the schedules of law enforcement personnel.
- For instances in which meetings are held virtually, some agencies may decide to host meetings more frequently, such as twice a month.

Location

HSG meetings should have a designated permanent location.

- An ideal location is an available conference room at the local law enforcement agency headquarters.
- This reinforces the fact that the program is being supported by the law enforcement agency and that community input is a priority for the agency.
- This also ensures that participants feel safe and are afforded the necessary level of privacy.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

When Chief Rodney Monroe (ret.) introduced the HSG to the CMPD, he purposely decided to host the monthly meetings in the police chief's conference room to convey to the community that this was a priority for the department. However, some survivors may be wary of coming to the police department. One way your facilitators can ensure all of the survivors are comfortable attending meetings is by sending an anonymous poll to the participants asking them to provide suggestions for locations, and other general feedback.



GO BACK TO FACILITATING
HSG MEETINGS

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Materials and Agenda

Providing materials for monthly HSG meetings encourages participation and also fosters continued engagement with the HSG program.

- Meeting facilitators can use available online resources to help guide discussion such as **“The Grieving Person’s Bill of Rights”**



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE RESOURCE

- Meeting facilitators should research available resources prior to monthly meetings that are relevant to the desired discussion topics, and to ensure alignment with emerging best practices.

Below is a sample HSG meeting agenda that can be tailored based on your agency’s needs and resources:



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE SAMPLE AGENDA



GO BACK TO FACILITATING HSG MEETINGS

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Attendance

The decision to attend a monthly HSG meeting is voluntary and differs for every individual. Some may have the desire to attend soon after they have lost their loved ones, while others may wish to attend several months or even longer after their loss. It is important for agencies to keep all survivors informed of the meetings (to the extent they desire) should they chose to participate at a later time.

- A successful HSG program will use either email or postcards to remind family members of upcoming meetings. The distribution list for emails or postcards should be updated regularly to add new families and to remove individuals who do not wish to receive the notices. This email distribution list is also important for continued engagement with families outside of monthly HSG meetings.
- Participants should not be pressured to speak or share their personal stories at monthly meetings. Some participants may feel more comfortable speaking at the meetings, while others may prefer to sit and listen. Nonetheless, every participant should be given the opportunity to share, and no one participant should dominate the group discussion.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department

The CMPD HSG program produces a monthly newsletter that is distributed to all participants at the HSG meetings. The newsletter consists of meeting and contact information, notices of one-year anniversaries of lost loved ones, and dates for upcoming events.



[ACCESS AN EXAMPLE
NEWSLETTER HERE](#)



[GO BACK TO FACILITATING
HSG MEETINGS](#)

Facilitating HSG Meetings

Youth Meetings

The facilitation of youth meetings is distinct from that of adult meetings. Agencies considering the implementation of a youth support group should refer to the guidance below.

- Agencies looking to implement a youth support group should strongly consider partnering with certified counselors to co-facilitate the meetings. Such a partnership allows an agency to engage the youth through age-appropriate group activities and group discussion.
- Depending on the ages of participants, it may be necessary to split up youth groups for specific activities and discussions.

Below is a youth grief support pamphlet and available resources for youth survivors.



[CLICK HERE TO ACCESS THE YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT PAMPHLET](#)



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Sustainability and Measuring Success

The central piece of maintaining an HSG is having support from leadership, which includes support from the law enforcement executive, the district attorney, community leaders, and service providers that partner with the agency. Some agencies have established an MOU that lays out the goals of the HSG and the roles of each of the partner agencies. This helps to clarify the purpose and activities of the HSG and help guide the partner through the rollout of the program. This shared agreement can help partners to understand their position and what they are offering to families by being engaged in the HSG.



**PLANNING FOR CONSISTENT
ENGAGEMENT**



MAINTAINING FUNDING



GATHERING FEEDBACK



DATA COLLECTION TOOLS



**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS A
SAMPLE MOU**



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Sustainability and Measuring Success

Planning for Consistent Engagement

Having consistent service offerings will be essential to the sustainability of an HSG. Maintaining this consistency and support and engagement will make it easier to maintain family members' involvement. When the family knows that there is a consistent source for information and resources, they will continue to view the HSG as a legitimate program in which they can encourage other community members to participate.

- Agencies should plan to maintain consistent engagement and plan for changes in leadership or personnel throughout the program. Having a smooth transition plan will help guide the continuous cooperation from partners. Many departments fear that having a person retire may cause other key processes in the program to fail.
- If the department is proactive in thinking about sustainability and has a plan for the transition of key positions, it can be prepared for unforeseen changes to personnel or partners.



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Sustainability and Measuring Success

Maintaining Funding

Limited budgets pose a risk for making HSG operation more difficult to sustain. If an HSG initiative begins as a grant, eventually the department will need to find ways to continue to fund the program.

- Understanding the resources needed to operate an HSG may help complete the planning processes for securing funding. Departments should outline the cost for operating the program and hosting monthly meetings. It is important to make sure that costs will not outweigh allocated funding amounts.
- Some departments have designated items in their budget specifically for the HSG management and operation. Doing this will help to ensure that there will be sufficient funding to continue to support families.



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Sustainability and Measuring Success

Gathering Feedback

Gathering participant feedback to make ongoing improvement to the HSG is an essential piece to sustainability.

- Agencies should look to families and community members to receive information and adapt to emerging suggestions.
- Keeping families involved in changes to the program will help to sustain them as active partners. HSG programs will evolve over time and partners should remain flexible as they make innovative changes.
- Collaborating with the community will help the HSG coordinators understand how they can continue to grow membership and participation.



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Sustainability and Measuring Success

Data Collection Tools

To assist with measuring the need, impact, and efficacy of the Homicide Support Group program in your agency, we worked with Dr. Alex Piquero to develop a comprehensive approach to determining the need for the program and measuring the positive impacts it has on secondary crime victims and the community. We have provided data collection tools (on the following page) that can be administered to all stakeholders: police personnel, victim advocates, prosecutors, and community participants. Some of these forms are designed to be administered to individuals once, while others will help to collect data to show changes in participant perception over time. We recommend conducting the analysis as follows:

For one-time survey administrations:

- You will simply analyze frequency distributions (i.e., what percentage of the respondents felt that the HSG helped, them, etc.) This way you can demonstrate, from 0 to 100 percent, where things stood.
- This is immediately understandable to everyone, with high percentages meaning that the HSG is beneficial.

For comparing a baseline to some later survey administration:

- You would simply calculate a paired-samples t-test, which is a test of how perceptions changed from time 1 to time 2 among the same people. For example, the usual t-test is a comparison of how women and men score on an exam (i.e., which average is significantly higher/lower [or no difference] between the two groups).
- The paired-samples or dependent samples t-test is comparing people on time 1 and time 2 to see if their perceptions changed over time. This is a simple measure and an easy way to provide evidence that the program is making an impact.
- Ideally, we would see improvements in people's perceptions of police from when they start participating in the HSG to when they end their participation in the HSG.



CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE

Sustainability and Measuring Success

Data Collection Tools (cont'd.)

The following tools can be administered to all stakeholders: police personnel, victim advocates, prosecutors, and community participants.

- Police Department Personnel (Form 1, 2)



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 1: WHY SHOULD YOU ADOPT AN HSG?



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 2: OFFICER PERCEPTIONS OF THE HSG AND SCV

- Prosecutors (Form 3, 4)



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 3: PROSECUTOR'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE HSG, SCV, AND DETECTIVES



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 4: MEASURING STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE

- Victim Advocates (Form 4)



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 4: MEASURING STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE

- HSG Participants (Form 5, 6, 7, 8)



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 5: SCV PERCEPTIONS OF THE HSG AND OFFICERS



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 6: SCV PERCEPTIONS OF DEALING WITH THE HOMICIDE



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 7: MEASURING HSG PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE



CLICK HERE TO ACCESS FORM 8: MEASURING IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON SCV



GO BACK TO SUSTAINABILITY AND MEASURING SUCCESS

Summary of Key Components

- Leadership buy-in and support are critical to successful HSG implementation and operations.
- To be successful, departments must make a cultural change to fully support HSGs.
- Consider the personal qualities and temperament needed for staffing the HSG.
- Consistency in HSG representation fosters relationship building.
- Remain flexible to the changing needs of the HSG and victims' families.
- Build partnerships with community service organizations and local businesses.
- Structure HSG meetings to make the best use of detectives' time.
- HSGs are an opportunity to build and strengthen public trust.
- HSGs are a “lifeline” for victims' families.
- HSGs provide a sense of hope and normalcy to victims' families.
- Seek out the most vocal victims' families to participate.
- Gather participant feedback for ongoing improvement of the HSG.
- Finding funding to sustain the HSG operations is critical.
- Develop a clear training curriculum and ensure that all HSG members receive consistent training.
- Make goals and objectives of the HSG clear and continually work to socialize the program with all key stakeholders.

Checklists

Sample Meeting Agenda

- Participants arrive and have the opportunity to chat over coffee and snacks.
- Facilitators welcome everyone to the meeting.
- One participant is chosen to light a memorial candle, followed by a moment of silence.
- All participants introduce themselves, stating their names and the names of their loved ones who were lost.
- Q&A session with a homicide detective and representative from the DA's office or prosecutor's office. Questions are non–case specific.
- Facilitators hand out relevant literature or provide topic for group discussion.
- Facilitators should come prepared to each meeting with potential discussion topics or reading material (or both) to help guide the meeting.
- Participants engage in open discussion, moderated by the facilitators.



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HSG MEETINGS

Acknowledgments

The COPS Office and CNA acknowledge the support and assistance we received from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Police Department and District Attorney's Office and the Richmond (Virginia) Police Department in developing the content for this comprehensive program implementation toolkit. In particular, we would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

- Chief Johnny Jennings
- Sergeant Ricky Robbins
- Shardal Rose, Victim Support Specialist
- Migdalia Cortes, Victim Support Specialist
- Shannetta Thompson, Victim Support Specialist
- Detective Dave Osorio (ret.)
- Detective Charles McMurray (ret.)
- Marlene Joshua-Henderson, Program Participant and Volunteer

Mecklenburg County District Attorney's Office

- District Attorney Spencer Merriweather

Richmond Police Department

- Chief Gerald Smith
- Captain James Laino, Major Crimes Division
- Officer Kimberly Cheatham, Homicide Support Group Coordinator
- Sharron Saunders, City of Richmond Victim/Witness Services, Director

We would also like to thank the Indianapolis (Indiana) Metropolitan Police Department for its time in reviewing drafts of this toolkit and providing insights and recommendations for improving the user experience. Specifically, we thank Deputy Chief Kendale Adams and victim advocates Antonia Bailey and DeAndra Yates.