



REPORT TO CONGRESS ON THE PILOT PROGRAM ON RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

The Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization Act of 2022 (VAWA 2022) authorized a “Pilot Program on Restorative Practices” (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 12514). The FY 2022 Appropriations Act (which was enacted before the VAWA 2022 changes went into effect) included \$11 million for a grant program with an explanatory statement mirroring the statutory language in the new VAWA grant program on restorative practices. Subsequently, the FY 2023 appropriations included an additional \$15 million specifically for the restorative practices program authorized by VAWA 2022.

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) has developed a pilot program, using its standard, rigorous process. The process involved reviewing existing research, meeting with experts, holding roundtables and listening sessions, and consulting with stakeholders, including survivors, advocates, and law enforcement. OVW has taken a similar approach to formulating pilot and demonstration projects in the past, on such topics as domestic violence homicide reduction, model domestic violence courts, family justice centers, dual-service programs that serve sexual assault and domestic violence victims, among others.

In moving carefully to develop the program, which is defined by detailed and prescriptive statutory language, OVW has accounted for unique considerations and sensitivities related to providing restorative practices in matters involving sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. For instance, OVW is ensuring that support from experienced training and technical assistance providers is in place before the pilot sites are identified and begin work. OVW also reviewed existing restorative practices programs and related research to identify elements that may constitute best practices. These include restorative practices that use a victim services framework, provide safeguards to protect victims from further harm, and support victim autonomy.

The program’s statute (34 U.S.C. § 12514(h)(2)) requires the OVW Director to report on the effectiveness of activities carried out with grant funds, beginning on March 15, 2024, and biennially thereafter. The reporting requirement specifies information the biennial report to Congress must provide, including data on people served and not served by the funded programs, victim satisfaction with the restorative practice, and outcomes of harm-doers’ involvement in the restorative practice. As OVW’s first investments in the pilot program will be made during the current fiscal year (2024), this summary takes the place of the biennial report and provides details on OVW’s efforts thus far and plans for implementation with the initial funding.

Described below are plans for funding the Pilot Program on Restorative Practices in FY 2024.

Training and Technical Assistance

OVW issued a Call for Concept Papers in March 2023 to identify organizations with the requisite experience and capacity to provide training and technical assistance (TTA) to grantees, subgrantees, and potential grantees and subgrantees of the Pilot Program on Restorative Practices. Following a review of the responses to the Call for Concept Papers, OVW selected five applications for further consideration and invited them to submit a full application in December 2023. OVW anticipates issuing awards to the three entities in 2024.

Pilot Sites

In spring 2024, OVW anticipates releasing a competitive solicitation to invite applications for pilot site awards. After it closes, OVW will subject the applications to a review process to assess, among other factors, applicants' capacity to: implement programming aligned with the pilot program defined in 34 U.S.C. § 12514; conduct that programming within a victim services framework; adhere to guardrails set forth in the statute and those required by OVW to ensure safety and autonomy for the person(s) harmed and accountability for the person(s) who committed the harm; participate in intensive and tailored TTA; and participate in an evaluation. OVW anticipates that grantees will participate in a significant planning phase.

Evaluation

OVW anticipates releasing a solicitation in spring 2024 to select an entity to evaluate the pilot program. Applicants will be required to demonstrate their capacity to: develop and implement program evaluations through researcher-practitioner partnerships, including partnerships with organizations primarily focused on serving culturally specific and underserved communities; conduct research involving victims; abide by federal regulations and other requirements related to human subjects research; maintain research independence and integrity; and assess best practices for evaluations of restorative practices designed to prevent or address sexual assault, domestic/dating violence, and stalking. This includes a victim evaluation component as indicated in the program's statute. Because OVW does not expect the pilot sites to use one uniform model and target identical communities, the evaluation may involve multiple, distinct approaches developed specifically to assess each site's approach using appropriate, rigorous, and practical methods. OVW anticipates incorporating multiple points at which the evaluators will share findings with OVW and various stakeholders.