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VictimConnect Implementation Evaluation Plan

Toolkit Resource 4

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This brief is the fourth of seven toolkit resources resulting from the Urban Institute's formative evaluation of the VictimConnect Resource Center, a nationwide victims' helpline operated by the National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC). The evaluation was conducted in 2019 and 2020 with funding from the National Institute of Justice (box 1).[1] In this brief, we describe the goals of Urban's proposed implementation evaluation of VictimConnect, clarifying the relevant research questions and how VictimConnect's implementation activities will be examined. The referenced evaluation instruments are contained in the seventh toolkit resource (Dusenbery et al., forthcoming).

Introduction to Implementation Evaluation

An implementation evaluation (or a process evaluation) describes a program or service's delivery and determines whether that delivery is being carried out as planned. It answers valuable questions about program functions, including how well the program is working and whether it is reaching the intended clients in the intended ways. Implementation evaluations are intended to produce more transparent documentation of programs' models and early warnings about challenges or problems so organizations can respond with improvements.

Overview of the VictimConnect Evaluation Toolkit

The VictimConnect Resource Center is a nationwide helpline that provides information, emotional support, and referrals to victims of crime and their loved ones through four technological modalities: softphone (phone calls via a secure, anonymous internet-based connection), online chat, text messaging, and the center website. In 2019, with funding from the National Institute of Justice, Urban launched a multiphase evaluation of the center, collaborating with research liaisons at the National Center for Victims of Crime. During the first phase, the evaluation team conducted a formative evaluation of VictimConnect through which it assessed the program's evaluability, used those findings to strengthen the program's research capacity, and developed a comprehensive plan for a future implementation and outcome evaluation. Findings from the first phase are summarized in *Formative Evaluation of VictimConnect: Preparing for Rigorous Evaluation of a National Resource Center* (Yahner et al., forthcoming) and are supplemented by the VictimConnect Evaluation Toolkit resources, which are briefs covering the following: (1) foundational theory and literature, (2) refining the logic model, (3) an evaluability assessment, (4) the implementation evaluation plan, (5) the outcome evaluation plan, (6) research capacity building, and (7) evaluation instruments. If funded, we anticipate that the next phases will begin in 2022 and will entail a comprehensive implementation evaluation and rigorous outcome evaluation of VictimConnect.

The information collected during an implementation evaluation can also help researchers interpret findings from an outcome evaluation of the same program and more fully understand why a program is (or is not) impacting clients as desired. In this way, an implementation evaluation can help identify which components of a program should continue as is, which may need to be improved or changed, and which appear ready to be replicated or expanded.[1]

According to the Center for Victim Research, implementation evaluations of victim services programs like VictimConnect commonly seek to capture information about the types of services provided; the frequency, duration, and scope of service delivery; characteristics of clients and staff; the degree of fidelity to the program model; and client satisfaction (Yahner 2020). Accordingly, implementation evaluators collect data through document reviews, program observations, interviews with and surveys of staff and clients, and reviews of other administrative program data.

Proctor and colleagues (2011) defined another useful set of concepts relevant to implementation evaluation (table 1): acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, feasibility, fidelity, implementation cost, penetration, and sustainability. These eight concepts can guide assessments of a program's implementation by framing the evaluation design, informing the research questions, and even serving as targets of measurement during evaluation. Some concepts (e.g., appropriateness, feasibility) are more relevant in the early stages of program operation, whereas others (e.g., penetration, sustainability) are more applicable after a program has been established.

TABLE 1

Implementation Evaluation Concepts

Concept	Definition
Acceptability	Perception that a program or service is agreeable or satisfactory
Adoption	Uptake, utilization, or intention to try a service or a programmatic approach
Appropriateness	Perceived relevance and compatibility of a program for its setting and particular problem
Feasibility	Extent to which a program or service can be carried out within an organization
Fidelity	Extent to which a program was implemented as intended, following specified protocols
Cost	Cost impact of a program's implementation effort
Penetration	Integration of a program or service within its practice setting
Sustainability	Extent to which a program is maintained within an organization's ongoing operations

Source: Enola Proctor, Hiie Silmere, Ramesh Raghavan, Peter Hovmand, Greg Aarons, Alicia Bunger, Richard Griffey, and Melissa Hensley, "Outcomes for Implementation Research: Conceptual Distinctions, Measurement Challenges, and Research Agenda," *Administration and Policy in Mental Health* 38, no. 2 (2011): 65–76.

Using this understanding of implementation evaluation, Urban's research team developed the plan described herein to evaluate the implementation of the VictimConnect Resource Center. After reviewing program materials, matching concepts to each output in the logic model, and interviewing NCVC staff, the team determined that the evaluation concepts of Proctor and colleagues most relevant to VictimConnect's implementation evaluation are acceptability, adoption, fidelity, penetration, and sustainability. Acceptability concerns the extent to which VictimConnect staff and visitors[2] perceive the program's services (including the technology it uses) and their delivery to be satisfactory or agreeable. Adoption involves VictimConnect's delivery of trauma-informed, victim-centered, and strengths-based services and its protection of victims' privacy. Fidelity concerns the extent to which VictimConnect is implemented in accordance with its policies and protocols, including how and what services are delivered to visitors. VictimConnect's penetration concerns its institutionalization or reach within the service-provider community. Lastly, VictimConnect may achieve sustainability if its resource directory and network of service providers are maintained and integrated for routine, ongoing use.

Implementation Evaluation of VictimConnect

The overarching goals of Urban's implementation evaluation of VictimConnect are as follows:

- to document the functions that the VictimConnect program carries out and whether it meets the expectations identified in its logic model and other program plans

- to understand whether the program is or is not reaching its target population and providing services as intended

- to assess visitor and staff satisfaction with the technology-based mechanisms through which the program's services are provided

Findings from this implementation evaluation will help NCVC improve VictimConnect's operations and will inform the field by enhancing efforts by the Office for Victims of Crime and other agencies to improve the response to victims nationally through technology. Together with Urban's proposed

outcome evaluation of VictimConnect (Bastomski, Yahner, and Dusenbery, forthcoming), this implementation evaluation will add to the base of evidence on how to use resource-efficient, technological methods to reach and serve victims in ways that are victim centered, trauma informed, and protective of victims' safety, rights, and confidentiality.

Urban developed this implementation evaluation plan in collaboration with NCVC research liaisons, starting by identifying relevant components of the VictimConnect logic model, including program activities and anticipated outputs. The team reviewed previous evaluations of hotlines and victim services for lessons learned that could be applied, and it clarified the implementation evaluation research questions, identified data sources, and matched sources to the research questions. Throughout these steps, Urban's researchers prioritized doing no harm to VictimConnect victims and other visitors while incorporating rigorous methods to every ethical extent possible. These procedures include maintaining confidentiality protections and using available resources as efficiently as possible.

In the sections that follow, we highlight components of the VictimConnect logic model that helped frame this evaluation's research questions, and we describe the methodology that Urban's research team plans to use to answer them.

Using the VictimConnect Logic Model to Guide the Implementation Evaluation

As described in the second toolkit resource, the VictimConnect logic model links the program's activities and intended outputs to describe what services VictimConnect provides to visitors and how it facilitates and seeks to improve those services (Dusenbery 2020). As indicated in table 2, these components are divided into focus areas: VictimConnect visitors (crime victims and people contacting the program on victims' behalf), technology, staff and volunteers, outreach and collaboration, and evaluation and improvement.

TABLE 2

VictimConnect Logic Model Activities and Outputs

Focus area	Activities	Outputs
Visitors	▪ VictimConnect uses four modalities to provide resources to visitors: softphone, online chat, text messaging, and web resources	▪ Number and percent change over time of softphone, text, chat, and web search interactions with visitors ▪ Percent change in diversity of visitor demographics
Technology	▪ Implement an omnichannel, cloud contact center ▪ Codify technology testing protocols ▪ Develop protocols for updating and expanding online resources	▪ Technological platforms have 99.999 percent uptime during operational hours ▪ Number and percent change of online resources updated
VictimConnect staff and volunteers	▪ Develop vicarious trauma action plan ▪ Convert training to online modules ▪ Develop volunteer program	▪ Implementation of vicarious trauma action plan and performance evaluation measures ▪ Number of online modules created ▪ Implementation of volunteer program

Outreach and collaboration	▪ Update outreach materials ▪ Partner with intra- and interagency programs/providers ▪ Develop a strategy for providing training and technical assistance to other service programs/providers	▪ Number of outreach materials expanded ▪ Number of new collaborations ▪ Publication of training and technical assistance guiding principles ▪ Number of agencies that request training and technical assistance
Evaluation and improvement	▪ Develop evaluability, research capacity, and implementation fidelity processes ▪ Use evaluation to explore new ways to best support victims via technology	▪ Evaluability assessment, evaluation plan, and implementation toolkit created ▪ New ways to use technology to support victims are tested and implemented

Source: Malore Dusenbery, "VictimConnect Evaluation: Refining the Logic Model" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2020).

VictimConnect's activities consist of service delivery through four modalities (softphone, online chat, text messaging, and web resources), use of a technological platform and supporting components to operate the resource center, training of VictimConnect staff and visitors, development of outreach resources, and efforts to conduct ongoing program evaluations beginning with Urban's formative evaluation. VictimConnect's outputs are the ways these activities can be directly measured, such as the number of and percent change in diverse visitor interactions over time, the number of outreach materials created by VictimConnect, and training and technical assistance (TTA) requests fulfilled. Furthermore, VictimConnect identified two immediate outcomes that the implementation evaluation will examine: whether visitors have reliable access to VictimConnect's call, chat, text, and website platforms, and whether visitors have access to up-to-date, high-quality referrals.

These activities, outputs, and immediate outcomes are the focus of Urban's evaluation of VictimConnect's implementation, and they informed the development of the research questions described in the next section.

Clarifying the Implementation Evaluation Research Questions

Four research questions (and their respective subquestions) guide Urban's implementation and outcome evaluation of VictimConnect. To finalize the questions, Urban's research team used the activities done for this formative evaluation's evaluability assessment—program observations, staff interviews, and document review—and ongoing conversations with research liaisons at NCVC and the evaluation's advisory board convened to support Urban's formative evaluation. The four research questions, which we refer to as RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4, respectively, are as follows:[3]

- RQ1: Does VictimConnect increase access to victim services?

- RQ2: Does VictimConnect improve delivery of victim services?[4]

- RQ3: How does VictimConnect protect victims' rights and confidentiality?

- RQ4: Does VictimConnect strengthen the efficiency of victim services?

When creating subquestions relevant to VictimConnect's implementation evaluation, Urban ensured that they were responsive to the program's logic model and that they reflected each

implementation evaluation concept deemed relevant (Proctor et al. 2011). The connection between each research question and its associated logic model output/outcome and implementation evaluation concept is shown in the appendix. Where possible, Urban plans to explore how findings from the implementation evaluation differ across subgroups of VictimConnect visitors and by technological modality. Subgroups will be created by grouping visitors with similar victimization experiences, needs, and socioeconomic demographics, and Urban will examine interactions through four modalities: phone, chat, text, and the program's website. In the next section, each subquestion relevant to Urban's implementation evaluation is presented under its primary research question.

RQ1: DOES VICTIMCONNECT INCREASE ACCESS TO VICTIM SERVICES?

RQ1A: Who are the users of VictimConnect? The research team will seek to understand VictimConnect visitors by factors including sociodemographic characteristics, victimization experiences, and immediate needs.

RQ1B: Does VictimConnect reach underserved populations? VictimConnect's understanding of underserved populations aligns with the definition given by the US Department of Justice: victims are underserved if they experience gaps in services.[5] This definition captures victims of certain crimes for which there are fewer services. Services provided in response to certain crimes—such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking—have specialized resources, whereas services for victims of other crimes may have limited funding. Examples of such other crimes include assault, robbery, hate and bias crimes, economic exploitation and fraud, elder abuse, and homicide covictimization. This definition of underserved populations also applies to victims with specific needs, such as those with disabilities or limited English proficiency and those with key relevant identifying characteristics, such as immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, teenagers, and members of culturally, ethnically, or religiously marginalized populations.

RQ1C: Does ease of access vary by technological modality, and do visitors prefer some over others? Through this question, Urban will explore the objective and subjective accessibility of VictimConnect's phone, chat, and text services and its website. It will assess the extent to which visitors experience technological challenges when trying to reach a Victim Assistance Specialist (VAS) and access website resources, and it will assess visitors' perceptions of the technology used by the program.

RQ1D: How knowledgeable are Victim Assistance Specialists about different victim services nationwide? This question concerns the extent of VASs' knowledge—and their confidence in their knowledge—about the services they refer victims to. It will therefore illuminate the quality of VictimConnect's service referrals. Knowledge appraisals will be based on the perspectives of VASs and VictimConnect supervisors and those of visitors. Researchers will also answer this question by independently assessing how thorough the resource database from which VictimConnect referrals are made is and how well VASs use it during interactions.

RQ1E: How well are VictimConnect visitors informed of, referred to, and/or warm-transferred to community services relevant to their needs? This question is intended to capture the extent to which VASs carry out

one of the core aims of VictimConnect services: increasing visitors' knowledge about relevant services and, when appropriate, making referrals or warm transfers directly to service providers.

RQ2: DOES VICTIMCONNECT IMPROVE DELIVERY OF VICTIM SERVICES?

RQ2A: Are VictimConnect's services delivered as intended through its four technological modalities? This question concerns the extent to which the technology the program uses is reliable and its online resources are updated. It also addresses the extent to which VASs follow the procedures outlined in their training and established quality assurance protocols.

RQ2B: Are the mechanisms of service delivery appropriate and suitable for visitors' needs? This question will assess factors including the online helpline platform uptime, visitors' satisfaction with the technological modalities, and visitors' and service providers' satisfaction with the warm-handoff process.

RQ3: HOW DOES VICTIMCONNECT PROTECT VICTIMS' RIGHTS AND CONFIDENTIALITY?

RQ3A: How do VictimConnect's technological platforms protect victims' and families' right to anonymity and confidentiality? Recognizing the importance of victim privacy and the potential benefits and challenges of technology in ensuring privacy, the research team will answer this question by thoroughly documenting the protections that VictimConnect's platform has in place.

RQ3B: How consistently and in what ways is information about VictimConnect's anonymity and confidentiality protections conveyed to victims/visitors? This question will help the research team examine the implementation and communication of the protections described in RQ3A by VictimConnect staff, as observed by researchers, indicated by VASs, and reported by visitors.

RQ4: DOES VICTIMCONNECT STRENGTHEN THE EFFICIENCY OF VICTIM SERVICES?

RQ4A: Does VictimConnect adequately prepare staff and volunteers according to its stated goals? This question will assess VictimConnect staff's satisfaction with training, the extent to which and how well online training modules are implemented, the program's vicarious trauma plan, and the implementation of its volunteer program.

RQ4B: Does VictimConnect maintain up-to-date and high-quality information in its database of community providers and resources for VASs to use when providing services and for visitors to find online? The researchers will assess the referral database available to VASs and website resources available to visitors regarding the range and depth of locations and victimizations served. They will also assess the database's rate of growth and the extent to which it is updated.

RQ4C: Has VictimConnect increased its network of service providers over time overall, and have the populations and types of victimization served by that network become more diverse? In addition to capturing an inclusive database of service providers, VictimConnect seeks to create a network of service providers it frequently refers victims to, engages with in coordinated outreach activities, and provides TTA.

RQ4D: How well does VictimConnect reach service providers through training and technical assistance? In addition to serving crime victims directly, VictimConnect envisions itself as a resource and model for

other providers, and it plans to conduct TTA accordingly. This question seeks to identify the outreach materials and guiding principles for TTA that VictimConnect creates, the number of requests it receives for TTA, and service providers' satisfaction with its TTA.

In the next section, we describe the methodology used to answer these questions, including data sources, sampling approaches, and analytic strategy.

Implementation Evaluation Methodology

Urban's research team envisions a comprehensive 36-month implementation evaluation of VictimConnect, to be conducted in conjunction with a rigorous outcome evaluation as described in the fifth toolkit resource. The methodology for the implementation evaluation described below would involve quantitative and qualitative data sources, collection of randomly sampled data, and a mixed-methods analytic strategy. The first 9 months would be spent solidifying partnerships and pilot testing the evaluation instruments, the next 18 months would be spent collecting and analyzing data, and the last 9 months would be spent reporting and disseminating the findings to a broad audience of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers.

Data Sources and Sampling Methods

Through its formative evaluation of VictimConnect, the Urban research team identified data sources (listed in table A1) that will be instrumental for a future implementation evaluation that answers the above research questions. Data will be drawn from mechanisms in NCVC and during future evaluation activities conducted by Urban's team. The VictimConnect data sources that NCVC already has access to include session statistics, demographic information collected during interactions with visitors, the ongoing visitor feedback survey, and website traffic data. For more information about the steps NCVC took to increase its research capacity during this study, see the sixth toolkit resource.

Urban also envisions using additional research tools and mechanisms to collect relevant data. These include Urban's independent session observations, staff interviews, staff surveys, visitor surveys, stakeholder interviews, and review of the program materials and platform.[6] These data sources will also be used for the outcome evaluation; more details on their application can be found in the fifth toolkit resource. We describe the proposed methodology for collecting data from each source below, and drafts of the instruments can be found in the seventh toolkit resource.[7]

DATA ALREADY COLLECTED BY NCVC

Session statistics are captured by the VictimConnect technological platform, which is hosted by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). RAINN shares the data and reports with NCVC through an online portal. They include the volume of phone, chat, and text sessions, the wait time for calls and chats, the number of missed calls or dropped interactions, and whether a warm handoff occurred at the end of each phone interaction. From January through June 2020, VictimConnect served approximately 4,000 visitors through phone calls, online chat, and text messaging. The Urban research

team will collect this data from NCVC semiannually as a Microsoft Excel sheet shared through a secure folder. The session statistics will be used to answer RQ1C, RQ1E, and RQ2A (table A1). These data will provide general information about the use and functionality of the technological modalities and whether differences exist by time of year or day.

VictimConnect's visitor feedback survey for visitors interacting through phone calls and online chat has five questions and is similar to the feedback survey used in evaluations of the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, and the loveisrespect hotline (Finn, Garner, and Wilson 2011; McDonnell et al. 2018). Chat-based visitors are automatically linked to the online survey at the end of each session. Phone-based visitors are asked to participate after receiving services and, if they agree, are transferred by the VAS to the interactive voice response survey. The survey is not offered to phone visitors who are warm-transferred to another service provider. The National Center for Victims of Crime accesses the raw data and reports on survey responses through an online portal. The survey consists of four Likert scale questions about visitors' overall satisfaction, the likelihood of their using the services or advice recommended, their satisfaction with their VAS's knowledge and skills, and the likelihood of their recommending VictimConnect. The survey concludes with an opportunity for open-ended comments and suggestions. The Urban research team will collect this data from NCVC every six months as an Excel sheet shared through the secure folder. The implementation evaluation will particularly focus on visitors' satisfaction with VASs' knowledge and on whether overall satisfaction varies between phone and chat. These findings will be used to answer RQ1C, RQ1D, and RQ2B.

Visitor demographics include a range of characteristics, such as visitors' victimization experiences, their needs, and the services provided by VASs. Because VictimConnect is completely anonymous and strives to be victim centered and trauma informed, VASs are trained not to ask visitors directly about their demographic characteristics. The specialists capture this information manually only if visitors share it voluntarily during their interactions. The VASs are required to document the data on the online platform before ending each session. The National Center for Victims of Crime receives the data monthly in Excel spreadsheets from RAINN (which provides the technology platform). Updated by NCVC in August 2020, the categories include the type of call, frequency of access, age, gender, user relationship to victim, location, race/ethnicity, crime experienced, special populations, crime type trends, keywords, services discussed, services provided, and how the visitor heard about VictimConnect.

The Urban research team will collect this data from NCVC every six months for the duration of the data-collection period. The demographic information will be used to answer RQ1A, RQ1B, RQ1E, and RQ2A. It will provide general insight about the characteristics and needs of VictimConnect visitors and will offer the most data from VASs on services provided and the extent to which interactions align with VictimConnect's goals, training, and protocols. Importantly, the anonymity of the service means that each interaction logged in the platform does not necessarily reflect a unique person and may be someone who has contacted VictimConnect multiple times. The data content and limitations—for example, the fact that the data only capture what visitors voluntarily shared, do not reflect individual

visitors, and are manually input by VASs—mirror the data collected by the National Domestic Violence Hotline and loveisrespect (McDonnell, Nagaraj, and Coen 2020). They also mirror the archival data of a regional sexual assault phone hotline reviewed by Colvin and colleagues (2017).

Website traffic data are collected by Google Analytics and are available as real-time data and trends. They include the number of page views and link clicks on the website, bounce rates, session durations, the devices visitors use, and how users were acquired. From January through June 2020, the VictimConnect website had 125,862 visitors. The Urban research team will collect these data from NCVC at the end of the data-collection period and upload them into Stata (or another statistical package) for cleaning and analysis. They will be analyzed in the aggregate to provide general information about the website's use and functionality, the online resources VictimConnect provides, and differences based on time of year or time of day. The Google Analytics data will serve as a secondary source of information for answering RQ1A, RQ1C, and RQ2B.

EVALUATION-SPECIFIC DATA TO BE COLLECTED BY URBAN

The trained Urban research team will conduct **session observations** for online chat, phone, and text messaging sessions using an observation protocol and checklist. Phone sessions will be observed live, whereas the team will receive chat and text transcripts for analysis. The VictimConnect technological platform was updated in 2020 and now allows for people other than the responding VAS to listen in silently on calls. The team will use this function to observe the live phone sessions. The team will listen remotely to at least 300 and to as many as 500 calls (randomly sampled over a one-year period), which, based on the number of calls from January to June 2020, will capture approximately 5 to 8 percent of all calls that VictimConnect receives. Researchers will listen in two-hour blocks at different times of the day and on all days of the week that VictimConnect is operational to ensure a representative sample.

The research team will also collect at least 100 and as many as 300 chat transcripts from NCVC during the same one-year period. To ensure a random sample, it will select a random set of days and collect a specified number of transcripts from those days. Because of the platform's privacy protections, chat content is not saved after a session is completed. This means the VAS will have to manually copy the text into a transcript file with the session date and time to be shared with the Urban team through a secure file-sharing system. The researchers will then complete the same observation tool for all chats. Having the verbatim transcripts allows for a deeper dive into the chat content, and to capitalize on this, 50 to 75 chats will be chosen at random for qualitative analysis to extract certain themes, such as how VASs pull information about visitors' needs and how they present referrals and resources to meet those needs. Because text sessions account for 1 percent of all interactions, a much smaller number of text transcripts will be collected for analysis.

The observation tool presented in the seventh toolkit resource was developed based on VictimConnect's training and procedures, the categories of information collected through the VictimConnect demographics, and a review of the literature, including the Client-Centered Hotline Assessment Tool (Grossmann et al. 2019). The tool's domains focus on visitor characteristics and needs, services offered and provided, and alignment with VictimConnect protocols. The session observations will help answer RQ1E, RQ2A, and RQ3B as a primary data source and RQ1A, RQ1B, RQ1D, RQ2B, and

RQ4A as a secondary data source.[8] The observation tool, along with all evaluation instruments, will be tested during the pilot study phase of the implementation evaluation.

Urban evaluators will conduct **staff interviews** with VASs, VictimConnect supervisors, and other NCVC leadership. Some studies have effectively conducted semistructured interviews with domestic violence and rape crisis advocates using interview guidelines paired with open-ended questions and flexibility (Powell-Williams, White, and Powell-Williams 2013; Ullman and Townsend 2007). Our in-depth, semistructured interviews will provide more nuanced insight into staff perceptions of VictimConnect's implementation. Topics covered will include visitors' characteristics and needs, VASs' knowledge and skills, VictimConnect's training, services offered and provided, and collaborations with service providers. Interviews will be conducted virtually and will last approximately one hour. All interviews will be recorded or captured through detailed notes if staff prefer not to be recorded. Urban aims to interview all staff associated with VictimConnect over two or three rounds throughout the evaluation period for 100-percent participation. The findings from the interviews will serve as a primary data source for RQ1D, RQ2B, RQ4A, and RQ4C, and as a secondary data source for RQ1A, RQ1B, RQ1E, RQ3A, RQ3B, RQ4B, and RQ4D.

Staff surveys will be administered to VASs to gather more information about randomly selected sessions throughout the data-collection period. We will follow the methods used by the two evaluations of RAINN's National Sexual Assault Online Hotline (Finn, Garner, and Wilson 2010; Finn and Hughes 2008) and survey VASs through an online evaluation form regarding either the first or last session of their shift, as determined during the pilot study phase. This approach will help provide consistent data collection without a burdensome time commitment. Survey data will be collected during a six-month period with an assessment of the completion rates during the pilot study to ensure adequate and representative participation. Keeping in mind the challenges Finn, Garner, and Wilson (2010) experienced with response rates,[9] the research team will work with VictimConnect's leadership to promote participation from all staff.

The survey form will contain closed- and open-ended questions about staff's perceptions of the overall helpfulness of the session to the visitor and the activities that took place during the interaction, including staff's confidence that the service providers they recommended or resources they offered were relevant, whether a warm handoff was suitable for the visitor's needs, whether a warm handoff occurred, and whether and how they conveyed information about the program's anonymity and confidentiality protections. The form will also ask about any service-related difficulties and technological challenges during the interaction. These staff surveys will help answer RQ1A and RQ1D as a primary data source and RQ1E, RQ2A, and RQ3B as a secondary source.

Urban evaluators will conduct one-hour, semistructured qualitative **stakeholder interviews** with community and national service providers to which VictimConnect refers visitors, recipients of VictimConnect outreach activities and TTA, and participants in the National Hotline Consortium (which NCVC coordinates). Throughout the data-collection period the Urban team will conduct 30 to 50 virtual interviews, the majority with providers that receive referrals, warm handoffs, and TTA. All interviews will be recorded or captured through detailed notes if the stakeholder prefers not to be recorded. The

interviews will serve as a primary data source for RQ1E, RQ2B, and RQ4D, and a secondary data source for RQ4C. The domains covered that relate to the implementation evaluation questions include providers' knowledge about and use of VictimConnect, their perceptions of VictimConnect's utility to the victim services field and their organization specifically, and their receipt of and satisfaction with the TTA services, including services regarding technological innovations.

Urban will work closely with NCVC to identify organizations to include in the study and to facilitate outreach. Providers will be targeted to reflect a range of service types, different types of victimization, and geographic variation. From the VictimConnect demographic data, we know that the five states from which the most visitors call or chat are California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Ohio. Starting in 2021, VictimConnect will use its platform to track the specific providers to which VASs refer visitors or provide warm handoffs in each interaction. The research team will use those data to begin identifying providers for interviews. During the formative evaluation, the NCVC research liaison compiled a list based on an informal staff survey of the resources that VictimConnect uses the most in each of those states and the primary national service providers for the five most frequently reported crimes. These providers include state crime victim compensation programs, statewide legal assistance providers (like the California Victims' Services Unit and the Ohio Crime Victim Justice Center), and local service providers (such as Safe Horizon in New York City and Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse in Texas). Moreover, NCVC will provide a list of past and current TTA recipients.

Urban will conduct **longitudinal visitor surveys** of VictimConnect visitors who connect through phone, chat, text, or the website. Visitors will be offered the chance to participate in the study and will receive the survey after completing the informed consent process. In addition to being critical for the outcome evaluation, the survey data will also be primary data for answering RQ1A, RQ1B, RQ1C, RQ1E, and RQ2B, and secondary data for answering RQ1D, RQ2A, and RQ3B. The domains of interest to the implementation evaluation include visitor demographics, victimization experiences and needs, VictimConnect service characteristics, activities during the interaction, feedback on the interaction, and feedback on the service overall. The fifth toolkit resource includes more information about recruitment for and administration of the survey, and the seventh includes a draft of the survey instrument.

The materials and platform review will consist of a thorough review of internal and external VictimConnect documents, such as training materials, outreach materials, and website products, a review of the service referral database, and a technology-focused review of the platform. The research team will work closely with NCVC to gather VictimConnect materials not publicly available and will connect with tech staff at NCVC and RAINN to review the program's technological aspects. By providing the intended framework against which actual implementation will be compared, the review will factor in the response to nearly every research question. Specifically, it will serve as a primary data source for RQ1B, RQ1C, RQ1D, RQ2A, RQ2B, RQ3A, RQ4A, RQ4B, RQ4C, and RQ4D.

Mixed-Methods Analytic Strategy

In this section, we describe the mixed-methods analytic strategy Urban will use to examine the data (qualitative and quantitative) collected for the implementation evaluation.

Quantitative data will be uploaded into Stata or another statistical package for cleaning and analysis. Relevant numerical data from the implementation evaluation include session statistics, visitor demographics, scaled questions on the VictimConnect feedback survey and the Urban visitor survey, website traffic data, checklist responses for observations, and staff surveys. They will be analyzed in the aggregate to provide general descriptive information, or descriptive statistics, on the numbers, percentages, and average characteristics associated with VictimConnect's implementation. When appropriate, analyses will seek to identify differences by respondent characteristics, visitor characteristics, technological mode, and time, using cross-tabulations (analyzing the Chi-squared statistic) and independent sample *t*-tests.

Qualitative, or textual, data collected for the implementation evaluation include open-ended responses to the VictimConnect feedback survey and the Urban visitor survey and transcribed interviews of staff and stakeholders. A subset of the chat transcripts will also be reviewed for deeper thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and survey responses will be assessed for common themes through text analyses that may include use of QSR-NVivo, a package for analyzing qualitative data. To ensure the quality of the coding, the research team will collaboratively identify themes and hold regular coding conferences to discuss coding decisions and resolve any discrepancies.

After conducting the above analyses, Urban's team will integrate key findings from both types of data to assess the full picture of VictimConnect's implementation activities, outputs, and immediate outcomes. This mixed-methods assessment will enable richer exploration and explanation of operations that appear to be working well and those that may require improvements.

Human Subjects Protections and Data Security

Urban is committed to conducting the implementation evaluation activities in ways that protect and preserve the confidentiality afforded to crime victims who reach out to VictimConnect, respect victims' rights, and are attentive to risks of revictimization and retraumatization (Murray 2019). This evaluation and its protocols will be reviewed for approval by Urban's institutional review board, which reviews all Urban research involving human subjects to ensure data-collection and data-security plans comply with federal regulations and protect the rights and welfare of human subjects. Subsequent to approval from the board and before any data collection begins, the project will be reviewed for approval by the National Institute of Justice Human Subjects Protection office. Project data will only be accessible through a secure platform and restricted to project team members who have signed a confidentiality pledge.

Consent protocols will emphasize the voluntary nature of the research, discuss the potential risks and benefits associated with participating in the study, and clearly state the purpose of the research and its intended uses. People participating in interviews and/or Urban's surveys will be fully apprised of the goals of this study and informed of their ability to stop participating at any time. Visitors will be assured that they will continue to receive services through VictimConnect and organizations they are referred to regardless of whether they choose to participate. Everyone who consents to participate in the study

will be guaranteed confidentiality, meaning any personally identifiable information exchanged between the participant and the research team will not be shared with anyone outside of this research project.

The research team will adhere to fundamental principles of research ethics and take key measures to ensure the security of the data it collects. Project findings and reports prepared for dissemination will not contain information that could readily be used to identify a participant. Only deidentified data will be archived in accordance with the US Department of Justice's data archiving requirements. Adequate precautions will be taken to ensure administrative and physical security of personally identifiable information.

Conclusion

In this brief, Urban describes the overarching goals and research questions associated with its planned implementation evaluation of VictimConnect. The questions were informed by Urban's evaluability assessment activities, which highlighted the relevant components of VictimConnect's logic model and the evaluation concepts that will inform any determination of its successful implementation. We have detailed how quantitative and qualitative data will be collected and analyzed to this end using comprehensive and rigorous approaches to increase the validity of evaluation findings.

Urban envisions conducting this implementation evaluation of VictimConnect in conjunction with a thorough outcome evaluation and in full collaboration with the National Center for Victims of Crime. Taken together, the findings from our proposed evaluation activities will permit Urban, NCVC, and the Office for Victims of Crime (which funds VictimConnect) to understand which program components are working well and why. Moreover, sharing these findings with the victim services and hotline resources fields can help them understand how technology can be used to improve the response to crime victims nationwide. Lastly, we hope that this toolkit resource, one of several developed during Urban's formative evaluation of VictimConnect, is helpful to others planning implementation evaluations of similar programs and resource centers.

Appendix. Implementation Evaluation Roadmap

Implementation Evaluation Roadmap

Implementation evaluation questions	Logic model outputs/ Immediate outcomes	Evaluation concepts	Data sources	Domains
RQ1: Does VictimConnect increase access to victim services?				
RQ1A: Who are the users of VictimConnect?	▪ Number and percent change of softphone, text, chat, and web search interactions	▪ Penetration	Primary: ▪ Demographics ▪ Visitor surveys ▪ Staff surveys Secondary: ▪ Staff interviews ▪ Observations ▪ Website traffic	▪ Sociodemographic characteristics ▪ Victimization experiences ▪ Reported needs
RQ1B: Does VictimConnect reach underserved populations?	▪ Percent change in diversity of visitor demographics ▪ Number and percent change of online resources updated ▪ Number of outreach materials expanded ▪ Number of new collaborations	▪ Adoption	Primary: ▪ Demographics ▪ Materials/ platform review ▪ Visitor survey Secondary: ▪ Staff interview ▪ Observation	▪ Sociodemographic characteristics ▪ VictimConnect service characteristics ▪ Resources provided ▪ Outreach
RQ1C: Does ease of access vary by technologic modality, and do visitors prefer some over others?	▪ Number and percent change of softphone, text, chat, and web search interactions ▪ New ways to use technology to support victims are tested and implemented? ▪ Technological platforms have 99.999 percent uptime	▪ Acceptability	Primary: ▪ Platform review ▪ Session statistics ▪ Visitor Survey Secondary: ▪ Feedback survey ▪ Website traffic	▪ VictimConnect service characteristics ▪ Feedback on service overall

Implementation evaluation questions	Logic model outputs/ Immediate outcomes	Evaluation concepts	Data sources	Domains
RQ1D: How knowledgeable are Victim Assistance Specialists about different victim services nationwide?	▪ Number of online modules created ▪ Number and percent change of online resources updated	▪ Acceptability	Primary: ▪ Staff interviews ▪ Feedback survey ▪ Staff surveys ▪ Materials/ database review Secondary: ▪ Observations Visitor survey	▪ Activities during the interaction (from visitor) ▪ Feedback on interaction (from visitor) ▪ Activities during interaction (from VAS) ▪ Perceptions of VASs overall ▪ Materials available to VAS
RQ1E: How well are VictimConnect visitors informed of, referred to, and/or warm-transferred to community services relevant to their needs?	▪ Outcome: Visitors have access to up-to-date, high-quality referrals	▪ Fidelity ▪ Adoption	Primary: ▪ Session statistics ▪ Observations ▪ Visitor survey ▪ Stakeholder interview Secondary: ▪ Staff interview ▪ Staff survey ▪ Demographics	▪ Activities during interaction (visitors, VAS, observation) ▪ Warm handoff numbers ▪ Feedback on service (service provider)
RQ2: Does VictimConnect improve delivery of victim services?				
RQ2A: Are VictimConnect's services delivered as intended through its four technological modalities?	▪ Number of online modules created ▪ Technological platforms have 99.999 percent uptime	▪ Fidelity	Primary: ▪ Observations ▪ Session statistics ▪ Material review Secondary: ▪ Staff Surveys ▪ Visitor surveys ▪ Demographics	▪ Activities during interaction (observation, VAS) ▪ Reliability of technology ▪ Training ▪ Interaction procedures

Implementation evaluation questions	Logic model outputs/ Immediate outcomes	Evaluation concepts	Data sources	Domains
RQ2B: Are the mechanisms of service delivery appropriate and suitable for visitors' needs?	▪ Technological platforms have 99.999 percent uptime ▪ Number and percent change of online resources updated ▪ New ways to use technology to support victims are tested and implemented	▪ Acceptability	Primary: ▪ Platform review ▪ Visitor survey ▪ Stakeholder interview ▪ Staff interview Secondary: ▪ Feedback survey ▪ Observations ▪ Website traffic?	▪ Feedback on service overall (visitor and service provider)
RQ3: How does VictimConnect protect victims' rights and confidentiality?				
RQ3A: How do VictimConnect's technological platforms protect victims' and families' right to anonymity and confidentiality?		▪ Adoption	Primary: ▪ Material and platform review Secondary: ▪ Staff interviews	Technological protections
RQ3B: How consistently and in what ways is information about VictimConnect's anonymity and confidentiality protections conveyed to victims/visitors?		▪ Fidelity	Primary: ▪ Observations Secondary: ▪ Staff surveys ▪ Staff interviews ▪ Visitor surveys	▪ Activities during interaction (observation, visitor and staff) ▪ Interaction procedures ▪ Training
RQ4: Does VictimConnect strengthen the efficiency of victim services?				
RQ4A: Does VictimConnect adequately prepare staff and volunteers according to its stated goals?	▪ Implementation of vicarious trauma action plan and performance evaluation measures ▪ Number of online materials created ▪ Implementation of volunteer program	▪ Acceptability ▪ Adoption	Primary: ▪ Material review ▪ Staff interviews Secondary: ▪ Observations	▪ Training ▪ Materials available to VAS ▪ Feedback on service (from VAS) ▪ Activities during interaction (observation)

Implementation evaluation questions	Logic model outputs/ Immediate outcomes	Evaluation concepts	Data sources	Domains
RQ4B: Does VictimConnect maintain up-to-date and high-quality information in its database of community providers and resources for VASs to use when providing services and for visitors to find online?	▪ Number and percent change of online resources updated	▪ Sustainability	Primary: ▪ Material review Secondary: ▪ Staff interviews	▪ Materials available to VAS ▪ Materials available to visitor ▪ Feedback on service (from VAS)
RQ4C: Has VictimConnect increased its network of service providers over time overall, and have the populations and types of victimization served by that network become more diverse?	▪ Number of outreach materials expanded ▪ Number of new collaborations	▪ Penetration	Primary: ▪ Staff interviews ▪ Material review Secondary: ▪ Stakeholder interviews	▪ Provider network ▪ Materials created
RQ4D: How well does VictimConnect reach service providers through training and technical assistance?	▪ Publication of TTA guiding principles ▪ Number of agencies that request TTA	▪ Penetration	Primary: ▪ Stakeholder interviews ▪ Material review Secondary: ▪ Staff interviews	▪ Provider network ▪ Feedback on TTA ▪ Perception of TTA from staff

Notes: TTA = training and technical assistance; VAS = Victim Assistance Specialist.

Notes

[1] Implementation evaluations are sometimes referred to as process evaluations. Both focus on assessing the activities and interim outcomes ("outputs") involved in a program's delivery (CDC 2011). In this brief, we use the term implementation evaluation to capture both concepts.

[2] VictimConnect defines their visitors as anyone that contacts VictimConnect, including victims/survivors; family, friends, and other supporters of victims; and other professionals such as service providers.

[3] These activities and the full list of the research questions for both evaluations are described in the full formative evaluation report (*VictimConnect Formative Evaluation Report*) and the third toolkit resource ("VictimConnect Evaluability Assessment: Toolkit Resource 3").

[4] The Urban team envisions three aspects of this research question: the approach used to deliver VictimConnect services, such as the four technological modalities and how warm handoffs are made; the delivery of emotional support, information, and referrals during the VictimConnect interaction; and community providers' improved ability to deliver services.

[5] Final Program Guidelines for VOCA Victim Assistance Grants, Federal Register 62, no. 77 (April 22, 1997).

6   Interviews and surveys will include those done with paid professional staff and unpaid, trained volunteers who work as VASs.

7   For more information on the potential for Urban researchers to link data sources, please see the fifth toolkit resource (Bastomski, Yahner, and Dusenbery, forthcoming).

8   Primary data sources are those providing the most relevant information to address the specified question, whereas secondary data sources will be used to supplement or better contextualize the answer to the question.

9   Finn, Garner, and Wilson (2010) received surveys on 731 sessions from 94 volunteers, which equated to a 40-percent response rate. However, 10 percent of the volunteers were responsible for nearly half of the data.

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