



# Collaboration and Challenges in Antitrafficking Task Forces

## Lessons Learned from an Evaluation of the Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Forces to Combat Human Trafficking

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*June 2022*

**In efforts to address human trafficking, stakeholders have historically been siloed and uncoordinated. To address challenges in coordinating system-level responses to human trafficking, the Office for Victims of Crime and the Bureau of Justice Assistance funded the Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking Program to build coordinated, multidisciplinary partnerships between stakeholders integral to antitrafficking work, including nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations serving survivors as well as law enforcement and prosecutors at the local, state, and federal levels. The National Institute of Justice funded the Urban Institute to conduct the first federally funded, multisite, mixed-methods evaluation specifically to assess the impact of ECM human trafficking task forces on the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking crimes and the identifying and assisting of survivors. This brief documents the evaluation’s findings on the collaboration between key ECM task force stakeholders and challenges to their collaboration.**

This study, the Evaluation of the Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) to Combat Human Trafficking, funded by the National Institute of Justice, sought to understand federally funded ECM task forces’ impact on identifying and assisting human trafficking survivors and investigating and prosecuting human trafficking, and to analyze differences in various task force implementation models (e.g., structure, organization, and other key characteristics) to understand which task force models and features contribute most to specific outcomes. In addition, this study sought to gain insight into the

investigative, prosecutorial, and victim service practices among ECM task forces, challenges and barriers ECM task forces face in addressing human trafficking, and best practices and recommendations for successfully developing and implementing ECM task forces across the United States.

In the pages that follow, we provide an overview of the ECM task force model and the need for research on multidisciplinary, collaborative approaches to addressing human trafficking. After briefly discussing the study's methods, we present findings on the relationships between stakeholders, evidence of collaboration, and collaboration challenges, and we provide recommendations for improving collaboration. Additional findings and recommendations yielded by this study can be found in McCoy and coauthors (2022).

## Background on ECM Task Forces and Urban's Evaluation

In 2010, the Office for Victims of Crime and the Bureau of Justice Assistance launched the Enhanced Collaborative Model Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking Program to support communities in the development of effective and sustainable multidisciplinary human trafficking task forces to implement and employ victim-centered approaches to identify survivors of sex and labor trafficking, provide services to survivors, and investigate and prosecute all forms of human trafficking. ECM task forces bring together key stakeholders in coordinated partnerships, including law enforcement and prosecutors at the local, state, and federal levels; service providers; mental health professionals; and labor professionals (Sheldon-Sherman 2012). As of FY2020, there were 47 active federally funded ECM task forces in the United States.

Little research has been conducted on the collaboration between ECM task force stakeholders. Research on human trafficking task forces more generally suggests they increase communication and coordination between service providers and law enforcement. In particular, law enforcement involved in these task forces report relying heavily on victim service providers for human trafficking case referrals; a 2008 study showed that 82 percent of law enforcement agencies involved in task forces, as opposed to 49 percent of agencies not involved, reported that victim services support was frequently or occasionally involved in building a trafficking case (Farrell, McDevitt, and Fahy 2008).

Moreover, task forces may experience challenges implementing, organizing, and sustaining their work. Challenges include the temporary nature of task forces because of grant funding cycles, competing agency allegiances and priorities, tensions across expanding federal jurisdiction and subsuming state duties by federal officers, the conflict of multiple actors operating on the same investigations, and the prioritizing of certain kinds of trafficking cases (domestic minor) over others (labor trafficking) (Farrell et al. 2012).

To explore these and other issues as they pertain to ECM task forces in particular, the National Institute of Justice funded the Urban Institute to conduct a multisite, mixed-methods evaluation of the impact of federally funded task forces on addressing human trafficking, including sex and labor trafficking. More specifically, we sought to (1) understand the impact of the ECM task forces in

identifying and assisting human trafficking survivors and investigating and prosecuting human trafficking, and (2) analyze differences in various task force implementation models (e.g., structure, organization, and key characteristics) to understand which task force models and features contribute most to specific case outcomes. In addition, this research sought to gain insight into the investigative, prosecutorial, and victim service practices among ECM task forces; challenges and barriers task forces face in addressing human trafficking; and best practices and recommendations to develop and implement successful task forces. In consultation with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Office for Victims of Crime, and the National Institute of Justice, Urban selected 10 task forces based on geographic variation, funding cycle, ECM grant purpose area, lead law enforcement organization, and organizational or coverage area (state, county, city, etc.). Six major research questions guided this study:

- How are ECM human trafficking task forces providing comprehensive victim services?
- What approaches and techniques are ECM human trafficking task forces relying on to investigate and prosecute cases of human trafficking?
- Which characteristics of human trafficking cases or features of the offense predict case outcomes (such as prosecution)? In addition, how does the presence of certain ECM human trafficking task force elements contribute to those case outcomes?
- What is the impact of ECM human trafficking task forces on addressing human trafficking (in terms of sex and labor trafficking survivors identified and assisted, and cases investigated and prosecuted)?
- Which types of ECM human trafficking task forces perform well and why? Which task force elements (such as task force organization, size, scope, leadership structure, and organizational location) are associated with effective task forces?
- What challenges and barriers are ECM human trafficking task forces facing?

To answer these research questions, we conducted qualitative and quantitative analyses using the following data sources:

- **In-depth interviews with task force stakeholders.** We interviewed 143 task force stakeholders, including 60 law enforcement officials, 23 prosecutors, 55 victim service providers, and 5 other relevant task force stakeholders (e.g., county government, communications staff) across our study's 10 diverse ECM task forces.
- **Closed case files of law enforcement investigations into human trafficking.** We reviewed and coded 226 closed law enforcement case files of investigations identified as involving human trafficking collected from 8 of the 10 participating ECM task forces. Case files included 257 suspects and 208 survivors. Case files were pulled from a random sample of 30 to 40 cases per task force that had occurred since the task force began receiving ECM funding.
- **Data from the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Performance Measurement Tool and the Office for Victims of Crime's Trafficking Information Management System.** We received quarterly administrative performance metrics on law enforcement investigations and prosecutions (from

the Performance Measurement Tool) and survivors identified and assisted (from the Trafficking Information Management System).

## Relationships between ECM Task Force Stakeholders

The findings highlighted in this brief emerged from our data analysis and directly from stakeholders' responses to interview questions about task force collaboration. In interviews with these stakeholders, we gained insight into the relationships between the core stakeholder groups—namely law enforcement, victim service providers, and prosecutors.

### Victim Service Providers and Law Enforcement

In all 10 ECM task forces that participated in this study, victim service providers and law enforcement partnered and collaborated, but **the strength of these relationships varied**. In some cases, these relationships preceded the ECM grant funding. But in many cases, an ECM task force provided an additional vehicle for the two stakeholder groups to build personal and professional relationships. Victim service providers and law enforcement respondents said the task forces were opportunities to **develop relationships of mutual respect** and feeling more comfortable working together on antitrafficking work, which resulted in better outcomes for survivors. Stakeholders said increased collaboration **improved information sharing** between law enforcement and victim service providers in ongoing investigations and helped move case investigations along. These partnerships also helped bridge gaps in trust and communication between law enforcement and survivors.

It's an important part of the things that we do: the collaboration, the teamwork, and really liking each other. It makes a difference because you can see task forces working together, but you're just working together professionally, but we don't have that. We are working together professionally, but we also like each other. —Service provider

Yet, victim service providers and law enforcement did cite **communication struggles**. Some victim service providers expressed that it was hard working with law enforcement, especially regarding survivors' confidentiality. Because of the nature of their work, **victim service providers are professionally obligated to uphold certain levels of confidentiality for their clients**, meaning they cannot share certain details with law enforcement. Law enforcement officials, on the other hand, have their own ethical obligations concerning confidentiality and case/investigation integrity. This can be a barrier to collaboration and communication, as stakeholders are bound by the standards of their professions. Furthermore, it can be a source of frustration for law enforcement officials, who, for example, may benefit from knowing a survivor's location but may not be able to solicit that information from victim service providers.

There are some issues...as far as getting things reported to us when it needs to be and then us notifying them on the back end of things that they need to know. I think that communication both ways is lacking. —Law enforcement official

Stakeholders from one task force mentioned that victim service providers believe law enforcement officials do not tell them enough about survivors' current legal situations; similarly, law enforcement officials do not think service providers reply quickly enough to their requests or provide them with satisfactory follow-up information. But despite these communication challenges, stakeholders agreed that task forces help mitigate some issues. For instance, task force meetings are opportunities for victim service providers and law enforcement officials to troubleshoot problems together and ensure their priorities are aligned.

## Law Enforcement and Prosecutors

Task force stakeholders also cited strong partnerships between law enforcement and prosecutors. Law enforcement officials and prosecutors noted **preexisting relationships** before the task force was established, but half the sites explicitly mentioned that the task forces enhanced working relationships and increased collaboration. For example, prosecutors from several task forces mentioned that they now work more closely with law enforcement and regularly discuss cases together.

However, prosecutors and law enforcement also experienced challenges working together. Prosecutors from one site expressed frustration finding law enforcement officials who had the **time to investigate** labor trafficking cases. Another challenge included the **burden of proof required** to prosecute human trafficking cases—particularly labor trafficking cases—and the evidence that law enforcement needs to gather to realistically support prosecutions.

I would say that prosecution's always a hurdle. It doesn't matter the offense; they always want more, and they always want it better...It's always a love-hate relationship between the police officer and the prosecutor...You call and the officer's, "Man, I've got this great case." The prosecutor goes, "Well, you're missing this. You could add on a little bit here," and stuff like that. Is that a challenge? I would say it's a challenge. Is it something that you can't work through? Absolutely not. —Law enforcement official

## Victim Service Providers and Prosecutors

We found that victim service providers and prosecutors **interacted less with each other than with law enforcement**. When collaboration occurred between these groups, it primarily involved victim service providers connecting prosecutors with survivors to help prosecutors build a good rapport with survivors pretrial. Prosecutors from 7 of the 10 task forces indicated they engage and communicate with survivors through victim advocates or service providers. But prosecutors are only involved with and provide support to victims when their assistance is necessary. Victim service providers, on the other hand, work with victims to help them prepare impact statements and testimonies, provide transportation and clothing for court proceedings, help them gauge what to expect in the courtroom, and explain the process and the layout of the court.

I got to interact a little bit here and there but not a ton, really. I think that's partially due to a lot of our clients don't wanna report things, so now you have a lower involvement with the legal services. —Service provider

Victim service providers and prosecutors are likely more disconnected than other stakeholders we interviewed because their goals differ, and **their work does not overlap as much** as the work between law enforcement and prosecutors. For example, prosecutors focus on cases' prosecution and legal system outcomes, whereas victim service providers focus on survivors' immediate and long-term needs.

With prosecution, their goal is prosecution, obviously. Maybe with legal services, it's making sure that that person has their legal remedies. How can they work together? How can we help those happen as a social service provider? I feel like the challenge is always getting on the same page with things. I think the timing can be different for different folks. —Service provider

## Evidence of Enhanced Collaboration between ECM Task Force Stakeholders

Stakeholders we interviewed perceive the ECM task forces as instrumental in facilitating interagency collaboration, improving awareness about human trafficking among key stakeholders and the general public, and enhancing system capacity to handle trafficking cases. They also said the task forces have facilitated **collaboration in service provision** and made system actors generally aware of what services are available and what services survivors need.

I don't think we would've probably worked at all, or worked well on human trafficking, had it not been for the task force and the funding that it had. —Law enforcement official

Before the ECM task forces were implemented, entities may have been working on human trafficking issues independently. The ECM task forces have brought stakeholders and organizations together with a **shared goal**. They have also encouraged stakeholder communication, collective decisionmaking, and troubleshooting.

It gives us a platform to come together and talk and have these conversations. What we started finding out is that we were reinventing the wheel throughout the state a lot. Just by sitting at a table together, we're like, "Wait a minute. Did you know that so-and-so in [city] is doing this, too?" They're like, "What? Really? Who?" and connecting them, and now they're working together. I think, as a state, as a whole, it's helped us work a lot more efficiently, and it's helped us...statewide to start talking and communicating. —Service provider

ECM task force stakeholders noted that collaboration impacted antitrafficking efforts by removing barriers to information sharing, breaking down law enforcement officials' and victim service providers' misconceptions about each other's work, and increasing stakeholders' willingness to collaborate. **Task force members in colocated areas** particularly appreciated the value their proximity brought to collaboration, though even in areas without colocation, stakeholders said being professionally affiliated through the task forces improved collaboration.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, colocation means a task force had a common space in one building where task force members from different agencies and organizations (e.g., local law enforcement agencies, federal law enforcement agencies, victim service providers) could congregate and work together for part or all of the week on task force activities but could still return to work at their parent organizations as needed. Colocation does not mean that entire agencies or organizations shared one location.

The collaboration is a key part of our business model. We have to collaborate. I can't get my job done without other people helping me and vice versa. We help each other out, so it's important not to burn bridges with your friends. —Law enforcement official

ECM task forces had a tremendous impact **increasing awareness about human trafficking**. Respondents said awareness increased in their organizations, in the criminal legal system, in public service organizations such as hospitals, and across communities and states. Law enforcement officials from one site said federal agencies can be helpful when building knowledge on human trafficking issues. Task force members from another site said they had hosted public events for a human trafficking awareness day, published press releases and held conferences, and had video contests to raise general community awareness.

Reports from people in the community, and not just social workers, has gone way up. You can really see this very quantifiable increase in change and everything in awareness. I mean, it's really been amazing what we've been able to accomplish in just [number of] years. —Prosecutor

In addition to collaboration and increased awareness, respondents also focused on the more concrete impact the task forces have had on their ability to focus on human trafficking cases, including **increasing capacity** and building infrastructure to identify and respond to potential cases.

The fact that we have working relationships with the people that are on the task force was not a thing prior to this, and I think that that's really awesome. I think the overlap of knowledge has been really helpful. I feel like we've learned a lot from the people around the table, best practices, ways to engage with survivors...We've really had to lean on these wonderful partnerships around the table to teach us what we should be doing...I think that's been incredibly impactful on the task force level. —Service provider

Furthermore, ECM task forces in some sites have increased **collaboration with federal partners** and given task force members a “direct line” to federal agencies. For example, a law enforcement officer mentioned that 15 to 20 years ago, law enforcement stakeholders in their site would hardly interact with federal agencies, but they now go to events with federal employees and know around 10 to 15 people there.

## Issues and Challenges with Collaboration between ECM Task Force Stakeholders

Respondents from all 10 ECM task forces indicated the task force structure has improved stakeholder collaboration on human trafficking investigations, prosecution, service delivery, and antitrafficking work, but respondents also noted challenges to collaboration and coordination. These challenges include breakdowns in communication and coordination, staff burnout and turnover, differing processes and goals that limit productivity and effectiveness, personality and workstyle differences and clashes, and task forces being siloed or too large and unproductive.

## Breakdowns in Communication and Coordination

Stakeholders emphasized challenges with law enforcement and victim service providers communicating and coordinating while investigating human trafficking cases. In particular, stakeholders cited **differing antitrafficking goals** as a point of contention between law enforcement and service providers. For example, victim service providers focus on meeting survivors' immediate and long-term needs, whereas law enforcement officials focus on gathering evidence and pursuing investigations that can support successful prosecution. Sometimes, these goals can be conflicting, particularly when a survivor is reluctant to speak with law enforcement and feels more comfortable discussing their victimization experiences with service providers who cannot legally share this information with law enforcement. But task force members were aware of the impact that a lack of collaboration between law enforcement and service providers can have on case outcomes and the services and support that survivors receive throughout investigations.

I think learning the law enforcement environment and learning to see things through their lens was a learning curve for me. I was there from the beginning. I'm an advocate. That's what I do. This is where I come from, but wait a minute. These are people that you work with. These are individuals that you build rapport with and you too, you can't help but learn things from their lens. That takes time and it takes openness and it takes understanding, and that doesn't happen very easily sometimes. —Service provider

I think the collaboration and the integration between the service providers and law enforcement is crucial to the success [of] whether cases get prosecuted or not. Because once victims realize that the cops aren't there—they're not out there to arrest you, to lock you up, to [do] any of that kind of stuff, you get better cooperation, and you're able to prosecute cases. Also, victims feel comfortable coming forward and either giving you information about somebody else or indicating their need. —Law enforcement official

## Staff Burnout and Turnover

Task force members noted that high turnover rates in participating agencies and among task force leadership make collaboration and coordination more challenging. For instance, by the time a victim service provider builds a relationship with a detective at a lead law enforcement agency, that detective may be transferred to another unit or promoted out of the department, requiring the service provider to build a new relationship with a new staff member. Furthermore, task force members mentioned that the **resource-intensive and time-consuming nature of antitrafficking work** can lead to burnout and fatigue, particularly when there are not enough personnel to investigate cases and provide the services survivors need.

Especially in certain agencies, you do see a lot of turnover in certain roles, or they get a promotion, or they're moved to a different area, especially within law enforcement. I don't think we see it as much with service providers, but in law enforcement, sometimes they're moved to a different area of the state, or, like I said, they get that promotion, or there's also the burnout where "I can't handle these cases," so they move to a different level or something. Those are challenges to me that I see, and maybe it's pretty typical in other places too, but those would be the bigger areas. —Service provider



## Differing Goals and Work Styles

Respondents emphasized that a **lack of shared understanding of task force processes and goals** can be a barrier to collaboration. Some stakeholders explained that task force-wide training would help address gaps in stakeholders' understanding of the policies and protocols associated with operations, investigations, prosecution, and service provision. Task force members felt that a shared understanding of how to approach trafficking cases and a task force's overall goals is foundational to building and sustaining successful partnerships.

I think it's just important that all your players are on the same page and doing the same trainings. I need to be trained in the material you're trained in, or we're gonna be flying two different ships.  
—Service provider

There's a difference between coordination and collaboration. We can all go about our separate processes and maybe coordinate when it comes to a specific thing. If we're not working together on new things or advocating for things together, we're doing training together, or doing any of those really partnership-oriented things, then we're not gonna build the relationship that's necessary for actual collaboration. That's the first step. —Service provider

In addition, respondents reported that collaboration can be undermined when task force members' work styles or personalities clash. Stakeholders said task force members may not get along well because of **differing visions for task force operations, leadership styles, and goals**. Relatedly, respondents explained that task force members often concentrate more on their personality conflicts rather than the task force work. Furthermore, respondents explained that people who do antitrafficking work must have the skills and collaborative work styles the work requires, especially during the challenging circumstances of human trafficking cases.

I think more so the challenges that I've seen are just personality-wise. Sometimes people just aren't a good fit for this type of work or don't like to play well with others. —Law enforcement official

## Task Forces' Siloed Structures and Large Sizes

Respondents said some task forces' siloed structures and large sizes hinder collaboration and coordination. Members of large task forces noted a lack of transparency in decisionmaking, particularly when task force leadership and subcommittees hold separate meetings to make decisions and do not follow up with team members and other stakeholders to communicate discussion points and decisions. In addition, some respondents felt **large task forces caused operational inefficiencies**.

It seems like every player on the task force is making unilateral decisions. I just hear about things that's been happening on the task force. It's like, when did this happen? Who made that decision? How come I don't know anything about that? Everybody's just making their own decisions, and I have no idea what's going on. —Service provider

Because of their geographic scope, **statewide task forces faced unique logistical and financial challenges** in fostering collaboration among task force members across their states. Respondents explained that it was difficult to support collaboration statewide because of the time and costs required

to travel across their states to engage in task force work. Statewide task forces also faced difficulty matching survivors to services, which might not be locally available. Although statewide collaboration between members of statewide task forces is still possible, respondents said building relationships between task force members who do not routinely work together face to face was a hurdle.

If we have someone who's in another part of the state, it really limits the ability to just run out and check in or offer for them to come into the office 'cause we're an hour, two hours, two and a half hours away, so that makes it difficult. Also when you're going to meet with someone who's two hours away, that's most of your day to meet with that individual, so that certainly has an effect on availability for others, and it feels different I think when they no-show 'cause if you drive up to somebody's house 10 minutes away, and they're not home or you're waiting in the office, and they don't come in and you're like, "Ah, I'll just get on with something else," but when you drive a couple of hours, it's a challenge when that person's like, "Oh, sorry double-booked," and you're like, "Hmm, okay." —(Service provider)

## Recommendations for Improving Collaboration

Based on our findings, we highlight three recommendations for improving ECM task force collaboration: (1) enhance organizational and operational factors, (2) strengthen relationships between task force members, and (3) facilitate more trainings and activities within the task forces.

### Enhance Organizational and Operational Factors

According to stakeholders, there was a lot of inconsistency in protocols within task forces. Members of half the task forces believed **establishing formal operational protocols** would ensure transparency and agreement on roles. Members of only two task forces mentioned that they created protocols when the task forces were first established through the ECM program grant. Members of three task forces said protocols were still being developed.

Also identifying [the] process and putting it down on paper to some degree, I think is helpful. It doesn't solve every problem. Every case is different, but what it allows for is the establishment of like, "No, we know this is what we're gonna do. We know who to call in this situation, and it's not last minute."...I think that would be my biggest suggestion to folks starting up. It's like a combination of relationship and institutionalizing some of what you've identified as being important. —Service provider

Task force members also mentioned that they believed **every ECM task force should have a designated coordinator**. This could be someone who is not tied to law enforcement, prosecutors, or victim service providers and who can be an external coordinator or liaison with the community. If the coordinator or administrator works in a law enforcement agency, victim services program, or prosecutor's office, it is important that they have the time and capacity to focus solely on task force activities, including handling budgets, agreements between agencies, computer systems, contact lists, and other administrative logistics.

Furthermore, there was strong interest in **including more survivors' voices** on task forces; victim-centered approaches place the survivor's priorities, preferences, needs, and interests at the center of all decisions when working on human trafficking cases. There was also strong interest in colocating the task forces; half the task forces were colocated, and members of those task forces mentioned that this structure enhanced collaboration and communication. Task force members in colocated areas particularly appreciated the potential for collaboration that proximity provided.

The colocation is key, fundamental. A lot of people like to say we're connected by email, but having people in the same room and knowing that person's face and voice is so very helpful. It makes us much more effective that we can hand information back and forth rapidly since we're in the same office space. It works better this way. You need team members in the same place so that people can interact freely in person. You don't build relationships the same way via the internet that you do in person. –Law enforcement official

## Strengthen Relationships between Task Force Members

There are challenges with transparency and communication between stakeholders. To mitigate these, task force members need to ensure that law enforcement, prosecutors, and victim service providers **share an understanding** of how to approach human trafficking and assist survivors.

I know that in certain aspects, there are a multitude of agencies that have to be involved. I think everyone has to let go of the territory—who's going to get credit for it...In the long run, what we really need to be looking at is the victims, what they need, and taking care of the individuals who are perpetrating this crime...You have to [get] rid of the mindset of the pecking order or the egos. –Law enforcement official

Members of one task force in particular recognized that they need to work on collaboration, so they are setting up **monthly meetings** to facilitate conversations about their work to generate a shared understanding of their priorities, working relationships, and goals. Members of another recommended that task forces **institute case reviews** to increase collaboration and transparency so members can build a shared understanding of each other's roles in human trafficking cases. Case reviews enable all stakeholders involved in a case to come together to discuss how that case proceeded in a confidential forum. Case reviews can be beneficial because they provide a team an opportunity to discuss together what went well, what could have been done better, or, if the case is still open, what they could fix.

I'd encourage them to really decide which partners they want and to really sit down and talk about what that commitment looks like. What is it that we can each bring, what are we looking to achieve, and how? What is the level of commitment? How much support do entities need? Having those frank conversations before putting things on paper is fundamental. –Task force coordinator

Stakeholders also recommended **facilitating and supporting team-building and bonding activities**. It is imperative to ensure not only that all task force members are on the same page but also that they get along. This is especially important for antitrafficking cases because human trafficking case investigations require considerable time and collaboration.

## Lead More Trainings within Task Forces

Stakeholders also emphasized that **peer learning** can facilitate a shared understanding among members of human trafficking, the traumas survivors face, and best practices for investigating and prosecuting cases and providing services.

I think it's just important that all your players are on the same page and doing the same trainings. I need to be trained in the material you're trained in, or we're gonna be flying two different ships. If I go to a task force training with the [state] task force and you're going to be trained by the [different state] task force and then we're gonna try to be on the same task force, yeah, we can bring different ideas together, but we might have totally different understandings...Our core operational team did the same training when we first got funding...part of that training was team building and making plans together. We all understand each other really well. It was like four days of forced bonding with one another, so I think that made all the difference. If we didn't have that, it would be very different, I think. —Service provider

Stakeholders also suggested that the designated task force coordinator organize task force-wide meetings and subcommittee **convenings on special topics such as trauma-informed and victim-centered practices**, data and evaluation, and service provision.

I would say what's worked best is you have to have a task force administrator. You have to have a community coordinator or liaison or somebody to just handle the community 'cause the community, in itself, is huge. It's a full-time job...I do think that it's important to have an administrator or whatever you wanna call this person whose job is to help coordinate partners. I do think that that's critical and important. —Service provider

## Conclusion

The findings from this study fill a critical gap in knowledge for researchers and practitioners regarding multidisciplinary, federally funded human trafficking task forces, on which additional evaluation and research can be conducted. Importantly, we learned that collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders are crucial for task forces to be effective.

ECM task forces have facilitated collaboration in service provision and helped establish a general awareness among key stakeholders of what services are available and what services survivors need. Before the ECM task forces were implemented, several separate entities were working on human trafficking issues separately. The task forces brought together stakeholders and organizations with a shared goal and encouraged stakeholder communication and collective decisionmaking and troubleshooting. Furthermore, ECM task force stakeholders noted that collaboration had impacted antitrafficking efforts by removing barriers to information sharing, breaking down misconceptions about each other's work (i.e., between law enforcement and victim service providers), and increasing willingness to collaborate. Members of colocated task forces appreciated the value that physical closeness brought to collaboration, yet even members of non-colocated task forces said the professional affiliation of a task force improved collaboration. The ECM task force model has also increased collaboration with federal partners.

Respondents across all task forces indicated that the ECM has improved collaboration on antitrafficking work, but they also noted challenges to collaboration and coordination, including breakdowns in communication and coordination, staff burnout and turnover, personality differences, task forces being siloed and too large, and differing processes and goals that limit productivity and effectiveness. Stakeholders' key recommendations for improving collaboration include enhancing organizational and operational factors, strengthening relationships between task force members, and leading more trainings and activities.

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## Acknowledgments

This brief was funded by the National Institute of Justice Grant Award number 2017-VF-GX-0004. We are grateful to them and to all our funders, who make it possible for Urban to advance its mission.

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders. Funders do not determine research findings or the insights and recommendations of Urban experts. Further information on the Urban Institute’s funding principles is available at [urban.org/fundingprinciples](https://urban.org/fundingprinciples).

We would like to thank the following former and current Urban Institute staff for their assistance with this study: Sino Esthappan, Libby Doyle, and Catherine Lewis. We would also like to thank our project partner Colleen Owens for their invaluable contributions, without which this study would not have been possible. Lastly, we thank all our respondents at the Enhanced Collaborative Model Human Trafficking Task Forces who participated in this effort.



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