



Refining the VictimConnect Logic Model

Toolkit Resource 2

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December 2020

This brief is the second 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 from 2019 to 2020 with funding from the National Institute of Justice (box 1).¹ In this brief, we explain the value of developing logic models in general and why doing so was useful for evaluating VictimConnect. We then explain how Urban collaborated with NCVC to refine the VictimConnect logic model.

Introduction to Logic Models

The [Center for Victim Research](#) describes logic models as visual road maps of what programs and projects are intended to achieve and how they are expected to work. A logic model depicts the relationship between available resources, activities offered, and intended results. It may simultaneously document what a program has in place and its vision for the future. Logic models benefit programs by helping guide program development, implementation, and evaluation. For example, they can do the following:

- provide a view of a program’s overarching goals or vision and of specific program components, something that can be helpful for understanding complex programs

¹ This project was supported by Award No. 2018-V3-GX-0003, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

BOX 1

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.

- clarify the theory and assumptions underlying a program and potential conceptual gaps, which could inform an evaluability assessment
- track progress, changes in program implementation, and evolving needs
- inform the development of research questions and the selection of evaluation measures

Logic models are intended to present information in a visually accessible format, requiring researchers and practitioners to balance detail and depth with visual simplicity.¹ Logic models should be reviewed regularly and revised if changes to the program or external factors become apparent. The simplest logic models include programs' purposes or goals and their inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. More detailed ones may include additional components depending on their purpose and program complexity. For example, a logic model may acknowledge the problem a program intends to solve or the external factors affecting its ability to achieve intended results. Table 1 includes definitions of common components of logic models.

TABLE 1

Common Components of Logic Models

Logic model term	Definition
Goals or purpose	Broad statement that identifies the target population and sets the program's overall direction and intended results.
Objectives	Specific, measurable statements of the desired results of the program that contribute to achieving the overarching goal.
Inputs	The resources a program has available, including staff, partners, funding, equipment, materials, facilities, technology, and participants.
Activities	What the program does, including services, products, and infrastructure development.
Outputs	The direct results of the program activities, often phrased as the size or scope of the services and products delivered (e.g., number of people served, number of trainings).
Outcomes	The intended changes in behavior, attitude, knowledge, and/or skills resulting from the program; may be at the individual, organizational, or community level; may be expressed as short term, intermediate, or long term.
Impacts	Long-term or big-picture—often system-level—changes that the program will achieve.
Problem	What the program is trying to solve or address.
Assumptions	Conditions or theories underlying the program that are necessary for success.
External factors	What might affect the program's ability to function as planned or succeed.

Developing the VictimConnect Logic Model

Recognizing that a logic model is a foundational program component and a critical evaluation tool, the Urban-NCVC team took steps to refine the existing VictimConnect logic model between October 2019 and January 2020. Project partners communicated and collaborated openly during each step.

The Urban team began by reviewing other programs' logic models, specifically their organization, use of space, visual readability, and inclusion of content other than inputs, activities, and outcomes. The National Center for Victims of Crime reached out to the National Hotline Consortium for examples of hotline-specific logic models, particularly ones capturing big-picture impacts of the hotline program on its staff and other service programs. The NCVC research and evaluation specialist who served as special liaison to the research team also provided, and Urban reviewed, VictimConnect program materials to understand the relevant program components, including previous versions of the program's logic model. Previous iterations were created by NCVC in FY 2015 and updated in FY 2016.

The Urban team met with NCVC's research liaison to determine which elements of a logic model would be most important for capturing VictimConnect's key components (for example, the Urban-NCVC team discussed whether to highlight VictimConnect's goal, its purpose, or the problem it seeks to solve). The liaison also gathered the VictimConnect leadership team's insight about the model's ideal structure for the purposes they envisioned. Urban and NCVC also had valuable conversations about whether to include inputs and/or activities, outcomes and/or impacts, and the time frames (i.e., short-, medium-, and long-term) of outcomes. The Urban team created a template for NCVC to complete with the program content and revised the template's structure as needed throughout the process.

“Logic models are most accurate and effective as evaluation tools when evaluators work directly with program staff to develop the models and gain a deep understanding of exactly what the intervention is attempting to achieve, and how.”

—Petersen, Taylor, and Peikes (2013, 2)

The NCVC research liaison refined the content of the VictimConnect logic model by extracting information from program materials and seeking input from VictimConnect’s leadership team. The liaison presented a draft of the revised model to the Urban team for overall feedback, which was followed by sequential review by each Urban team member. Then, NCVC revised the draft and submitted it to Urban for review. The final draft was presented to and approved by NCVC’s chief programs officer and the VictimConnect supervisor who oversees the VASs and their interactions with visitors. The logic model was then shared with the evaluation funder (the National Institute of Justice) and with the VictimConnect leadership team. The model was revised a final time in fall 2020 based on the other steps in the formative evaluation.

Components of the VictimConnect Logic Model

Through the above efforts, the Urban-NCVC team settled on the following key components for VictimConnect’s logic model: goal, objectives, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, assumptions, and external factors. These were divided into the following focus areas to improve readability and clarify organization: VictimConnect visitors (crime victims and people contacting VictimConnect on victims’ behalf), technology, staff and volunteers, outreach and collaboration, and evaluation and improvement (figure 1). The logic model’s “outcomes” column was only divided into focus areas for visitors and other service providers because those are the primary groups that the program strives to impact.

Visually, the VictimConnect logic model achieves the following:

- The **Goal Statement** reflects that VictimConnect’s approach is strengths-based rather than problem-based. It establishes the population of focus (victims of all backgrounds and crime types) and intention (access to resources that support recovery and empowerment). It also highlights the program’s commitment to providing resources and supports that are technologically secure and of high quality.
- The **Objectives** outline VictimConnect’s specific aims for each category of implementation (i.e., Visitors, Technology, VictimConnect Staff & Volunteers, Outreach & Collaboration, and Evaluation & Improvement). For example, VictimConnect emphasizes innovation, reliability, and security for its technology platform; knowledge, motivation, compassion, and awareness of vicarious trauma for its staff and volunteers; and the importance of using findings from the

implementation and outcome evaluation to improve the program. These objectives (combined with the overarching goal) inform each of VictimConnect's activities and intended outcomes.

- The **Inputs**—linked to the Objectives—capture VictimConnect's funding, web-based helpline platforms, and data-collection efforts. They specify key, distinct internal and external teams that support each of the implementation categories, including NCVC's technology and marketing teams, VictimConnect's leadership and Victim Assistance Specialists, and external partnerships with national hotlines, local service providers, and the Urban Institute.
- The linked **Activities** and **Outputs** describe the services that VictimConnect provides to visitors—including technological support, staffing, and outreach resources (including those being developed)—and the ongoing evaluation efforts. Other activities listed in the model include diversifying visitor demographics and types of interactions, updating online resources, creating a vicarious-trauma action plan and online training modules, implementing new technology to support victims, and facilitating new collaborations and requests for training and technical assistance. Outputs are the ways that these activities can be measured, such as the number of and percent change in diverse visitor interactions over time.
- The **Outcomes** specify VictimConnect's intended results, which include improving visitors' access to services, diversifying the population of victims who access its platforms and high-quality referrals, and increasing visitors' and other service providers' knowledge about available resources. These services are intended to increase visitors' satisfaction and help more crime victims meet their service needs. Moreover, for other service providers, VictimConnect intends to be a model for supporting victims via technology, for increasing the capacity to serve victims, and for encouraging use of evaluation. Outcomes were not divided into short and long term because most were determined to be relevant for multiple time frames and the VictimConnect team wanted to allow for more flexibility in setting measures.
- The **Assumptions** focus on what NCVC's VictimConnect team posits that victims need to achieve recovery and empowerment. Best practices suggest that service providers should be victim centered, trauma informed, and protective of victims' safety and that victims need multiple types of support, including practical, emotional, and financial support.
- The **External Factors** are things that limit victims' access to VictimConnect or affect VictimConnect's ability to operate as intended. These factors may be victim related, such as crime trends and victims' access to technology, or related to the types of services VictimConnect can provide or connect to, such as funding and policies.

FIGURE 1

The VictimConnect Logic Model



VictimConnect Logic Model

GOAL: Ensure that victims of all backgrounds and crime types have access to secure, high-quality resources supportive of recovery and empowerment.

OBJECTIVES →	INPUTS →	ACTIVITIES →	OUTPUTS →	OUTCOMES
Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assemble and make accessible resources and assistance supportive of the recovery and empowerment of victims of all backgrounds and crime types in communities nationwide 	Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Office for Victims of Crime funds VictimConnect's services to visitors, i.e. victims and their support networks (family, friends, service providers, etc.) 	Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VictimConnect uses four modalities to provide resources to visitors: softphones, online chat, text messaging, and web resources 	Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number and percent change of softphone, text, chat, and web search interactions with visitors Percent change in diversity of visitor demographics 	Visitors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visitors have reliable access to VictimConnect call, chat, text, and website platforms Visitors have access up-to-date, high-quality referrals Visitors are more satisfied with their interactions with VASs A greater number of visitors access resources that VictimConnect shares A greater diversity of victims are served, including underserved victims Visitors have increased knowledge about different victimization types and services available to them Visitors' needs are addressed in a streamlined and comprehensive manner
Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an innovative and reliable VictimConnect technological platform that provides secure access to resources for all crime victims 	Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Center for Victims of Crime (NCVC) technology team Web-based phone, text, and chat platforms 	Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement an omni-channel, cloud contact center Codify technology testing protocols Develop protocols for updating and expanding online resources 	Technology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technological platforms have 99.999% uptime during operational hours Number and percent change of online resources updated 	
VictimConnect Staff & Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a VictimConnect infrastructure of knowledgeable, compassionate, motivated, and vicarious trauma-informed staff and volunteers 	VictimConnect Staff & Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VictimConnect leadership team Victim Assistance Specialists (VAS) NCVC technology team Existing VAS training materials 	VictimConnect Staff & Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop vicarious trauma action plan (e.g., professional development, staff wellness) Convert training to online modules Develop volunteer program 	VictimConnect Staff & Volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of vicarious trauma action plan and performance evaluation measures Number of online modules created Implementation of volunteer program 	
Outreach & Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate a resource center widely known and accessible to service providers in diverse communities Conduct outreach efforts and collaborate with other programs 	Outreach & Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Hotline Consortium members Intra- and inter-agency victim assistance programs/providers NCVC Marketing team 	Outreach & Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update outreach materials Partner with intra- and inter-agency programs/providers Develop a strategy for providing TTA to other service programs/providers 	Outreach & Collaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of outreach materials expanded Number of new collaborations Publication of TTA guiding principles Number of agencies that solicit our TTA 	Other Service Providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other providers have an increased capacity to deliver high-quality services to victims of crime Other providers turn to VictimConnect as a model for best practices for responsibly and effectively using technology to support crime victims Other programs are encouraged to integrate research into their practice
Evaluation & Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continually evaluate VictimConnect's implementation fidelity and outcomes, making program improvements in response to evaluation findings 	Evaluation & Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing VictimConnect literature and data Partnership with the Urban Institute 	Evaluation & Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop evaluability, research capacity, and implementation fidelity processes Use evaluation to explore new ways to best support victims via technology 	Evaluation & Improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluability assessment, evaluation plan, & implementation toolkit created New ways to use technology to support victims are tested and implemented 	
Assumptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To best support and empower victims, service providers should be victim-centered, trauma-informed, and protective of victims' safety In the aftermath of crime, victims need access to helpful information, as well as practical, emotional, and financial support 		External Factors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crime rates and trends Policies or laws that affect the criminal or civil justice processes (e.g., changes to statutes of limitations) Government operations (e.g., a government shutdown) Funding for victim services generally, including other victim assistance providers Victim access to technology (i.e., internet, phone service) 		

Source: National Center for Victims of Crime, 2020.

Note: TTA = training and technical assistance.

Using the VictimConnect Logic Model

The revised VictimConnect logic model has greatly benefited NCVC leadership and the Urban evaluation team. Urban and NCVC have used it to support current activities. For example, it is helping Urban plan its implementation and outcome evaluation and will support future evolutions of VictimConnect.

In NCVC's programmatic efforts, the logic model informed NCVC's [operations summary](#), a key program document. The operations summary and the logic model will be made available to program staff, funders, and future evaluators when appropriate. Thus far, NCVC has used the logic model to inform strategic planning—particularly planning to measure hotline performance—and to evaluate potential grant opportunities. It also intends to regularly update both products and use them to inform choices around technology improvements, report writing, website updates, training new staff members and volunteers, and other operational changes.

In Urban's evaluation efforts, the VictimConnect logic model has been essential for understanding the program's overarching components as Urban conducts its formative evaluation, which includes an evaluability assessment and planning for future implementation and outcome evaluation. Urban has used the logic model to determine whether VictimConnect is evaluable (see the third toolkit). The Urban team also used the logic model in developing the implementation evaluation plan and the outcome evaluation plan (see the fourth and fifth toolkits) and in creating data-collection instruments and protocols (see the seventh toolkit).

Conclusion

The Urban-NCVC team recognizes the value of VictimConnect's logic model for clarifying program components, highlighting its aspirations, and specifying its evaluable outputs and outcomes. The tool was developed collaboratively by VictimConnect research liaisons and the Urban evaluation team, resulting in a stronger and more accurate model. Urban and NCVC created a product of use internally and externally through a shared understanding of the program's vision, multiple stages of review, and thoughtful, thorough discussion of how the program components aligned with the model. Moreover, this process and product allow for modifications as VictimConnect grows and changes. The logic model was instrumental in completing the formative evaluation of VictimConnect, including designing a comprehensive implementation and outcome evaluation, and it will serve VictimConnect long after this evaluation. This brief can inform other programs and evaluation partners seeking to develop project-based logic models through cooperative processes.

Note

- ¹ Although it is a best practice—and often required by funders—for victim service programs to develop a logic model, it is unclear what proportion of programs do undergo this process.

References

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Malore Dusenbery is a policy associate in the Urban Institute’s Justice Policy Center, where she focuses on victimization in general and gender-based violence in particular. Her research, evaluation, and technical assistance aim to improve the provision of victim services, increase accountability through the justice system and other mechanisms, and foster collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

Acknowledgments

This brief was funded by Award No. 2018-V3-GX-0003, awarded by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, US Department of Justice, with a subaward for research assistance to the National Center for Victims of Crime. 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 author 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.

This evaluation benefited from the assistance of many people, and the author thanks those whose contributions made this research possible. Foremost, I extend special thanks to research liaisons at the National Center for Victims of Crime, including the director of victim resources, Sarah Ohlsen; the VictimConnect supervisor, Lavontte Chatmon; chief program officer, Deane Johnson; and former research and evaluation specialist, Hannah Neukrug. I also thank the NCVC Victim Assistance Specialists and supervisors who operate the VictimConnect Resource Center. My gratitude also extends to members of the project's advisory board, including director of research and evaluation at the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, Kimberly Goodman; associate professor and vice-chair in George Washington University's Department of Prevention and Community Health at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, Karen McDonnell; vice president of population health at Easterseals New Jersey, Amanda Stylianou; and founder of EmpowerDB, Steven Jenkins. Lastly, I thank the Urban Institute colleagues who contributed to this work, including Jennifer Yahner, Sara Bastomski, Krista White, Sarah Benatar, William Congdon, Keely Hanson, Erica Henderson, and Emily Tiry.



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