



SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH
ASSOCIATES

The Strong Field Project Baseline Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

In 2010 Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) launched the Strong Field Project (SFP), a four-year \$7 million effort to build a strong, coordinated network of domestic violence (DV) service providers in California. The SFP's three-pronged approach consists of: 1) the Leadership Development Program (LDP), designed to develop a critical mass of leaders to meet the goals of the DV field; 2) the Organizational Strengths Grants (OSG) which funds DV organizations to build their own capacities and test new practices that will benefit the field; and 3) a Networking and Knowledge Sharing component designed to strengthen the networks that connect DV organizations throughout California.

BSAV contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct the evaluation of the SFP. This report is based upon information collected from interviews with SFP stakeholders, SFP event observations, SFP document review, and quantitative assessments. The goals of this Baseline Evaluation Report are to document the context in which the Strong Field Project launched, share feedback on SFP implementation to date, and provide key recommendations to guide the project moving forward.

Strong Field Project Guiding Values

SFP partners agreed on the following four values to help guide their work: (1) diversity, (2) collaboration, (3) innovation, and (4) learning. Although the first SFP cohort had some ethnic and geographic *diversity*, the cohort consisted primarily of white DV leaders representing urban areas. The SFP achieved a diversity of organizational types and organizational cultures throughout the representative LDP and OSG agencies. In terms of *collaboration*, SFP partners were generally satisfied with level of collaboration among themselves but desire more clarity around the different components and goals of the SFP, as well as the SFP's role relative to CPEDV. In terms of *innovation* and *learning*, LDP participants have begun implementing the strengths-based approach in their own organizations, and OSG projects exhibit great potential to serve as "prototypes" that can be replicated across DV organizations.

Information Sharing and Coordination

Although information sharing and coordination among SFP partners is strong, there remains a need for a more streamlined process to communicate the SFP to the broader DV field and assess how the Project is being understood. Further, the SFP should begin coordinating with other DV-related statewide efforts, including those led by the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), the California Department of Public Health, and the Centers for Disease Control. Because CPEDV already has relationships with these entities, CPEDV should be resourced to serve as the liaison between these organizations and the SFP to identify how these groups can partner and mutually leverage DV efforts for the greater benefit of the field.

Participant Response to SFP Opportunities

- **Participant Application and Selection Process.** LDP and OSG participants found the application process to be a relatively smooth and streamlined process. Primary suggestions for improvement included staggering the LDP and OSG application timelines, providing stronger communication and clarity around the

SFP’s eligibility criteria, its various programmatic components and goals, and the use of CCAT results in the selection process.

- **SFP Intermediaries, Tools, and Information**
 - **LDP.** Participants expressed overwhelming enthusiasm for the LDP Kickoff Retreat, citing the coaching, strengths-finder and peer-coaching exercises as particularly useful. Areas of improvement cited by participants and intermediaries included the cohort make-up, absorption of complexity of certain topics, and scheduling logistics. Similarly, participants expressed satisfaction with the LDP webinars, in-person meeting, and peer coaching circles, finding information sharing, problem-solving and peer support very effective and useful.
 - **OSG.** The majority of OSG grantees shared that the CCAT results validated their assumptions and helped inform the focus of their OSG projects, with one-third of the grantees already launching their projects or planning to work with technical assistance providers to launch their projects. All OSG grantees were appreciative of the chance to learn about each other’s projects at the first OSG convening and look forward to future peer networking opportunities
 - **Networking and Knowledge Sharing.** Participants of the SFP field-level activities expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet regionally and/or attend the Annual Training Institute. They were interested in the GIS mapping plans, despite questions regarding survivor confidentiality and the intentions behind GIS plans. While participants were pleased at the level of coordination between BSAV and CPEDV, leaders cited room for improvement around clarity regarding CPEDV’s role in the SFP and better articulation of the connection between content of SFP trainings and its relationship to the larger vision of the SFP.

Baseline OSG Organizational Level Capacities

During the OSG application process, baseline organizational capacities of OSG grantees were measured using TCC Group’s Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT). We compared the results with (1) 96 BSAV Core Support grantees who serve as a proxy of the DV field, and (2) comparable nonprofits in five areas: leadership, management, adaptive, and technical capacities, and organizational culture.

- **Leadership capacity:** OSG grantees was reported as primarily “satisfactory” (60%) in this capacity area, with 40% of the grantees reporting “strong” leadership capacity, although in the sub-area of *Leadership Sustainability*, 80% of the grantees scored themselves as “challenged.” The overall leadership capacity score of OSG grantees was comparable to that of the overall DV field and stronger than comparable nonprofit organizations, especially in the subcategory of *board leadership*.

- **Management capacity:** OSG grantees are functioning at a satisfactory level, with 46% of the cohort exhibiting strong management capacity, and an additional 47% reporting satisfactory management capacity, with grantees scoring strongest in the areas of *Managing Staff Communications*, *Managing Program Staff*, *Financial Management*, and *Staff Development*. Overall, management capacity of OSG grantees was slightly higher than that of comparable nonprofits and the DV field at large.
- **Adaptive capacity:** OSG grantees reported this capacity area as “satisfactory” (80%), with the most challenged areas being *Program Resource Adaptability* (73%) and *Programmatic Learning* (47%). Measured against comparable nonprofits and the DV field at large, OSG grantee organizations scored slightly higher in average overall management capacity.
- **Technical Capacity:** Reflective of the trends of the overall DV field, OSG grantees report significant challenges in their baseline technical capacity, with 60% scoring “satisfactory” and 40% scoring “challenged.” Compared to the overall DV field, with the exceptions of *Fundraising* and *Legal Skills*, OSG grantees fared worse across nine of the 11 indicators of technical capacity. Similarly, OSG grantees scored higher only in *Fundraising*, almost equally in *Facility Management Skills* and *Service Delivery Skills*, and lower in every other category than comparable nonprofits.
- **Organizational Culture:** Overall, OSG grantees reported 47% “Satisfactory” and 40% “Strong” baseline organizational culture scores. Compared to the DV field in general and similar nonprofits in particular, OSG grantees displayed a higher average organizational culture rating.

Baseline LDP Capacities

Baseline management and leadership capacities of the 20 Cohort I LDP participants were assessed via six outcomes that addressed (1) overall self awareness, (2) peer learning networks, (3) collaborative partnerships, (4) sustainable practices, (5) multicultural and strengths-based frameworks, and (6) overall leadership and management skills and understanding.

- **Self-awareness.** LDP participants have a generally positive sense of self-awareness despite reporting relatively high levels of job-related stress, and experiencing a sense of isolation endemic to the DV field at large, which is diminishing as LDP participants connect with other members of their cohort.
- **Collaborative partnerships.** Although DV leaders understand the importance of collaborative partnerships, innovative service delivery, and sustainable organizations, participation in collaborative partnerships is not at the level required to move forward and sustain a DV movement due to challenges in resources, infrastructure and opportunity to develop, test, improve, and maintain the requisite practices to actualize these.
- **Sustainable practices.** At baseline, participants reported themselves moderately low in terms of engaging in sustainable practices, and expressed appreciation for

the opportunity the LDP has provided to build a community of peer learning and support.

- **Multicultural and strength-based frameworks.** There remains a strong need for multicultural frameworks and cultural competency in the field. Both LDP participants and OSG grantees expressed interest in multicultural leadership and cultural competence training as future SFP topics.
- **Leadership and management skills.** LDP participants exhibit medium to moderately high capacity, especially in people/relationship management, strategic thinking, financial and resource management, and communications and marketing skills.

Partnerships and Networks Baseline Capacity

DV practitioners are resourceful at identifying and reaching out to partners locally who can provide coordinated supportive services to their clients. However, these networks have largely been responsive and service-focused, with less attention given to prevention strategies.

- **Statewide and Local Coalitions.** CPEDV is the most frequently mentioned partner among DV organizations, cited as a key partner by almost 40% of the 118 DV organizations surveyed by BSAV. The majority of SFP organizations we interviewed stated that they entrust CPEDV and its seven regional coalitions to advocate and act on their behalf in terms of identifying other fields, alliances, and organizations to partner with the DV field and grow a movement toward preventing and ending DV. Local/regional coalitions are typically more active in urban regions. In general, 75% of DV organizations' partnerships are at the local level, only 15% are at the regional level, and 9% are statewide. Reasons for networking and collaborating with partners most frequently include direct services (29%), coordinated response (28%), and referrals to DV organizations (14%). DV organizations surveyed by BSAV listed over 550 unique partner organizations, reflection the inclination of partners to be local and specific to the region. The most frequently cited partners are DV coalitions/collaborations/task forces (21%), law enforcement (14%), and health/mental health services (11%).
- **Peer Learning and Knowledge Sharing Baseline Capacity.** Few opportunities exist for peer learning and knowledge sharing to occur. Although many resources exist, their dissemination has been piecemeal. The SFP represents the opportunity to engage in peer learning and knowledge sharing in a systematic way.
- **Advocacy Baseline Capacity.** The SFP operates on the premise that to be successful in its advocacy efforts, the DV field must adhere to a clearly communicated and shared vision. However, in our conversations with DV leaders, they emphasized that more important are shared *commitment* and coordinated *strategies* toward prioritizing systems change work. The SFP will help strengthen the DV field's infrastructure to coordinate its strategies toward preventing DV by providing opportunities for the field to convene and "put forward the best thinking." Nevertheless, the SFP was cautioned against crafting its vision and goals independently from other complementary initiatives.

State and Local Leadership Engagement in Policy Advocacy

Despite their awareness of the importance of policy advocacy, half the SFP participants interviewed cited low capacity to do this work. A few DV organizations deemed their participation unnecessary, fully delegating these responsibilities to CPEDV and reflecting a lack of understanding the connection between local and state-level advocacy efforts.

- **Advocacy Frequency.** Among the 118 DV organizations surveyed, only 16% spend 17 or more hours per month, and 6% spend no time on advocacy on activities. Forty percent of OSG grantees and 25% of organizations with large¹ DV budgets report spending 17 or more hours per month, significantly more than the DV field overall.
- **Types of Advocacy Activities.** Participation in statewide (91%) and regional (89%) coalitions are the most commonly cited advocacy activities among DV organizations. LDP and OSG organizations reported higher participation rates across all types of advocacy activities.
- **Advocacy Leadership.** Over half of our interviewees indicated that CPEDV is the best positioned to build the advocacy capacity of the field. The field also recognized additional opportunities to strengthen CPEDV's capacity in this area, for example, by further acknowledging that advocacy wins result from close partnerships between CPEDV and member organizations. This is important in that we found a tendency for DV practitioners to underestimate their own policy advocacy capabilities.

Considerations Going Forward

In pursuit of continuous improvement, we summarize some of the facilitators and barriers to effective implementation that the SFP has faced in this first year, using them to inform a set of recommendations for the SFP as it moves into Year 2 of its implementation.

Facilitators to Effective Implementation

1. **Use of well-vetted logic model and ongoing discussions to guide implementation.** The upfront investment in engaging SFP partners to design a logic model to prioritize and guide their activities continues to serve as a reference point by which to check decision making.
2. **Strong internal communication among BSAV and SFP intermediaries to coordinate across the three SFP programmatic components.** Well-developed internal project infrastructure has helped ensure fluidity of information and coordination among SFP intermediaries.
3. **Effective use of data to inform the SFP's direction.** The SFP is rooted in BSAV's year-long research process that identified the needs of the field and continues this tradition of using data to inform its direction and respond nimbly to emerging needs.

¹ "Large" DV budget is defined as \$9,539,343-\$986,348.

4. ***Continued solicitation of DV field input into the direction of the SFP at key points.*** The SFP continues to leverage DV field input via its BSAV Advisory Group and strategic partnership with CPEDV, but also is proactively working to ensure that these representative DV voices accurately reflect the diversity of the field.

Barriers to Effective Implementation

1. ***Communication and messaging with the broader DV field.*** Although BSAV has made considerable efforts to communicate and brand the SFP, questions from the field remain around the differences among the three different SFP programmatic strategies, their relationships to each other, and the overall goals of the project.
2. ***Distinction of roles and responsibilities within the SFP and relative to other players in the DV field.*** Delineation of SFP partner roles still need to be clearly defined, including the roles of the BSAV Advisory Group and CPEDV in the SFP, as well as the field-building roles among BSAV, JRG, and CPEDV.
3. ***Dependence of SFP sustainability on transferring its responsibilities to the statewide and local coalitions.*** Although these DV coalitions possess great potential, they still have additional expectations and priorities, and may require further support in order to build on and sustain the gains of the SFP.

Recommendations

1. ***Identify SFP priorities for going forward in Year 2 by revisiting the SFP logic model and using this Baseline Evaluation Report as a launching point for discussion.***
2. ***Implement technological supports to facilitate information exchange across SFP partners internally and help ensure that the multiple pieces of the SFP uniformly move together.***
3. ***Provide additional in-person or online forums to support peer exchange and knowledge sharing across OSG projects.***
4. ***Explore untapped networks and go deeper into the organizational management hierarchies to recruit more diverse leaders.***
5. ***Engage in an ongoing examination of the inter-relationship among the different SFP strategies for maximum effect.***
6. ***As CPEDV continues to increase its leadership and organizational capacity, scale up its involvement as an “intermediary” partner in SFP.***

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the Strong Field Project’s first year, there is clear evidence that the groundwork has been laid toward achieving the ultimate impact of creating a strengthened DV field. While there are some implementation issues to address, participant and the DV field responses and our baseline data analysis suggest that this Project provides the critical and timely opportunity to ensure the longevity of leaders and sustained focus on one of society’s most pressing problems.