

Executive Summary

In February 2015, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) surveyed state court Violence Against Women (VAW) Points of Contact to determine how Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) STOP funds are allocated to and used by courts. Under the STOP block grant program, each state or territory must allocate at least five percent of their STOP monies to court entities—including state, local, and tribal courts. This report is based on survey responses from 46 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Three key findings are highlighted below.

1. Nearly all states have a designated VAW point of contact at the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

According to the survey and responses to email queries, only four states or territories—American Samoa, Michigan, Virgin Islands, and Wyoming—were not able to identify a designated VAW Point of Contact in the AOC. This represents a significant increase since the first survey was carried out in 2003, in which about half of all states/territories (26) had a VAW Point of Contact. In most instances, the VAW Point of Contact is a formally recognized position. In other instances, the designation of an individual to serve in this capacity is an informal appointment and contingent on certain activities, such as completing a survey or participating in a workshop or conference.

2. Most respondents reported improvements in the allocation of the five percent set-aside, their participation in planning and priority setting, and coordination with the STOP administering agency.

Three data points suggest improved relations and dissemination of set-aside funds in most states. First, nearly three of every four respondents (74%) stated that the courts were receiving the entirety of the five percent set-aside—a sizeable increase from the 53 percent reported in 2012. Second, the percentage of respondents indicating the AOC does not have a defined role in the distribution of STOP funds declined from a high of 38 percent in 2003 to an all-time low in 2015 of 16 percent (8 states). Third, the majority of respondents indicated that coordination between the AOC and the STOP administering agency had stayed the same (28) or improved (15) since the 2012 survey. Six states indicated, however, that coordination had worsened since 2012.

3. STOP funds are most commonly used to support judicial and court staff training, especially in the areas of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

The majority of respondents reported that STOP funds were used to train judges and judicial officers (73%) and court staff (67%). The use of STOP funds for court staff training is a marked increase from previous years, as are review/assessment of policies and procedures, hiring court staff, and developing judicial resource guides. By prevalence, the issues addressed in STOP-funded projects are domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, teen dating violence, human trafficking, and state-tribal coordination.