

# Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) Community Engagement Project

## Executive Summary Report

### Project Overview

**Purpose:** During Fall 2024, MOVA partnered with Root Cause to facilitate stakeholder engagement with victim service providers and survivors of crime across the Commonwealth to inform recommendations for MOVA's future funding and advocacy priorities in the context of a changing funding landscape.

**Context:** Current funding to support victim services in Massachusetts (MA) is not sufficient. Federal funds, such as Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds, have been on the decline and reliance on federal funds is not sustainable to support services for all victims and survivors of crime. MOVA has been advocating for additional state investments to meet the needs of survivors.

### Key Learnings from Providers and Survivors

A combination of listening sessions and surveys were used to gather broad yet nuanced and descriptive data. Between December 2024 and February 2025, six 90-minute listening sessions were held: five with providers and one with survivors. The single survivor session was conducted virtually; two of the provider sessions were also virtual, while the remaining three were held in-person in Boston, Marlborough, and Northampton. The mix of in-person and virtual sessions allowed for broad and representative insights into MA's different regions. Online surveys were open for survivors and providers from January to March 2025.

**Findings & Outcomes:** The listening sessions and surveys were designed to identify gaps in service provision and to pinpoint the most essential needs of both survivors and providers to inform future funding and advocacy priorities. These methods helped surface common themes related to funding needs, service delivery, and access to services.

- **Provider Insights** - Provider organizations are consistently at capacity, which leaves unmet needs in the community. As staff are forced to do more with less, they are overwhelmed by burnout, burdened by low wages, and face limited growth opportunities. The combination of these stressors fuels high turnover and reduced service quality and capacity.
- **Survivor Insights** - While survivors found lifelines in resources like cash assistance, support groups, and case management, accessing them was often confusing, retraumatizing, exhausting, and slow. Survivors, especially those with marginalized

identities, described widespread distrust in institutions like courts and law enforcement, finding them fragmented, impersonal, and unreliable in delivering justice. Many shared experiences of needing to advocate for themselves when seeking services. This reinforces the need for a more coordinated and trauma-informed system.

Participant Reach		
<b>Engagement Survey Reach</b>	<b>Providers</b> - 44 respondents	<b>Survivors</b> - 34 respondents
<b>Listening Session Reach</b>	<b>Providers</b> - 76 attendees from 64 organizations. Overall, 12 out of 14 MA counties were represented (excluding Dukes and Nantucket).	<b>Survivors</b> - 11 participants. Of these, seven identified Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC); ten identified as female and one as male; and two were MA natives residing out of state. Participants represented nine cities and towns across six MA counties and two states.

## Funding Priorities and Recommendations

Overwhelmingly, providers and survivors reported the need for increased funding for all expenses and service types. The following outlines the identified funding priorities identified through the engagement opportunities:

- **Program Staff Salaries & Supports:** Support workforce recruitment, retention, and wellbeing of qualified and diverse staff in the field.
  - **Recommendation:** Allocate funding and/or collaborate with other funders to work towards workforce recruitment and sustainment
- **Professional Development & Training:** Support a more robust pipeline of talented, experienced staff from a variety of backgrounds
  - **Recommendation:** Allocate funding towards staff education and upskilling, and collaborate with providers to identify common professional development needs
- **Service Accessibility:** Build widespread, public awareness and accessibility for a variety of needs and populations. This priority largely pertains to the experiences of marginalized communities.
  - **Recommendation:** Allocate funding towards targeted outreach efforts in order to minimize service roadblocks
- **Financial Assistance:** Enable providers and organizations to directly support survivors in meeting their basic needs under extremely stressful circumstances.
  - **Recommendation:** Allocate funding towards financial assistance programming
- **Housing & Shelter:** Enable providers to directly support survivors with safe shelter services and stable housing.

- **Recommendation:** Allocate funding towards rapid rehousing, emergency shelter, and permanent housing interventions
- **Administrative/Operational Staff & Expenses:** Support administrative and operational expenses in order to increase organizational efficiency and growth.
  - **Recommendation:** Allocate flexible funding towards operational expenses

## Next Steps

While the findings offer strong recommendations for MOVA, we acknowledge that this engagement is limited in its insights due to low survivor participation and under-representation of BIPOC providers. History reminds us that people historically marginalized are disproportionately impacted by funding cuts and service reductions. Additionally, the reality of the community needs and resource constraints cannot be addressed by one funder, and MOVA will not be able to address all of the funding priorities and recommendations alone. During times of significant constraints it will be imperative to center equity in the outreach and funding award processes.

We encourage MOVA to consider the following:

1. **Foster an environment for collaboration and collective action:** With most providers relying on public funding, the threat of continued federal cuts poses a serious long-term sustainability risk to services across MA. Collaboration with other funders and advocacy efforts will be essential, along with ongoing community engagements to monitor real time impacts. MOVA should consider hosting biannual convenings with providers, advocates, survivors, and funders to foster collaboration, share insights, and explore joint funding and capacity-building opportunities.
2. **Identify advocacy priorities given anticipated gaps in services:** Through collaboration with other funders, providers, survivors, and advocates, explore common advocacy priorities that can amplify the need for funding and address anticipated gaps in services.