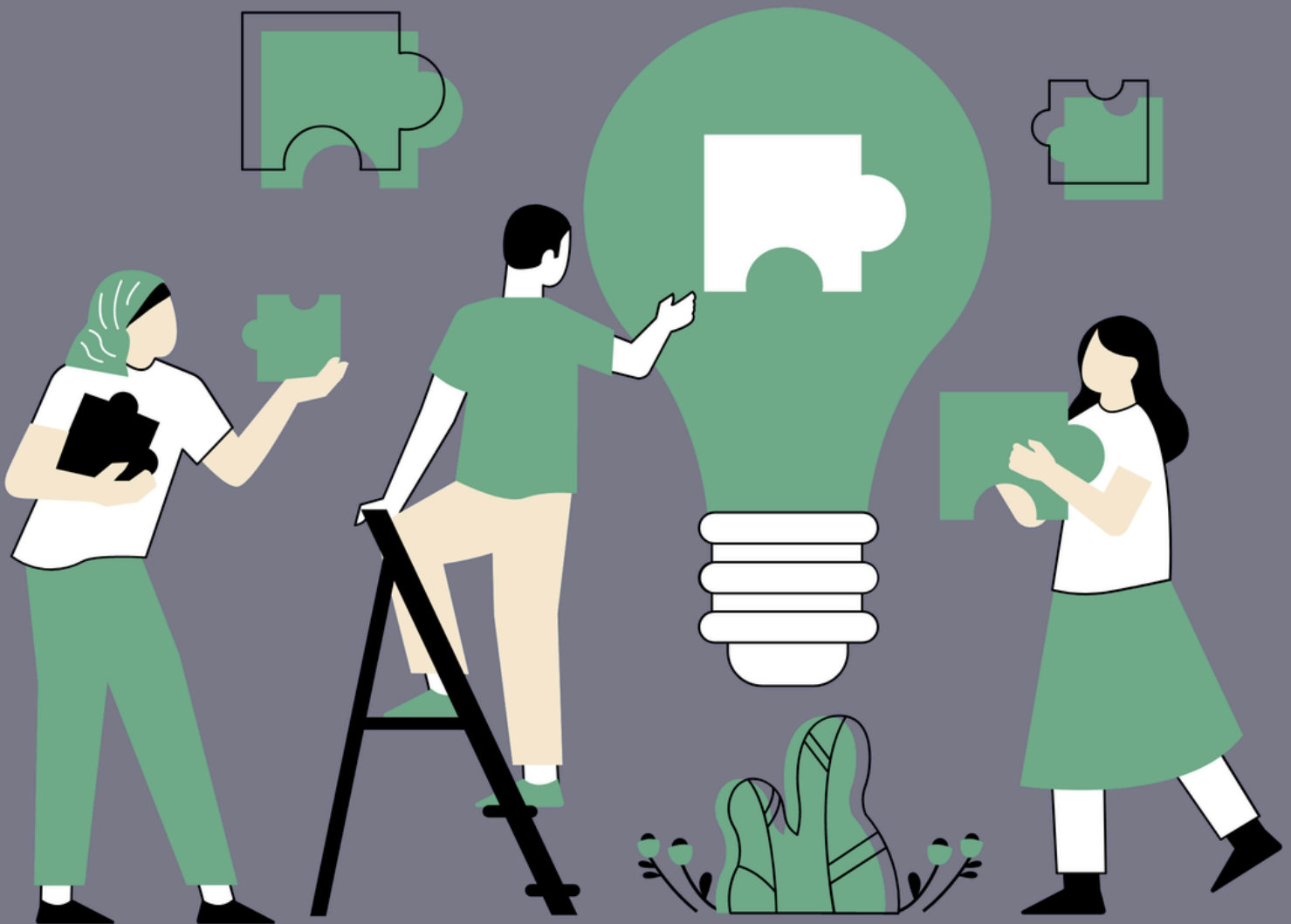


J.B. Pritzker, Governor
State of Illinois



Delrice Adams, Executive Director
Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

2025 ILLINOIS FAMILY VIOLENCE COORDINATING COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY





2025 Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Council Strategic Plan Summary

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I. Introduction

The Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Council (IFVCC) initiative comprises a Statewide Steering Committee and up to 23 local councils. Ten local councils are funded by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA). The Statewide Steering Committee and local councils include diverse criminal justice stakeholders, such as court personnel, law enforcement, and victim service providers. For over 30 years, they have sought to improve the justice system's institutional and community response to family violence statewide through public education, professional training, and protocol development. In recent years, the Statewide Steering Committee has not conducted strategic planning. (A strategic plan is a tool for defining organizational direction, determining realistic goals, and establishing operational stability,¹ and the strategic planning process helps identify ways members can support local council work.) Therefore, we conducted a study to inform the development of a new IFVCC Statewide Steering Committee strategic plan. As a strategic direction-setting document, the plan developed from this study outlines priority goals and action steps; measurable outcomes and implementation timelines will be developed by the Statewide Steering Committee and local councils as part of subsequent planning efforts.

One targeted goal of this strategic plan is better working relationships between IFVCC members and collaborative partners, including community members. Other benefits include improved criminal justice and social service professionals' knowledge of family-violence-related-topics and increased community resources. The strategic plan objectives align with IFVCC's long-term goal of improving policies or practices that address family violence and increase victim safety.

II. Methods

Program Materials

Materials reviewed for this study included content from the [IFVCC website](#), IFVCC Notice of Funding Opportunity materials, and local council executed grant agreements.

Survey

Only the 10 ICJIA-funded local councils and the Statewide Steering Committee were invited to participate in the study. Members of the Statewide Steering Committee and ICJIA-funded local councils were asked to complete a survey about their council's composition, activities, successes, challenges, and goals.

¹Kabeyi, M. (2019). Organizational strategic planning, implementing and evaluation with analysis of challenges and benefits for profit and nonprofit organizations. *International Journal of Applied Research and Studies*, 5, 27-32. 10.22271/allresearch.2019.v5.i6a.5870.

We administered the survey using the Qualtrics online survey platform. The ICJIA program director for IFVCC disseminated the survey link to Statewide Steering Committee members and local council coordinators. Coordinators were encouraged to share the link with their local council members. Approximately 600 local council members and 20 Statewide Steering Committee members were eligible to participate in the study. The survey was open for six weeks, from early February 2022 to late March 2022. Two reminder emails were sent to Statewide Steering Committee members and local council coordinators, encouraging them to complete and/or share the survey with other members. A total of 44 active members completed the survey (e.g., approximately 7% of eligible participants), including representatives from the Statewide Steering Committee and from all 10 ICJIA-funded local councils.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted with Statewide Steering Committee and local council members to expand our understanding of council activities, successes, challenges, goals, and stakeholder training needs. Among the participants were survey respondents who expressed interest in taking part in a focus group. Additionally, the IFVCC program director sent a follow-up email to Statewide Steering Committee members and local council coordinators asking them to indicate their interest in a focus group. We conducted four focus groups from mid-May 2022 to mid-June 2022 via WebEx, an online virtual conferencing platform. Fifteen members participated; they represented the Statewide Steering Committee and five local councils. Sessions were audio- and video-recorded and averaged 57 minutes. Because survey participation was anonymous, we could not determine whether specific focus group participants also completed the survey.

Facilitated Discussions

Statewide Steering Committee members participated in five facilitated discussions during committee meetings. Meetings were held virtually via WebEx from December 2021 to February 2023. We facilitated four discussions, and the IFVCC program director facilitated one additional discussion. During discussions, members provided input on the survey instrument, focus group protocol, and study recruitment strategies. They also assisted in interpreting preliminary results and developing strategic plan goals and objectives. An average of 11 members attended each facilitated discussion.

III. Limitations

The study had several limitations. First, compared to the total number of Statewide Steering Committee and local council members eligible to participate in the study, less than 10% completed the survey. As a result, we were unable to examine differences by council role (e.g., co-chair, workgroup lead, member) or system type (e.g., law enforcement, victim services, courts). Furthermore, most participants were Statewide Steering Committee members or local council members from Northern Illinois. Limited participation from other local councils inhibited our ability to generalize findings to other Illinois regions (e.g., Central Illinois, Southern Illinois). To mitigate these limitations in the future, we plan to use multiple methods of outreach. For example, in addition to encouraging local council coordinators to share the survey with members, we will directly contact local council members by using ICJIA-funded council membership lists in their grant agreements. We will also send out additional reminders to eligible participants and involve the Statewide Steering Committee co-chairs in promoting future IFVCC evaluation efforts.

IV. Goals and Associated Findings

Findings supported the adoption of four goals centered on: a) collaboration; b) public awareness; c) training; and d) data analysis and sustainability. For each goal, a short summary of relevant research findings, objectives, and actions steps is provided.

Collaboration

Findings highlighted the need for greater collaboration among local councils and stakeholders. Almost half of survey participants (45%) were unsure how well their council coordinated with other councils across the state. To improve communication among members and reduce duplicate efforts, focus groups suggested council resources should be shared more frequently. For example, several focus group participants expressed not knowing what materials, such as training tools, had been developed by other local councils. Furthermore, nearly a third of survey participants (29%) occasionally or rarely shared information with members outside of council meetings, yet over half of participants (57%) believed this activity to be a high or essential priority. Focus group participants suggested gathering and sharing council materials more often.

Participants identified relationship-building as another important strategy for improving collaboration and communication among council and community members. Over a quarter of survey participants (26%) were uncertain if their community supported the council's work, which could signal doubt about collaborative efforts.

Some focus group participants proposed using community gatekeepers to obtain greater community involvement. For example, one member discussed bridging communication and collaboration gaps between law enforcement and other stakeholders. Additionally, members emphasized that developing trainings and outreach materials for community members is an important strategy for strengthening collaborative engagement and building relationships with stakeholders.

GOAL 1
Improve local council and stakeholder coordination and communication by increasing availability of council-developed tools and emphasizing relationship-building

OBJECTIVE 1	ACTION STEPS
Increase availability of local council materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather local council materials, such as protocols, training materials, and templates Create a repository of local council materials
OBJECTIVE 2	ACTION STEPS
Establish and strengthen working relationships with communities, particularly members serving as gatekeepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and provide more trainings for community members Develop and disseminate outreach materials to communities

Public Awareness

Results pointed to the need for increased public awareness, including efforts to expand and diversify council membership. Most survey participants (65%) reported that increasing public awareness was a high or essential priority, especially for emergency medical services, corrections, and faith-based organizations. However, a third of participants indicated that their council only rarely or occasionally engaged in public education. Also, a quarter of surveyed members reported that their council rarely or never engaged in outreach with stakeholders to help improve their responses to family violence. Correspondingly, focus group participants expressed the need for public education on domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking.

We found occasional gaps in strategies used by local council members and other participants for increasing and diversifying membership. In our review of ICJIA-funded local councils’ grant agreements, we found that most councils did not have military (92%), self-advocates (75%), and 911 dispatchers (75%) represented.

During focus groups, participants noted that it had been difficult to recruit members from some fields and to maintain relationships with these stakeholders. They suggested building relationships with system and organizational gatekeepers and leveraging existing members' statuses and networks to secure increased participation. Focus group participants also pointed to the IFVCC website as a tool for promoting awareness of the local councils and for recruiting prospective members. They asserted that making updated and comprehensive materials publicly available would increase council awareness and, therefore, help strengthen current relationships and foster new ones.

GOAL 2
Prioritize community awareness of local councils through outreach and the dissemination of local council resources

OBJECTIVE 1	ACTION STEPS
Build and maintain professional relationships with stakeholders representing various systems and organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in outreach with systems and organizations having little to no current involvement in the Statewide Steering Committee or local councils Utilize members' knowledge, experiences, and networks to recruit new members Ensure ready availability of eligibility and participation requirements for prospective members
OBJECTIVE 2	ACTION STEPS
Publicly disseminate IFVCC updates and new or revised council materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine IFVCC mission to include its unique contributions to the family violence field Frequently update the IFVCC website with news and upcoming events and trainings Highlight local council accomplishments via the IFVCC website, social media, and other public outlets Expand the availability of local council materials via the IFVCC website

Training

The need for expanded training offerings and protocols for responding to family violence emerged as a key assessment finding. Survey results revealed that the highest priority for training topics included recognizing signs of and responding to abuse, child abuse and neglect, and domestic or family violence.

In addition, 51% of participants identified emergency responders as a high or essential priority group for trainings, with those responders also needing to become involved in the development of a family-violence response protocol. In recent years, local councils have developed protocols for law enforcement and for prosecutors. However, only 27% of survey participants were at least moderately familiar with these protocols. This low level of familiarity underscores the need to expand dissemination and increase training availability. Furthermore, the survey demonstrated that protocol trainings were among the least commonly offered training type. Participants asserted the importance of increasing the availability of protocol trainings and recruiting stakeholders to develop family violence protocols for additional fields. They also recommended that protocols be shorter, easily searchable, and customized to council service areas to encourage stakeholder utilization. For example, law enforcement officers who completed the survey indicated they never, rarely, or only occasionally use the protocols because they are generalized and not adapted to their local community and need to be updated.

GOAL 3
Expand stakeholder use of local council protocols and training materials

OBJECTIVE 1	ACTION STEPS
Increase use of protocol and training materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline and format protocol and training content to be more user friendly Update protocol and training materials frequently to reflect new legislation, initiatives, and best practices Examine how local council training offerings may help satisfy training mandates
OBJECTIVE 2	ACTION STEPS
Expand protocols and trainings to include additional stakeholder groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify stakeholders to adapt protocols and training materials Tailor training schedules and formats to better meet stakeholders' needs and preferences Invite local council members to share their experiences conducting trainings, including lessons learned

Data Analysis and Sustainability

Study results suggested local councils would benefit from increased efforts to assess the impacts of councils on local communities. Over a third of survey participants (37%) indicated that evaluating their council's outcomes was a high or essential priority goal over the next few years. However, one in five participants reported that their local councils rarely or never used data reports and logic models to evaluate outcomes or to aid with decision-making. Focus group participants discussed the importance of assessing longer-term training outcomes, such as changes in stakeholder behavior and agency policies or procedures. They noted that current evaluation forms do not capture this type of information. Furthermore, members discussed having limited access to sources of law enforcement and court data, such as police reports and probation documents. They recommended increasing data access and updating evaluation forms to better inform their local council's impact on the community.

GOAL 4 Increase local council capacity to gather and interpret data to better assess the program's longer-term impacts

OBJECTIVE 1	ACTION STEPS
Facilitate access to and utilization of local, county, regional, and statewide data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide trainings to local councils on data reports and logic models Provide information on ICJIA's data holdings and other publicly available administrative datasets
OBJECTIVE 2	ACTION STEPS
Improve post-training assessment to capture short- and long-term outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to assess post-training knowledge Partner with researchers to develop instruments that examine system and organizational adoption of policy and practice changes Partner with researchers to assess short- and long-term outcomes

V. Conclusion

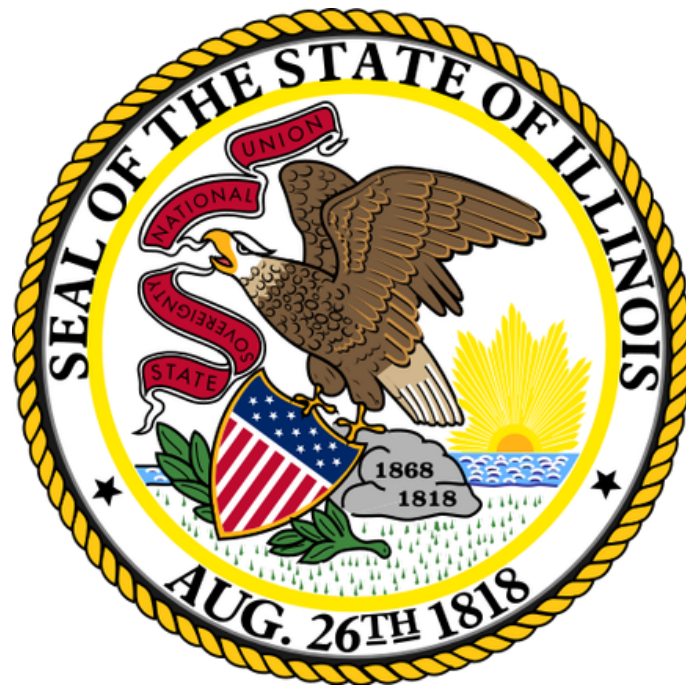
The strategic planning process identified four goals focused on collaboration, public awareness, training, and data analysis and sustainability. Related to the first two goals, research findings highlighted the need for improved communication among local council members and stakeholders through increased dissemination of materials and outreach to communities. The result will be greater knowledge of family-violence-related topics by criminal justice and social service professionals and community members. Additionally, the study found the need to expand training offerings and streamline protocols. Doing so will increase professionals' confidence in addressing family violence post-training and implementing projects aimed at systems improvements. Finally, members pointed to gaps in assessing both post-training outcomes and the impact of local council work on communities. Thus, increasing local councils' access to data and implementing a post-training assessment will result in the Statewide Steering Committee having a better understanding of the strengths, challenges, and barriers local councils experience.

The research findings and strategic plan have been presented to the Statewide Steering Committee and local council coordinators. As next steps, the co-chairs of the Statewide Steering Committee will collaborate with ICJIA staff to create an implementation plan and monitor progress through ongoing research and evaluation activities. As local councils and the Statewide Steering Committee begin to operationalize this plan, it will be important to assess the capacity, staffing, and resources required to sustain the proposed activities. Councils may differ in their administrative support and regional demands, and implementation timelines will vary accordingly. The strategies outlined here are intended to guide decision-making rather than prescribe uniform implementation. Together, these steps will help the Statewide Steering Committee and local councils strengthen their statewide coordination and support more consistent, informed responses to family violence across Illinois.

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