Embedding Victim Survivor Advocates on RFVP Governance Groups and Working Groups

Related Policies and Procedures: Consultation with Victim Survivor Advocates; Managing Disclosures;
Related Guidelines: RFVP Terms of Reference;
Related Forms: Remuneration Rates table; VSA Governance Group / Working Group EOI; VSA Engagement Application; My Engagement Needs and Expectations; Skills and Capability Self-Reflection Tool.

Policy:

The RFVP are committed to embedding the voice of lived experience in all aspects of our work in line with the RFVP strategic plan in which we commit to 'centring victim survivor experiences in our system thinking and responses'. It was endorsed by the RFVP Systems Leadership Group in August 2021 that the partnership will elevate the valuable knowledge and expertise of victim survivors and embed Victim Survivor Advocates on RFVP governance groups (Systems Leadership Group; and Implementation Committee) and working groups. This policy and related procedures have been developed with victim survivor advocates to ensure safe and sustainable lived experience engagement. Decisions cannot be made for them, without including them. Involvement of Victim Survivor Advocates on governance groups and working groups will connect and ground professionals to the reason why we do the work; advocate on behalf of victim survivors; and speak truth through their unique perspective.

The RFVP will use the term 'Victim Survivor Advocate' (VSA) in all policies, procedures, guidelines and related forms. The RFVP values the expertise that each VSA offers and the RFVP will ensure each VSA will be seen, heard and respected as a colleague with a unique perspective and understanding of the people that are most affected by family violence.

The RFVP SLG have endorsed the Principles for Best Practice, outlined in the Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework developed by the University of Melbourne and WEAVERS in 2020, as the preferred framework for embedding lived experience. The RFVP have adopted, and will utilise, the Safe & Equal 'My Engagement Needs and Expectations' template; 'Skills and Capability Self-Reflection Tool'; and 'Survivor Advocate Project Brief' template (renamed 'VSA Governance Group / Working Group EOI').

A minimum of 2 victim survivor advocates will be engaged for involvement on any one governance group or working group. This provides the victim survivor advocate with an important 'buddy system', allowing the advocates to support each other. The VSA can apply for and perform the role of Chair or Deputy Chair on a working group.

All VSAs will be remunerated for their involvement on governance committees or working groups as per the endorsed RFVP Remuneration Rates table that was developed and refined from the Experts by Experience Framework. This remuneration will be sourced from the RFVP Integration Funds and allocated in the RFVP budget to be endorsed by the SLG each financial year.

The RFVP Terms of Reference for Governance Groups and Working Groups will be updated to reflect involvement of VSAs. It will be encouraged that each Governance Group and Working Group

member complete the 'Skills and Capability Self-Reflection Tool' prior to VSA involvement in that group.

These procedures have been developed in consultation with VSAs and with reference to the Safe & Equal 'Planning Best Practice Engagement with Survivor Advocates' document.

It is acknowledged that these procedures are a starting point and will be adapted as needed and as learnings are gained with involvement from the VSAs.

Procedure:

1. Expression of Interest

The RFVP will seek VSAs engagement for membership on a governance group or working group via an Expression of Interest process. The 'VSA Governance Group / Working Group EOI' document will be advertised through the RFVP newsletter; Implementation Committee; with former 'Speaking Out' Advocates who have expressed interest in engagement with the RFVP; and with Women's Health East 'Margins to the Mainstream'. The EOI will include all of the relevant information about the governance group or working group that VSA involvement is sought for. All VSAs wanting more information, or to apply for involvement will be asked to contact the Principal Strategic Advisor (PSA).

The EOI process will be open for 3 weeks from the date the position is first advertised in the RFVP newsletter.

The EOI will outline that the successful VSAs will be engaged as an independent contractor and not as an employee of the RFVP. (See Appendix 1)

2. Application process

Once a VSA contacts the PSA to express interest in membership on a governance group or working group, the PSA will forward them an accessible version of the 'VSA Engagement Application' and 'My Engagement Needs and Expectations' forms. The VSA will have 1 week from the end of the EOI period to complete and submit the application form back to the PSA.

3. Selection process

The selection process will commence once the application period ends. The selection will be conducted by the PSA in conjunction with the RFVP Independent Chair (for governance groups) or applicable Working Group Chair (for working groups). Where there are 2 or less applications, all applicants will be interviewed. Where there are 3 or more applications, a shortlist process will be conducted.

In line with our commitment to the Experts by Experience principles for best practice (Inclusion) our selection process will be inclusive and dedicated to including a diverse range of voices. Police checks will not be completed as part of the selection process and VSAs with experience with the criminal legal system are encouraged to apply.

Two VSAs will be selected for each governance group and working group. For breadth of diversity and experience, it is preferred that VSAs are not members of multiple RFVP governance and working groups. Involvement in consultations is encouraged.

4. Induction

The RFVP Independent Chair / Working Group Chair and the PSA will have a face-to-face (either in-person or on-line) induction meeting with the VSA/s for introduction and induction into the governance group or working group. All current governance group or working group documents will be shared with the VSA, including Terms of Reference and this Policy and Procedure document in a version that is accessible for them.

5. Meeting Agenda and papers

The VSAs will be involved in setting the priorities and agenda and decision making from the onset of their involvement. This will be done via contact with the PSA or relevant Chair.
Agenda and relevant papers for the governance group or working group meeting will be made available to the VSAs at least 1 week prior to the meeting. Each VSA will be provided with the relevant access to the meeting papers via the RFVP website – 'For members' page; alternatively the VSA can request the documents be emailed to the VSA if preferred.
The RFVP team will ensure that all meeting agendas and papers use accessible language with acronyms explained. Feedback will be sought regularly from VSAs on the accessibility of the language used.

6. Pre-meeting briefing

A member of the RFVP team, or governance group/working group Chair will arrange for a pre-meeting briefing to be held no later than 24 hours prior to the governance group or working group meeting. Both VSAs for that relevant group will be invited, with at least 1 attending to discuss the agenda and meeting papers. The RFVP team or Chair will ensure that the names, positions, and organisations of all attending members will be communicated to the VSAs. The nature and scope of each agenda item will be explored in the pre-meeting briefing to assist the VSAs to understand the context of each item and shape contributions they may like to make.

7. Meeting structure

The Terms of Reference for the RFVP governance groups and working groups; and the EOI for Working Group Chair will be updated to include the following –

- Pronouns – All meeting participants will be asked to share their pronouns to create a safe space for the VSAs.
- Ways of working – Permission for a VSA to take a break or step out of the meeting if needed.
- Language – Where possible, minimise jargon, acronyms and overt displays of hierarchy.
- Power dynamics – All steps will be taken to address power and hierarchy (eg the physical set up of the space, or use of titles). Institutional power will be acknowledged and practitioners will be kept accountable by taking deliberate action to create and support an empowering environment so the VSAs can exert influence.
- Discussions – The Chair will ensure affirmative actions are taken to ensure VSA leadership, knowledge, experience and expertise is prioritised; intentional in asking for VSAs contribute; give permission for VSAs to pass or come back to a question.

8. Disclosures

There may be occasions when safe or serious disclosures are made in meetings by the VSAs. The VSA will be supported by the Chair or PSA in line with the RFVP Managing Disclosures Policy.

9. Remuneration

All VSAs will be remunerated for their time as informed by the RFVP Remuneration Rates table and will include the meeting time, preparation time, any agenda planning, and pre and post-briefing time. If additional commitments are required in between meetings (for example to progress an Action Item) then this will be remunerated at the meeting rate.
The RFVP Remuneration Rates table can be found here - RFVP-Lived-Experience-Remuneration-Rates-November-2021.pdf

10. Invoicing

The VSAs will be engaged as independent contractors. The preferred method of payment to the VSAs is via invoice. The PSA will assist new VSAs to obtain an ABN, if required, to enable VSAs to invoice the RFVP after each governance group or working group meeting. Obtaining an ABN is free. The PSA will notify each VSA of the amount that is to be invoiced for that meeting based on the remuneration rates table and the number of hours they were engaged for. The PSA will authorise the invoice within 7 business days of it being received for payment by the EDVOS accounts team.

11. De-briefing and post meeting support

A member of the RFVP team will make individual contact with each VSA either via phone or electronically within 1 business day of each governance group or working group meeting. The RFVP team member will check in with the VSA around how they felt in the meeting; what worked well; what challenges were had; what could be done differently in future meetings; and an assessment of the power dynamics. The VSA will be offered access to external support as required, including group supervision as needed. This will be sourced and funded by the RFVP.

12. Support for Victim Survivor Advocates

The RFVP will ensure that support and counselling will be provided to any VSA that requests it. Many VSAs will have their own support network and this will be determined when the VSA completes the 'My Engagement Needs and Expectations' form and via the initial induction meeting with the PSA.

13. Confidentiality and Privacy

Each VSA may have different needs and requests around confidentiality and privacy. This will be up to each individual VSA and will respected by the respective governance group or working group. This may include, but not limited to –

- Request for no photos to be taken in meetings (including on-line meetings);
- No quotes with names attached/attributed to the lived experience advocate;
- Recording of meetings (VSAs may have camera turned off);
- Assurance that recorded meetings are not distributed and destroyed after the meeting Minutes are endorsed.

The PSA and Chair of the relevant governance group or working group will ensure that the VSAs needs and wishes are adhered to.

After a VSA finishes their period of engagement with the RFVP, a member of the RFVP team will discuss with them how they would like their personal contact information, including email address and phone number, to be handled. VSAs may elect for the RFVP to delete their personal information from RFVP databases immediately after finishing their period of engagement. For those that give permission for the RFVP to retain their details, this information will be kept for 5 years before being destroyed. Only RFVP team members will have access to VSA personal information.

14. Period of Engagement

Each VSA will hold their position on the governance group or working group they have been selected for a period of 12 months, including a 3 month probationary period. At the end of that time the VSA may apply to extend this appointment for a further 12 month period, for a maximum time in position of 3 years.

The VSA may, at any time, withdraw their involvement on the governance group or working group. From time to time a working group may cease as action plans are completed. If this occurs, the VSAs involvement will also cease. If this occurs that VSA may apply for any other VSA vacancies on RFVP governance groups or working groups.

Appendix 1

Is our consumer representative an independent contractor?

The legal test to determine whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor requires consideration of a number of different elements of the working relationship. Unlike employees who are seen to be subject to the control and direction of their employer, independent contractors are often recognised as running their own business and provide services under commercial, rather than employment, contracts.

Generally, a worker will be found to be an independent contractor when the following below attributes exist (other factors may also be relevant in particular cases):

Independent contractor – type of work	Independent contractor – payments and benefits
• has control over how to carry out their work and has the expertise to do so	• is paid for results achieved (for example, submits an invoice for work completed or is paid at the end of a project)
• is free to provide services to the general public and other businesses	• pays their own GST, tax, superannuation and holds own insurance policies
• is contracted to work for a set period of time or do a set task and can decide what hours of work are required to complete that work	• may have their own registered business as a sole trader with an Australian Business Number (**ABN**) or a proprietary limited company with an Australian Company Number (**ACN**)
• is free to accept or refuse work beyond the requirements of any current contract with the organisation	• provides all or most of the necessary materials and equipment to complete the work (for example, uses their own tools)
• is usually free to delegate work to others	• is in a position to make a profit or loss from work
• does not hold themselves out as part of the organisation (ie. doesn't wear the organisation's uniform or use its business cards)	• is not entitled to accrue any annual leave, sick leave or long service leave