

Twenty Tips for Community Outreach

The following tips for community outreach before and during NCVRW can be implemented in any number of ways. Since the goal is to reach as many members of your community as possible, it is a good idea to brainstorm with all victim-serving agencies throughout your community -- do not forget the many allied professionals such as your neighbors working in hospitals, mental health care organizations, businesses, banks, schools, media, legal, social service, governmental, and religious institutions to help you organize and participate in 1998 NCVRW activities. “**Victims’ Rights: Right for America**” should be a priority, and a reality, in every community across America.

1. **Raise the Stars and Stripes for Victims’ Rights:** To launch NCVRW, locate a public place, such as the local courthouse (outside is preferred), to fly the flags of victims’ rights throughout NCVRW. Ask crime victims throughout your community to bring a flag and flag pole to post in memory of a lost loved one, or as a special commemoration in honor of survivors of crime and victims’ rights. The flags can be flown outside a public building in a special memorial area. Organize a special dedication ceremony where every victim presenting a flag can read a special message that is then posted at the base of the flag. Encourage local elected officials, criminal justice officials, and all victim-serving organizations to attend. This will generate local media coverage of victims’ rights and services and of all your other NCVRW events.
2. This year, the **lighthouse** is a pictorial depiction of NCVRW, symbolizing “a light in the darkness, a beacon of hope, a pathway to justice.” There are a variety of uses for this symbol. Talk to local businesses, high schools, trade schools, artisans, and craftspersons about creating a small wooden lighthouse symbol. In the past, such symbols have been used as decorations for wreaths, table displays at local fundraisers, Christmas ornaments, key chains, and refrigerator magnets. The lighthouses can be available for purchase at NCVRW events and/or passed out to justice system personnel, guest speakers, or other public officials as mementos of NCVRW.
3. Sponsor a tree planting ceremony at a courthouse, jail or correctional institution, in concert with allied justice professionals. Make your “initial planting” the beginning of a

“victory garden for victims,” with plans to add to the initial planting during future National Crime Victims’ Rights Weeks.

4. Ask a **local printer to produce bookmarks** (utilizing the artwork included in this *Resource Guide*) that are personalized with your agency’s/coalition’s contact information. Distribute them to bookstores, libraries, nursing homes, schools, etc.
5. Ask key criminal and juvenile justice professionals, elected officials, and civic officials to submit one-to-two sentence **personal dissertations** on why “victims’ rights are right for America and right for (your community).” Use their responses in both media outreach and public awareness displays.
6. Sponsor a **nighttime rally** on the steps of your courthouse or other significant location, and invite participants to bring flashlights to “shine a beacon of light and hope on victims’ rights -- right for America and right for (your community).” Invite the media to attend.
7. Organize a **panel of victims** who believe that their rights as victims made a positive difference in their reconstruction of their lives in the aftermath of crime. Have a facilitator compare their personal stories to other vignettes where victims were not afforded such rights, and focus on the positive achievements and successes that victims’ rights have brought to your state and community. Try to include members of underserved victim populations, such as victims of hate/bias crimes, none-English speaking victims, and victims with disabilities. Encourage a frank discussion regarding the rights of victims’ in your community and the special challenges that are faced by underserved victim populations.
8. Talk to your local child-victim serving agencies to develop a public awareness program for local elementary school children. Network with these agencies and your school board to come up with a short list (3 things) for children to remember regarding crime and safety. Develop a simple brochure called **Safety 1-2-3's for You and Me** (or variation thereof) and distribute to all local elementary schools for special focus during NCVRW.
9. Develop a **list of “offenders’ rights” and “victims’ rights”** relevant to your state. Use these comparative data to show why “victims’ rights are right for America” in balancing the scales of justice.

10. Sponsor an **essay contest** among junior and high school students based upon the theme “Victims’ Rights: Rights for America and Right for Me.” Ask the youth to consider how rights for victims might affect anyone -- young or old -- who is touched by crime.
11. If you have a well-known (or even a not-so-well-known) bridge in your community, organize a **flashlight brigade** where marchers begin on each side and meet in the middle for a special ceremony dedicated to crime victims during NCVRW. Invite local dignitaries and crime victims as speakers. Launch rafts for victims’ rights -- lit by candlelight carried by crime victims -- in the river below.
12. Organize “**Nights of Light for Victims’ Rights.**” Ask local businesses to keep their lights on after dark during National Crime Victims’ Rights Week -- alert your local media to capture the many participating buildings on camera -- good for the late news or following morning editions. Each night during the week take heed of the increasing number of local businesses participating and generate media excitement to cover the growing local participation. Ask every building that participates to pass a brochure about your local victims’ rights and services to every employee.
13. Create an “**Owe-dometer**” for the agency(ies) responsible for restitution collection in your jurisdiction -- your local probation or corrections department or court, in both criminal and juvenile justice venues. Review data relevant to past restitution collections (amounts ordered versus amounts collected), and “challenge” the department to meet a pre-determined goal for restitution collection for a designated period of time, e.g., three months (idea courtesy of the California Youth Authority).
14. Although its been done before, again ask local citizens to **Turn on Their Home Lights for Victims’ Rights** during NCVRW! Get a challenge going during the week to see how many residences versus local organizations and businesses turn on their lights. During this time, ask your local crime prevention groups or other neighborhood associations to pass out information about victims’ rights and services in your community.
15. While most communities do not have lighthouses, especially the inland bound, locate all the points of contact for crime victims throughout your community -- emergency services, social services, units of government, and all victim-serving agencies. Do not forget the Red Cross, YWCA’s, schools, hospitals, religious institutions, etc. Ask them to “**Shine**

- a **Bright Light on Victims' Rights**" on a special day or throughout the week by putting up a public display in their windows and keeping it lit throughout the evening.
16. Ask your local government to put an announcement in their **public utilities billings** to announce National Crime Victims' Rights Week and where victims can seek local assistance and services -- many state crime victim compensation programs have used this public awareness strategy to expand public awareness for crime victims of the availability of crime victim compensation benefits.
 17. Contact all neighborhood organizations in your community that produce newsletters to run an **article about victims' rights and community services**. (For additional information, go to the Sample Press Release, Sample PSA's, and Sample Op-Ed contained in this *Resource Guide*.)
 18. Get local scouting organizations involved (girls clubs and boys clubs) by contacting the leadership of the organizations -- ask them to distribute packets throughout their schools on information available for kids. Create "**Kids Care**" packages based on information from local child-victim serving agencies.
 19. If your local law enforcement, prosecution, or correctional agency is not already offering a "**Run-for-Victims'-Rights Fun Run**" (a 5- or 10-kilometer fundraiser), this may be a good year to launch such an event during National Crime Victims' Rights Week!
 20. Ask your Department of Corrections to co-sponsor an **artwork contest** among its inmate art classes to develop camera-ready artwork for posters, buttons, etc., that is specific to your state or jurisdiction, utilizing the theme "Victims' Rights: Right for America." Provide certificates of appreciation to all who participate in this restorative justice-oriented activity.