Internet Issues and Web Presence in Texas Domestic Violence Agencies:

A Preliminary Report

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Executive Summary

Staff and volunteers at domestic violence agencies in Texas face demands that frequently outstrip their resources; intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors move more quickly towards safer living when they develop self-reliance. In light of those two realities, maximizing use of the Internet becomes one of many useful strategies for modern domestic violence agencies. Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the nature of Internet experiences and resources in the state’s IPV agencies.

This study begins to address this gap through two mechanisms: (1) a questionnaire on agency Internet infrastructure, uses, concerns, and plans; and (2) an analysis of agency web site content and design. Both sets of findings were placed in the context of the agencies’ community demographics -- particularly region, income, education, and population. The questionnaire had an 89% response rate with 81 responding agencies. Of those 81 agencies, 65 had web sites – all of which were analyzed.

The Internet is part of the basic infrastructure of most agencies. Among respondents, 99% provide Internet access to agency administrators and 49% provide some access to their clients with another 14% planning to add client access within two years. Staff access is up to 96% and volunteer access is up to 48%. Staff uses the Internet to deliver aggregated data (85%), find information (86%), deliver agency information (66%), and train clients (40%). Given sufficient resources, administrators would like to use the Internet to help clients learn to do their own searching (66%) and to find information for clients (77%); others would like to develop discussion-based support forums (23%).

The advantages of the web are clearly recognized by agency administrators but so, too, are the dangers and costs. Only 54% have a written policy in place and 46% report that they have no training on Internet use for staff or clients. Administrators are concerned about the Internet being used to stalk clients (66%) or locate staff (54%); additionally, 43% are concerned about potential loss of client privacy due to inadvertent misuse of the Internet by staff.

Clients already use the Internet -- within agencies, at local libraries, and elsewhere -- to find information on work (69%), government benefits (49%), and housing (44%), as well as to communicate via email (55%) and help children with homework (37%). Even so, clients fear that abusers will use the Internet to find them (46%), try to rekindle relationships (44%), and intimidate them or their children (38%). Administrators report that their clients want training in finding information (77%), Internet safety (66%), and accessing electronic government resources (58%).

Agency administrators are well aware of the managerial support required for effective deployment of the Internet. The majority of administrators would like to participate in implementing staff training (69%), client training (63%), improved technology (62%), model policies (60%), and grant applications (59%). Although 52% of agency administrators sought some improvement in their basic Internet access, they lack funding (64%), equipment (62%), and training (35%).

That need for basic in-house infrastructure is matched by a need for client-centered design of agency web sites. Only 39% of the 65 agency sites had a basic cyber-safety warning on the front page; 34% had no mention of IPV on their front page. Warning signs of IPV and safety plans were available on about 37% of the sites; 17% lacked basic descriptions of their services. Established techniques for developing visitor trust in a site’s authority and authenticity were
under-utilized. For example, 94% of sites had no note of updates and 6% of the 1198 tested links were broken.

Development of a statewide Internet infrastructure for IPV agencies could pool resources while supporting local control. Perhaps coordinated by the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV), such an infrastructure could encompass the following elements:

- a holistic analysis of the information, communication, and development potential of the Internet’s utility for IPV survivors as well as agency staff/volunteers;
- shared funding initiatives, including technology grants, to help agencies pool purchasing power for computers and updated equipment;
- model Internet policies and training programs based on tested standards;
- model agency web sites tested to maximize secure and effective support of clients and staff;
- partnerships with public libraries to support access to community-based resources;
- partnerships with any of the state’s three Information Studies programs to develop Internet planning, resources, deployment, and evaluation; and
- creation of client training programs on basic computer skills.

All of those benefits require a well-managed infrastructure complete with funding, training, resources, and community connections. Texas domestic violence agencies have already begun to develop support structures on an in-house basis. The TCFV already provides substantial training and consultative services. Perhaps the time has come to consider a statewide, coordinated approach to this vital work.
Information Experiences of IPV Survivors

The information environment of intimate partner violence (IPV) survivors includes both formal and informal information resources.

- The formal resources include government agencies (e.g., local police and 211 operators, state aid agencies, and federal justice agencies) and non-government agencies (e.g., domestic violence shelters, legal aid societies, and emergency rooms). Staffed by people who have some degree of professional responsibility for responding to IPV issues and consequences, these agencies have formal obligations and an infrastructure that provides support for meeting those obligations.

- The informal resources include known individuals (e.g., family, friends, co-workers, and pastors) and somewhat anonymous entities (e.g., discussion boards, listservs, and chat forums). Usually untrained in counseling and only minimally familiar with the most effective techniques for supporting IPV survivors, these individuals respond from the basis of their own life experiences and may, in some cases, seek information to better understand and/or support IPV survivors.

Information needs as diverse as finding emotional support and civil law information on custody issues are met by these formal and informal resources. Increasingly, all types of information are readily available on the Internet and IPV survivors are making use of that information.

The Internet requires considered, deliberate incorporation into the toolkit of IPV agency resources for five reasons.

1. Government services and resources are increasingly available only via the Internet. Although Texas still has communities that lack reliable Internet service provider companies and many individuals who need state services lack the financial support needed to have a home computer, these state services are moving steadily to the digital platform. Fortunately, most public libraries provide access to this information.

2. IPV survivors are already making use of the Internet to locate shelters, find online support communities to provide emotional support, and to construct their own escape paths. They may need help in doing this safely and effectively but they are not waiting for support.

3. The next generation will take that expectation of ready access to Internet-based information to an even higher level. Growing up with the Internet in their classrooms and cell phones as a norm, today’s junior high students will expect to Google their social service support in even the most disadvantaged communities.

4. Given proper support and training, the ability to identify, locate, retrieve, use, and manage Internet information as an independent individual can be an empowering, strengthening experience for anyone. For IPV survivors, it can be an effective support for personal growth.

5. Overworked shelter staff will always be able to choose among the tools at hand to make the most appropriate recommendation for each client. Adding a properly prepared Internet infrastructure to that array can maximize their expertise and help them reach more survivors.

Mapping the information landscape of IPV survivors is far from complete. Nevertheless, research indicates that they make effective use of information in all formats (print, digital, interpersonal, telephone, and media) on a wide array of issues (e.g., legal, medical, social...
service, housing, employment, and child care). Their information access problems can be profound and include naïve understandings of cyber-safety issues, undue reliance on inaccurate information from biased sources, basic reading literacy, local access to sufficient information resources, and inadequate information management techniques.

Focused work on the information world of IPV survivors has the potential to smooth their path towards safer living and augment the well-established information strategies of those whose work formally requires them to support movement down that path.

For more information on these concerns, see the following:

Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to analyze the Internet access and use concerns of Texas domestic violence agency administrators. The study triangulates two data gathering methods to generate data on agency Internet activities and agency web sites within the context of community demographics. (See Appendix B for demographics of agency communities.)

In consultation with staff of the Texas Council on Family Violence (TCFV), the questionnaire was constructed to minimize the time required of respondents. Although not pre-tested, the questionnaire was reviewed by three staff at the TCFV who suggested changes that were later adopted. Approved by the University’s Institutional Review Board, the 15-item questionnaire was sent via postal mail all 91 Texas Council on Family Violence agencies under a cover letter from the TCFV. The questionnaire was mailed out in print form and made available on Survey Monkey; responses were in both formats.

After each of the five rounds, those agencies that had responded were dropped from the succeeding mailing. In the fifth round, the postal contact was followed by a single phone call that was repeated only on invitation. The five rounds of surveys were sent out by postal mail on 11/12/07, 11/30/07, 12/17/07, 1/14/08 and 2/7/08. The five rounds achieved an 89% response rate with 81 of the 91 agencies participating. The majority of agencies responded in Round 2. The seven phone interviews in round five were transcribed into the Survey Monkey forms.

After gathering demographic data on the agency community, the researchers then broke the link between agency names and responses to keep all findings confidential. Questionnaire findings were analyzed in terms of community demographics and variables requested by the TCFV (e.g., regions and Health and Human Service Commission [HHSC] funding level).

In the second step, the 65 respondent-agency web sites were examined on 22 points related to cyber-safety, usability, and site content elements. Web site content was analyzed from the perspective of a survivor seeking information. Both researchers coded five web sites independently, compared the resultant coding, clarified coding category definitions, and then repeated the process until the coding category definitions were applied consistently. After three rounds, an inter-coder reliability rate of 97% was achieved, surpassing the 93% standard for this type of content analysis.1 The remaining sites were then divided and coded in full.

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Key Findings

- Internet access is common: administrators at 99%; staff at 96%; volunteers at 48%; clients at 49%; clients’ children at 28%.

- Staff uses the Internet for information rather than educational purposes: delivering aggregated data (85%), finding information (86%), and delivering agency information (66%) but training clients (40%).

- Administrators are interested in using the Internet to help clients become information self-sufficient but few are focused on the social-support functions enabled by Internet access: 66% want clients to learn to do their own searching (66%) but 23% are interested in developing the discussion-based support forums which might be used for follow-up support.

- Basic administrative infrastructure is incomplete: 54% have a written policy in place and 46% report that they have no training on Internet use for staff or clients.

- Administrators (66%) and clients (46%) are concerned about the Internet being used for stalking.

- Clients use the Internet -- within and outside agencies -- to find information on work (69%), government benefits (49%), and housing (44%).

- Clients want training in finding information (77%), Internet safety (66%), and accessing electronic government resources (58%).

- Administrators want help in the areas of staff training (69%), client training (63%), improved technology (62%), model policies (60%), and grant applications (59%).

- Agency web sites need fundamental clarifications: 61% lack basic cyber-safety information, 34% do not mention IPV on their front page, and 17% lacked basic descriptions of their services.

- Agency web sites could be better used to share fundamental IPV information: 63% lack the warning signs of IPV and safety plans.

- Agency web sites could better incorporate standard design elements that engender trust: 94% had no note of updates, 6% of the 1198 tested links failed, and 72% lacked visuals of the agency interior.
Questionnaire Findings

The questionnaire [see Appendix A for full text] examined three aspects of agency Internet context: resources, uses, and support needs. The findings reported below in both raw form and within the context of key demographic variables.

Internet Resources

The majority of responding agencies had DSL (64) access; 18 had wireless and five had dial-up access. (Some agencies reported two different types of access in different buildings with, for example, wi-fi in the administrative offices and DSL in the shelter.) Only 46% reported having sufficient computers for most staff.

Some agency staff reported lacking appropriate funding to update their equipment. “Finances have kept us from ensuring all staff has access and having updated computer systems,” one administrator wrote. “On average, our computers are from 1999 up to 2002. We are beginning to
have significant problems with memory and capacity from these computers to support web-based technology.”

Satisfaction with the Internet access could, of course, encompass anything from computer equipment to the reliability of the local Internet service provider (ISP). Leaving the precise definition to the respondent, the questionnaire addressed satisfaction in terms of meeting agency needs and found that only 37% were “very satisfied” with their set-up, as per Table 2.

![Table 2: Satisfaction with Internet Access](image)

Comments indicated that most needed better ISP support, newer equipment, and/or better software. Faster and more reliable Internet access may be inevitable in those parts of rural Texas that still lack established ISP but the funding to pay for it is far less certain.

At most agencies, administrators and staff had full access to the Internet. Volunteers, clients, and their children had significantly less access and comments indicated that staff often mediated such access. See Table 3 for specifics.
Additional access is planned in the coming six months for staff in three agencies, clients in three agencies, and children in one agency. In the coming two years, an additional three agencies plan to add access for volunteers, eight for clients, and five for children.

Overall, access is substantial but far from ideal. The continuing need for dial-up access coupled with the real possibility that the ten non-responding agencies might have no Internet at all, indicates a noticeable gap in basic access. Nevertheless, agency administrators have clearly committed to using the Internet for administrative and staff functions with steady movement towards the incorporation of volunteers, clients, and even the clients’ children. Well versed in making the most of few resources, agency directors are generally satisfied with their access although most see the need for some improvement. As the following section indicates, few are maximizing the Internet’s potential for social networking (e.g., chat rooms that provide on-going support for post-agency contact), training (e.g., online tutorials in cyber-safety), and computer literacy for employment (e.g., web sites that help develop keyboarding skills). This level of satisfaction is likely to plummet if resources remain stable while use rises.

Uses of the Internet

Comments indicated that, for agencies without client Internet access, trips are sometimes arranged to the nearest public library or social service agency (e.g., Texas Workforce sites) with
Internet access. In addition, staff, volunteers, and/or clients go elsewhere to use the Internet for information and support; they do so at home (49%), at libraries (37%), at work (15%), and at local businesses that provide access (4%). Only 30 of the 81 agencies (37%) reported that all agency-related Internet use was done solely at the agency. Client use of the Internet at non-agency sites was described broadly – clients use the Internet to look up legal information about their abusers, utilize divorce software, take online GED or college classes, and look for jobs. Overall, however, administrators report that clients use the Internet primarily for job searches, e-mail, benefits, housing and helping children with homework; see Table 4.

As more local governments follow the current trend towards e-government service development, the Internet access will become increasingly required for benefits, housing, and employment support. Schools are also making increased use of the Internet for both homework support and parent/teacher communication.

Both training needs and Internet fears could be mitigated through structured instructional programs. Client training needs focus on finding information (77%), practicing cyber-safety (66%), and utilizing electronic government services (58%). Administrators reported client concerns about Internet use that focused on abusers finding them (46%), rekindling a relationship (44%), and intimidating the client and/or children (38%).

Agency staffs are primarily using the Internet to receive and send information; the social support and networking options were not mentioned. As Table 5 indicates, training clients was the least common use while distributing agency information to both in-house and telephone clients occurred in 54 (66%) of the agencies.
Finding information for themselves, volunteers, and clients was a bit more common than sending required, aggregated data to reporting agencies.

Infrastructure for these activities was often somewhat informal. While 54% had written policies on Internet use, 14% had only verbal policies, 14% had verbal honor codes, 6% were working on policies, and 10% were neither using nor planning to develop any policy. Training was similarly under-developed. Comments indicated that many staff and volunteers enter with sufficient understanding of the issues to mitigate any need for training; objective testing of that understanding might be a useful means of identifying any additional training needs that do exist. As Table 6 indicates, 46% provide no training at all with cyber-safety and email training provided by 27 and 17 agencies respectively.
One agency is planning to add training within six months and four others plan to add it within two years.

Administrators reported their own concerns in areas similar to those of their clients. Fully 66% were concerned about abusers using the Internet for stalking; 54% had concerns about abusers finding staff online and 43% had concerns about staff inadvertently violating client privacy through misuse of the Internet. Several administrators noted that they were addressing all of these problems to whatever extent was possible but the concerns certainly remain substantial.

Internet use might be characterized as functionally minimal. Convinced that their clients make no meaningful use of the Internet -- due to a lack of computer skills, interest, literacy, and/or access -- some administrators commented that they use the Internet only to the extent required for daily functioning and inter-agency communication. At the other end of the scale, administrators reported using the Internet to both send and receive information, with hopes for expanding use when time, funding, training, and other infrastructure essentials permit. Using the Internet’s potential holistically is simply not an option that administrators have had the luxury of considering. The recommendations at the end of this report examine some possibilities in that arena.
Support Preferences

Administrators would often like to be able to provide services that are currently unavailable or rarely available. In order to understand their support preferences, these “potential” services require further delineation. Fully 66% want to be able to help clients do their own information searching – either by teaching them how to do it or by providing Internet access to those who are already capable of the task. Getting agency information out, particularly to those who never make in-person contact with an agency, is also a highly valued service that 51% would like to provide. Table 7 indicates additional uses of interest to administrators.

![Table 7: Services Agencies Would Like to Provide](image)

The use of a discussion board (DB) or chat service as a means of helping survivors who may not be able, willing, or ready to make in-person contact is already of interest to 23% of respondents. Visuals of the agency’s interior rooms, staff, volunteers, public activities, and so on can help alleviate client fears sufficiently to make contact or deeper involvement possible; 26% were interested in that possibility.

Agency administrators value the utility of training programs and policies as much as increased equipment. As Table 8 notes, 56 agencies (69%) reported wanting to train their staff on Internet use and privacy issues and 51 (63%) wanted support for training clients.
Whether the training is formatted as online materials or a local workshop is of less interest. Additional work may need to be done to better understand the preferred training formats. The opportunity to participate in grant seeking on technology matters was of substantial interest for 48 administrators as was the need for model policies.

Finally, the nature of Internet use limitations was revealing. Funding was the top priority, reported by 64% (52) of the administrators. Technology concerns (35 agencies), cybersecurity (30), and training (28) carried similar weights. Administrative issues were least often a limiting factor (13). Most of these use limitations and support preferences are more effectively resolved on a statewide level than in a piecemeal, agency-by-agency approach.

**Demographic variations**

Of course, these agencies vary widely in their community context. Given the TCFV structure of designing programs for the various regions, a deeper examination of regional variation is worthwhile. (See Appendix B for a state map of these nine regions.) For example, administrators
in Regions 3 and 8 were less satisfied with their access than were those in regions 2 and 4. As Table 9 indicates, satisfaction levels certainly varied across the state.

![Table 9: Satisfaction by Region](image)

These satisfaction levels might relate somewhat to the uses made of the Internet by agency clients (see Table 10) and staff (see Table 11).
Region 2, 5, and 9 respondents lead in the sense that all have clients making use of the Internet while region 7 includes four agencies in which clients make no use of it.
Regions 2 and 6 are not using the Internet for client training but staff are finding information themselves in all regions.

In terms of the services that agencies would like to provide for their clients, the more interactive applications are of least interest.
The use of visuals can reassure and attract survivors who fear shelters and agencies; photos of interior rooms and volunteers can be comforting without identifying a location or any individuals. Chat forums and discussion boards are certainly useful for those with safe Internet access.

In order to provide these and other services, agency administrators would like several different forms of immediate support. As Table 13 indicates, policies and training are primary needs in all regions.

![Table 13: Desired Support by Region]

In terms of the overall barriers to maximizing use of the Internet, administrators noted five types of problems. See Table 14 for specifics of regional distributions.
While funding is an obvious concern, substantial support could be offered in terms of training and Internet safety support.

Finally, as might be expected, satisfaction rates appear to correlate with the level of HHSC funding. As Table 15 indicates, one-third of the small agencies had concerns compared with only one-quarter of the medium agencies and one-seventh of the large agencies. Oddly, one-fifth of the unfunded agency administrators had concerns.
As Table 15 notes, those who were less than “very satisfied” constitute a substantial portion of the agencies.
Web Site Analysis Findings

The content analysis of the 65 agency web sites examined four main components: cyber-safety, usability, agency accessibility, and content. These components were considered from the perspective of a survivor seeking information.

Cyber-Safety

Seven agencies have clearly-labeled Escape buttons on their front page. Those that do have Escape buttons, generally redirect survivors away from an agency home page to a neutral site (e.g., Google’s homepage or CNN.com).

- Twenty-six agencies offer a warning when survivors visit their web sites. The warning tells site visitors that their web activity can never be completely erased and that if they want to access the site, they should do so from a safer computer (e.g., a library computer or a computer at a friend’s house).
- Thirteen agencies explain how to clear one’s computer history after visiting a site. Six agencies explain what cookies are, how they work, and/or how to clear them from one’s computer.
• Other cyber-safety indicators would include an explanation of the use of Spyware or a referral to a local service for computer protection. Neither of these elements is present on the 65 front pages analyzed.

Usability

• Agencies generally had working links on their sites (94%), with only a handful that had more than eight or nine non-working links at any time (6%).
• Seven agency web sites would require fine motor skills in order to access drop-down menus from the front page; this requirement hampers online access for those with certain types of injuries or physical disabilities.
• Sites that appeared to be exclusively dedicated to families or an older demographic sometimes refer to IPV as “family violence.” Survivors of a dating, live-in, or same-sex relationships may not feel certain their situations fit under the rubric of “family violence” and may, therefore, hesitate to apply for aid.
• Forty-four web sites referred specifically to IPV or domestic violence, making their agency appear accessible to a wider range of clientele.

Agency Accessibility Indicators

• Four agencies indicated that they had updated their agency web site, usually within the last year. Update notices are commonly recommended as one indicator of a site’s professionalism and authority. Undated sites may well appear less trustworthy to survivors as well as to social and professional contacts who may be searching for information on their behalf.
• Less than half of all agency web sites – 24 – showed some indication of a second language or a language gateway. Although links to sites like Babelfish, which allows visitors to translate from English into another language, are less than ideal, they do provide some support for the thousands of Texas survivors whose first language is not English.
• Sixty-four agencies prefer direct contact from clients via phone calls; 34 agencies posted street addresses on their sites, usually for administrative offices with instructions for survivors to call first if they were looking for a residential agency. Thirty-four agencies give only their mailing address to survivors; 52 had an email address. (See Table 17.)
• Only one agency has a chat or IM capability as a point of contact with clients.

**Web site Content**

Web site content should always include basic descriptions of agency services but 17% did not. See Table 18 for details.
Protective orders and safety plans are at least mentioned on many agency web sites, though protective orders are more prevalent; 38 agencies mentioned orders as a service offered or explained what they could be used for and how they might be obtained.

Safety plans are available as a PDF or as a general list on 26 sites. They range from short lists of items survivors should collect in advance of preparing to leave to detailed checklists.

An agency’s definition of Intimate Partner Violence, evident on 24 sites, is not necessarily the same as a legal definition of domestic violence in a particular county or jurisdiction but can be very helpful to survivors first coming to grips with their situation.

Only 18 agencies had clearly labeled or easily distinguishable photograph of some aspect of the agency on its web site including photographs of survivors and their children (without identifying information) or photographs of an agency’s living room area. Such visuals can provide significant reassurance to survivors who expect a human warehouse and/or judgmental staff.

Many agencies – 55 – explain the services offered, including legal counseling and child-care assistance, at their particular shelter or agency.

Only 33 referred to at least one other agency at which the client could seek help with additional resources.

Half of all agencies (33) refer clients to agencies that might not provide direct contact to clients (e.g., the National Network to End Domestic Violence, which serves administrators who then serve clients).
Conclusions

Cyber Safety

• There is real concern that clients are insufficiently prepared for Internet risks. Thirty agencies listed safety as an agency Internet use limitation; 54 said they wanted to offer clients the ability to search the web independently or unmediated by staff. “I don’t think they are concerned, but staff is,” one administrator wrote. Another said, “We are generally more concerned than (the survivors are)” about cyber safety.

• Sophisticated group and/or targeted training is required to help keep staff and clients at (1) a minimal understanding of cyber safety and (2) a basic skill level in information searching; 28 agencies listed training as a limitation on their agency’s use of the Internet and 56 agencies said staff training was a necessary resource. Currently, training largely occurs as one-on-one support between peers on an as-needed basis. “I’d like to know how to get government information,” one administrator said. “Clients are further along than the staff.”

• Most agencies do not have a specific written policy related to the Internet, possibly because they do not have broad enough access to the Internet or because they consider informal oversight sufficient.

• The social aspects of Internet use (e.g., online dating, MySpace, FaceBook) were listed by several respondents as a significant concern. Clients may not be sufficiently skeptical of or prepared for such relationships. These new and possibly predatory relationships required a heightened level of cyber-safety awareness.

Internet Education

• Carefully focused training is required to help keep staff and clients at a basic skill level in information searching. Currently, training largely occurs as one-on-one support between peers on an as-needed basis. “I’d like to know how to get government information,” one administrator said. “Clients are further along than the staff.”

• In some settings, the teenage children are called on to fill an adult role as they provide a human bridge to the Internet at the agency and/or local library.

• Most agencies do not have a specific written policy related to the Internet, possibly because they do not have broad enough access to the Internet or because they consider informal oversight sufficient. Including an expectation on training might be useful when such policies are created.
Agency administrators expressed concern that inadequate Internet education could lead clients or staff to (a) accidentally lose control of confidential data by emailing it to the wrong person or (b) be re-victimized, stalked, or located by abusers. One agency expressed concerned about legal action against the agency due to loss of client data.

Funding for Equipment and Space

- Funding is a challenge for agencies that want to expand their online services but need updated equipment, software, and cyber-safety guidelines. “Keeping up to date on equipment is always an issue,” one administrator said.
- Some agencies reported that even if they had money for up-to-date computers, there is usually not enough physical space for the computers that would enable agencies to keep staff and clients connected. “We would like to get staff computers, but we don’t have enough space for them,” one administrator said.
- Technical support for wider use of the Internet was also an issue for some. “Technical and equipment issues are a primary concern,” an agency administrator wrote. “If we had more resources/tech support, we could overcome obstacles of policy, privacy and training.”
Recommendations

A number of recommendations are possible on the basis of these findings. Listed below are a few recommendations that appear most evident. The opportunity to discuss these findings with agency staff, TCFV staff, and any other community stakeholders would certainly reveal additional recommendations and insights. We welcome any additional suggestions and will update this list as needed.

Coordination

A statewide resource-sharing coalition of TCFV-affiliated agencies is recommended to pool purchasing power for computers and updated equipment.

Training, capacity-building, and infrastructure grants could be coordinated on a regional and/or statewide basis. Using public libraries as community partners where needed, these grants could encompass the resources needed to support cyber-safety education for staff and clients as well as basic information seeking.

Partnerships with local public libraries could shift appropriate information responsibilities to the information professionals in those communities with properly funded libraries. A prototype program could be established in a few representative (i.e., urban, rural, and border) communities, refined, and expanded statewide.

A single, web-based repository of policy models, training tools, and well-reviewed resources could be created and maintained for all to use. Plentifully supplied with feedback forms, such a site could garner new information needs from clients and staff to keep ahead of the constantly changing information evolution.

Web 2.0 Opportunities

Web 2.0 refers to all those interactive, user-driven developments that give Internet users the chance to shape their own online environments. IPV survivors already use Web 2.0 when they use forums such as “Broken Spirits” [http://www.brokenspirits.com/] to share advice on how best to move towards safer living. Additional opportunities are available but they require careful coordination and well-reasoned planning. A coordinated examination of opportunities might include discussion of the following questions:

• How could the Internet be used to reach those survivors who currently do not come into shelters or agencies?
• How could it be used to follow-up with and provide online support for those who have left shelters or local jurisdictions in their efforts to move on with their lives?
• How could survivors shape their own statewide community to help each other with advice, referrals, and emotional support?
• Given the potential value of bibliotherapy, art therapy, and writing therapy, how could an online outlet for creative and introspective products (e.g., poetry, book reviews, sketches) contribute to building a community of support?
• How could the development of information literacy skills\(^2\) strengthen, empower, and develop the self-sufficiency of survivors?
• How could various Web 2.0 functions (e.g., tagging) help the children of survivors build a support community and information environment of their own?
• How could various Web 2.0 resources (e.g., wikis and blogs) help agency staffers problem-solve and share insights?

Administrative In-House Infrastructure

Since any Internet access can permit “abusers to enter the shelter electronically,” a one-stop advice line on trouble-shooting cyber-safety concerns could help all agencies keep abreast of their own local concerns. Grant-funded cooperation with an Information Studies program might provide a means of developing such a service.

An annual update of an appropriately modified version of this study could track changing administrative needs, clients concerns, and general expectations. Trends could be marked and used to target grant-seeking efforts and maximize resource deployment.

Targeted Support

Too many agencies have dial-up access; it is quite likely that non-respondents have no access at all. For these agencies, it is especially important to build a partnership with the local library to gain whatever local Internet support is possible.

Regardless of their own level of access, agencies serving rural communities may benefit from coordinating with public libraries to develop a strong telephone reference system that would supplement the 211 systems.

Agencies in communities that border other states and Mexico may need to coordinate with the information agencies in contiguous communities. The Internet can facilitate that kind of exchange with its use of both text and VOI (Voice over Internet) channels. Even a single site across a border can provide a bridge for accurate, appropriate information when well-prepared agency staff is involved.

\(^2\) The American Library Association defines information literacy as a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." ALA also states that "information literacy is a survival skill in the Information Age." "Information literacy forms the basis for lifelong learning. It is common to all disciplines, to all learning environments, and to all levels of education. It enables learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning." [From http://lib1.bmcc.cuny.edu/help/glossary.html#inflit; 5/15/08; A. Phillip Randolph Memorial Library, Research Help, Glossary, Information Literacy.]
Appendix A

Questionnaire

Current Internet Resources

1. Is it possible to get to the Internet at your agency? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ Yes, we use a dial-up connection
   ___ Yes, we have DSL connection for all of our computers
   ___ Yes, we have a wireless network for all of our computers
   ___ Yes, but only a few staff members have access to computers on the Internet
   ___ Yes, most staff have access to computers on the Internet
   ___ Not at this time but we plan to have Internet access within 6 months
   ___ Not at this time but we plan to have Internet access between 6 months and 2 years
   ___ No, and we have no plans to get access. Please explain what concerns (such as money, time, training, safety issues) are behind your current decision:
       ______________________________________________________________________
       ______________________________________________________________________
       ______________________________________________________________________

[If there is no Internet availability at your agency, please skip to Question 4.]

2. How satisfied are you with your agency’s current level of Internet availability?
   ___ Very satisfied, our computers generally meet our most important needs
   ___ Pretty satisfied, our computers generally meet our more common needs
   ___ Satisfied, our computers meet our essential, basic needs
   ___ Less than satisfied, our computers do not meet our basic needs but they help
   ___ Not satisfied at all, what we have is far from what we need
   ___ Other, please explain:
       ______________________________________________________________________
       ______________________________________________________________________
       ______________________________________________________________________

3. Who within your agency has direct Internet access through a designated computer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Currently have</th>
<th>Plan to add within 6 months</th>
<th>Plan to add within 7 months to 2 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Service staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients’ children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please share any additional comments: ____________________________________________

__________________________________________

**Uses of the Internet**

4. How do clients want to use the Internet at your agency? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ They don’t want to use it
   ___ To check their email
   ___ To search for work
   ___ To search for housing
   ___ To find government benefits or fill out government forms
   ___ To help their children do homework
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________________________

__________________________________________

5. What concerns do your clients have about the Internet? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ It is dangerous because their abusers may use it to find them
   ___ It gives their abusers a way to intimidate them or contact their children
   ___ Their abuser may use email to try to rekindle their relationship
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________________________

__________________________________________

6. What do you see as your clients’ most pressing Internet training needs? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ How to communicate with government and social service agencies on-line
   ___ How to use e-mail and web sites safely
   ___ How to find information about housing, jobs, schools, and other essentials
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________________________

__________________________________________

7. Do staff, volunteers, or clients go elsewhere to access the Internet for agency-related business? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ Yes, some use it at home
   ___ Yes, some use it at the public library
   ___ Yes, some use it at local businesses that have publicly available access
   ___ Yes, some use it at their work places
   ___ No, agency-related business is only done at the agency
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________________________

__________________________________________
8. Among staff, how is the Internet used at your agency to best support or serve clients? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ Sending aggregated agency data to other agencies or funding sources
   ___ Finding information for clients on housing, jobs, education, social services, etc.
   ___ Helping explain and/or identify agency services
   ___ Training clients to find materials on their own (e.g., school materials for their children, social service agency forms)
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________

   ________________________________________________________

9. Does your agency have a policy concerning access to or use of the Internet? (If you have a written policy, please delete any identifying information and include a copy of it if you are willing to do so.)
   ___ Yes, we have a written policy
   ___ Yes, we have an informal policy that’s explained verbally but not written down
   ___ Yes, we have an honor code among staff that they will use the Internet responsibly
   ___ No, we don’t have a policy about use of the Internet but we are working on it
   ___ No, we don’t have a policy about use of the Internet and don’t have immediate plans to create one.
   ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________

   ________________________________________________________

10. What kind of Internet training, if any, is provided for your agency’s staff, volunteers, and/or clients? (Please check all that apply.)
    ___ None, we have no Internet training of any kind
    ___ We provide training on safety, security, privacy, and/or confidentiality
    ___ We provide training on using email and/or searching the Internet
    ___ We plan to provide training within the next 6 months
    ___ We plan to provide training in the next 6 to 18 months
    ___ Other, please explain: ________________________________

    ________________________________________________________

    ________________________________________________________

    ________________________________________________________
11. What privacy and confidentiality issues concern you as they relate to the Internet? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ Abusers using the Internet to stalk our clients
   ___ Abusers might find our agency, staff, or volunteers
   ___ Loss of client privacy due to staff/volunteer actions
   ___ Other, please explain: ____________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

Support Preferences

12. What Internet-based services would you like to provide your agency clients? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ The ability for my staff to send aggregated agency data to other agencies
   ___ The ability for clients to do their own searching for housing, jobs, education, and other social services
   ___ Providing visuals (such as photos, floor plans, or video tours) of our facilities on the Internet for potential clients
   ___ Providing an explanation of our services on the Internet
   ___ Providing Internet-based discussion boards or chat rooms
   ___ Other, please explain: ____________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

13. What Internet support resources would you like to have available to you for immediate use? (Please check all that apply.)
   ___ Model or sample policies
   ___ Model or sample training materials for clients
   ___ Model or sample training materials for staff and/or volunteers
   ___ The opportunity to participate in a coordinated grant application
   ___ More/better computers and/or software
   ___ Online training materials on the following topics: ____________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ___ Someone to give a workshop in my community on the following topics:
   ________________________________________________________________
14. What concerns keep your agency from using the Internet as fully as you would like? (Please check all that apply.)

___ Administrative issues such as developing policies and liability
___ Technical issues such as managing a web site, maintaining equipment
___ Safety, security, privacy
___ Training for staff, volunteers, and/or clients
___ Funding for equipment and access
___ Other, please explain: ____________________________________________

Please share any additional concerns, requests, suggestions, or comments that you have on developing effective Internet use in your agency.
Appendix B: Demographic Data for Questionnaire Respondents’ Communities

Demographic information was gathered on each community using the 2000 census data as well as TCFV categories for HHSC funding and state regions. If analysis on a particular variable would be of use, please let us know.

Populations ranged from over 3 million to under 3,000.

![Table B1: Population Distribution](image)

Sixty-two percent of respondents were from communities of 100,000 or fewer.
Median age ranged from 24 to 44.

Over half of the responding communities had a median age of 30-34 years.
Median income ranged from $9,765 to $35,460.

Almost 60% of responding agencies were in communities with a median income of $20,000 or less.
Region distribution ranged from 2% to 20%.

The TCFV regions (see map below) group counties with reference to population size, culture, topography, and geographic distance. As might be expected, a greater response rate was obtained from the more populous parts of the state; non-respondents might have little or no stable Internet access on a community-wide basis.
HHSC funding distribution ranged from 7 to 27 agencies.
Appendix C: Resources

Resources for Information on Web site Building

Safety Net: The National Safe and Strategic Technology Project at the National Network to End Domestic Violence

http://www.nnedv.org/resources/safetynetpublications/

This site offers invaluable recommendations for Internet Safety for Domestic Violence survivors and organizations that serve them. It includes a data security checklist, a description of the best way to ensure computer safety and keep viruses out of agency computer networks, and a useful description of how to secure computers and computer data.

TechSoup, the Tech place for nonprofits

http://www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/funding/index.cfm

TechSoup offers a good resource library for nonprofits to use when they are looking for equipment, hardware and/or software funding. There are also tips on the site for how agencies can extend the life of their hardware and how agencies can accept or refuse donated equipment. The site also has a feature, TechSoup Stock, which shows a number of refurbished computers available to nonprofits at deep discounts.

W3Schools.com, A general, free web-building site

http://www.w3schools.com/site/default.asp

This site is used as a good, general reference site for questions agencies might have about how to build and edit their web sites. There is also a small section on Web Security, which shows how to secure one’s Windows server.
Funding

STOP Grant, U.S. Department of Justice

http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/stop_grant_desc.htm

The grant is administered by the Office on Violence Against Women and emphasizes creating a multidisciplinary approach to helping survivors of domestic violence get access to technology that will help them find legal information quickly.

Verizon Foundation Domestic Violence Initiative

http://www.verizonreads.net/grant/guidelines.shtml

The Verizon Foundation encourages agencies that serve Intimate Partner Violence survivors to apply for grants online. There are a number of eligibility guidelines, but the foundation says that serving domestic violence survivors is one of the company’s core initiatives.

Women Helping Others

http://www.whofoundation.org/WHO_FundingCriteria.htm

This Dallas-based organization provides grants to nonprofit agencies that serve women and children. In order to qualify for grants, agencies have to have a budget of $3 million or less, with government funding or United Way funding making up less than 30 percent of an agency’s income. Agencies that apply cannot have salaries and wages as more than half of the agency’s budget.
Exemplary Web sites

The Tri-Valley Haven Shelter

http://www.trivalleyhaven.org/

In Livermore, California, this site offers survivors a glimpse into life at the shelter with photos of the staff on the site, specific descriptions of domestic violence laws and a clearly labeled Escape button at the top of the page, in case a survivor is surfing the Internet at home and her abuser walks in unexpectedly. The shelter web site also has a link to an explanation of how survivors can clear their browser history.

Rape Abuse and Incest National Network

http://www.rainn.org/

The site’s design makes it easy for survivors to find legal resources and definitions of assault. Though it’s a national site, RAINN allows users to find a Local Crisis Center easily. Survivors can locate Crisis Centers by using a Google map and the centers are shown by zip code, not exact address. The National Sexual Assault Hotline’s phone number is visible at least three places on each page, which is a good practice for any site that serves IPV survivors.

Narika

http://www.narika.org/

This Berkeley-based site is geared toward IPV survivors in the South Asian community. At the top of the front page are two important links – an Escape button and a link to instructions on computer safety. The site links to resources in 22 states and five countries. The community alliances section is an excellent example of how agencies can use their sites to better serve clients.

Family Crisis Center

http://www.family-crisis-center.org/

This site has a pop-up window that explains the dangers of using the Internet, directs clients to the upper right hand corner of the page and explains that users should go to a safer
computer if they think their use might be monitored. It explains in clear language how clients can determine whether they are in abusive relationships, who they can email or call for help and what they will find when they go to this agency. The site also specifies that the residential home's address is confidential for the safety of clients, which must be reassuring for clients seeking shelter for themselves and their children.

Safe Horizon

http://www.safehorizon.org

This New York City-based organization helps all victims of violence with a message of “moving victims of violence from crisis to confidence.” The site is easy to navigate and it has an easy-to-find tab for people in crisis to find what they need quickly, a clear definition of domestic violence, stalking and what can be done to address it. There is also a shelter tour on the site – none of the shelters are actual New York City agencies – to help survivors feel more comfortable about moving from their homes to transitional housing.
Technology can be very helpful to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking, however it is important to also consider how technology might be misused.

1. **Trust your instincts.** If you suspect the abusive person knows too much, it is possible that your phone, computer, email, driving or other activities are being monitored. Abusers, stalkers and perpetrators can act in incredibly persistent and creative ways to maintain power and control.

2. **Plan for safety.** Navigating violence, abuse, and stalking is very difficult and dangerous. Advocates at the National Domestic Violence Hotline have been trained on technology issues, and can discuss options and help you in your safety planning. Local domestic violence and rape crisis hotline advocates can also help you plan for safety.

3. **Take precautions if you have a “techy” abuser.** If computers and technology are a profession or a hobby for the abuser/stalker, trust your instincts. If you think he/she may be monitoring or tracking you, talk to hotline advocates or the police.

4. **Use a safer computer.** If anyone abusive has access to your computer, he/she might be monitoring your computer activities. Try to use a safer computer when you look for help, a new place to live, etc. It may be safer to use a computer at a public library, community center, or Internet café.

5. **Create new email or IM accounts.** If you suspect that anyone abusive can access your email or instant messaging (IM), consider creating additional email/IM accounts on a safer computer. Do not create or check this new email/IM from a computer the abuser could access, in case it is monitored. Look for free web-based email accounts, and strongly consider using non-identifying name & account information. (example: bluecat@email.com and not YourRealName@email.com)

6. **Check your cell phone settings.** If you are using a cell phone provided by the abusive person, consider turning it off when not in use. Also many phones let you to “lock” the keys so a phone won’t automatically answer or call if it is bumped. When on, check the phone settings; if your phone has an optional location service, you may want to switch the location feature off/on via phone settings or by turning your phone on and off.

7. **Change passwords & pin numbers.** Some abusers use victim’s email and other accounts to impersonate and cause harm. If anyone abusive knows or could guess your passwords, change them quickly and frequently. Think about any password protected accounts - online banking, voicemail, instant messaging, etc.
8. **Minimize use of cordless phones or baby monitors.** If you don’t want others to overhear your conversations, turn baby monitors off when not in use and use a traditional corded phone for sensitive conversations.

9. **Use a donated or new cell phone.** When making or receiving private calls or arranging escape plans, try not to use a shared or family cell phone because cell phone billing records and phone logs might reveal your plans to an abuser. Contact your local hotline program to learn about donation programs that provide new cell phones and/or prepaid phone cards to victims of abuse and stalking.

10. **Ask about your records and data.** Many court systems and government agencies are publishing records to the Internet. Ask agencies how they protect or publish your records and request that court, government, post office and others seal or restrict access to your files to protect your safety.

11. **Get a private mailbox and don’t give out your real address.** When asked by businesses, doctors, and others for your address, have a private mailbox address or a safer address to provide. Try to keep your true residential address out of databases.

12. **Search for your name on the Internet.** Major search engines such as “Google” or “Yahoo” may have links to your contact information. Search for your name in quotation marks: “Full Name”. Check phone directory pages because unlisted numbers might be listed if you gave your number to anyone.

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Web: nnedv.org/safetynet    Email: SafetyNet [at] nnedv.org    Phone: 202-543-5566
Appendix D: Response Rates

The five rounds of surveys were sent out by postal mail on 11/12/07, 11/30/07, 12/17/07, 1/14/08 and 2/7/08. The five rounds achieved an 89% response rate with 81 of the 91 agencies participating. The majority of agencies responded in Round 2.

The seven phone interviews in round five were transcribed into the Survey Monkey forms.