

Lethality Assessment Program – Maryland Model (LAP)

Information Packet and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Table of Contents

History & Development	3
Background of MNADV	3
A Coordinated Effort: Establishment of the Lethality Assessment Committee	3
General Information	4-5
Why the LAP—Maryland Model works	5
How the LAP—Maryland Model works	4-5
Frequently Asked Questions	6-12
What services do you provide?	6
For sites already implementing the LAP	6
For sites interested in implementing the LAP	6
Is my organization eligible?	6-7
How do you select sites?	7
What makes a community ready for the LAP?	7-8
How do I know if my community-based domestic violence service program has the capacity to handle the LAP?	8-9
What are the obligations for sites selected for training?	9
Do all of the agencies/programs who may want to attend the training have to be signing partners on the initial application?	9
Can we have access to your materials without being trained in the LAP?	10
Can modifications be made to the Lethality Screen?	10
Is the LAP discoverable?	10-11
Do you provide TA to teams who want to implement the LAP in non-law enforcement contexts?	11
My city/state is considering legislating the LAP. What is MNADV's experience with mandates to implement the LAP?	11
How do you work with third-party organizations who are interested in the LAP for local programs and law enforcement agencies?	12
How can my team apply and/or who can answer additional questions I have? ..	12

HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT | LAP—Maryland Model

Background of MNADV

The Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence (MNADV) was awarded a Violence Against Women grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention in October 2003 to design a lethality assessment program to predict and prevent intimate partner homicide in Maryland. MNADV aimed to translate clinical research on lethality predictors into practical tools that would help first responders respond more effectively to dangerous and potentially lethal incidents of domestic violence.

A Coordinated Effort: Establishment of the Lethality Assessment Committee

In an effort to engage multi-disciplinary stakeholders in the creation of this program, MNADV established a Lethality Assessment Committee, comprised of representatives from law enforcement, the criminal justice system, domestic violence service programs (DVSPs), and academia. Notably, several leading researchers in the field of intimate partner fatality—including Drs. Jacquelyn C. Campbell and Daniel Webster of The Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Cara Krulewicz of the University of Maryland—were instrumental in these discussions.

On October 1, 2005, three pilot jurisdictions in Maryland implemented the **Lethality Assessment Program—Maryland Model (LAP)** after two years of development, field testing, and evaluation. As of 2013, nearly all 109 law enforcement agencies and 100% of the 20 comprehensive DVSPs in Maryland have been trained and participate in the LAP. MNADV has also incorporated the LAP model in different settings, including several hospitals and cabinet-level departments (i.e. Departments of Human Resources, Juvenile Services, and Public Safety & Correctional Services) across Maryland.

GENERAL INFORMATION | LAP—Maryland Model

Why the LAP—Maryland Model Works

The LAP is a multi-pronged intervention program that consists of an evidence-based tool called the Lethality Screen that helps field practitioners more clearly assess a victim's risk of intimate partner homicide, and an accompanying referral process that proactively connects victims to community-based domestic violence services.

By simply asking the Lethality Screen questions, the officer educates the victim about the predictors that signify increased risk of homicide. The hotline advocate gives further education to the victim as to how to remain safe, what options are available, and what resources are in the community. The victim is then empowered to make choices that increase her/his own safety and decrease the risk of homicide. Even victims who are not assessed as High-Danger at the time of the call for service, and those who are not ready to seek help, receive valuable information from the Lethality Screen; it affords them insight into the warning signs that could indicate that an abusive relationship is escalating in severity.

The U.S. Department of Justice identified the LAP in 2012 as one of just two “promising practices” to address intimate partner homicide.

How the LAP—Maryland Model Works

For law enforcement, the process begins when an officer arrives at the scene of a domestic violence call. The officer assesses the situation, and when the standards for danger are met, the officer asks the victim the series of 11 questions on the Lethality Screen. The Screen is adapted from Dr. Campbell's Danger Assessment, an instrument used by clinicians and counselors to assess a victim's risk of being killed by an intimate partner (Campbell, 1986).

If the victim's scored responses to the questions indicate increased risk for homicide, the officer privately informs the victim that the officer is concerned for the victim's safety, and that in situations like the victim's, people have been killed. The officer then makes a phone call to the local domestic violence hotline and proceeds with one of two responses.

Response #1: When the victim chooses to speak with the hotline advocate.

The advocate conducts a brief (no more than 10 minutes) conversation with the victim to safety-plan for the next 24 hours. Depending on the courses of action discussed in the telephone conversation between the victim and advocate, the officer may work with the advocate and victim to coordinate the victim's safety-plan (e.g., transporting the victim to shelter, or to the precinct to take out an emergency restraining order).

Response #2: When the victim chooses not to speak with the hotline advocate.

The officer still calls the hotline, offers *once again* for the victim to speak to the

advocate, and if the victim declines a second time, the advocate safety plans with the victim through the officer. The officer reviews the factors that are predictive of homicide so the victim can be on the lookout for them, encourages the victim to contact the DVSP, and may follow other protocol measures to address the victim's safety and well-being.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) | LAP—Maryland Model

Under a cooperative agreement with the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), MNADV provides cost-free training and technical assistance (TA) to teams of community-based DVSPs and partnering law enforcement agencies who want to implement the LAP in their jurisdictions, or who are already implementing the LAP. Below are some frequently asked questions about the details of the services MNADV offers through this award.

Q.

What services do you provide?

A.

For sites already implementing the LAP

We provide ongoing TA to sites that have already implemented the LAP, which includes re-training, distributing revised and new LAP-related materials and documents, disseminating LAP updates via quarterly newsletters, consulting on “best practices,” and providing feedback on LAP-related data that sites collect.

A.

For sites interested in implementing the LAP

For sites interested in implementing the LAP, we help jurisdictions assess their readiness to apply and prepare a successful application. Once a site is selected for training, we work intensively with the Team Coordinator and other stakeholders to ensure the site is prepared before we come out for a one-day, train-the-trainer session. After the training, we provide ongoing TA as sites formulate an implementation plan, train program and agency staff, and start collecting data.

Q.

Is my organization eligible?

A.

Applicants must apply as a single team: at least one law enforcement agency and at least one community-based DVSP from the same jurisdiction. At least one member of the team must be a current OVW grantee or sub-grantee (this includes receiving funding from STOP, ARREST, GTEAP, VAWA, and more), and all agencies must have

policies in compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Acts of 1990 and 1991, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Safe Streets Act of 1968.

Third party organizations—such as the state coalition or the district attorney's office—may be signing partners on the application, as long as at least one law enforcement agency and one community-based DVSP are the primary applicants.

If no organization on your team receives OVW funding, we encourage you to look to other local or statewide organizations that do receive OVW funding with whom you could partner. If there is another eligibility requirement your team does not meet—not having a language access plan, for example—we may be able to offer in-house technical assistance or provide referrals to other organizations to help your team get to a place where you could be eligible.

Unfortunately, we do not provide fee-based trainings at this time.

Q.

How do you select sites?

A.

We factor a number of criteria into our evaluation process, including:

- The population size of the jurisdiction served by the participating law enforcement agency(ies) and DVSP(s);
- The demographic diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, etc.) of the population being served;
- The geographic diversity (rural, urban, number of implementing agencies nearby) of the jurisdiction applying;
- An understanding of the purpose and effect of the LAP;
- A demonstrated history of collaboration to address domestic violence; and
- A demonstrated ability and enthusiasm to sustain implementation of the LAP, and a realistic plan for doing so.

While we gather some of this information from the narrative portions of the application, we also conduct individual interviews with the highest-ranking officials (Chiefs/Sheriffs, Executive Directors) at each applying agency and DVSP to more thoroughly explore the commitment to and enthusiasm for the LAP at the level of senior leadership. Additionally, we interview the Team Coordinator and state coalition.

Q.

What makes a community ready for the LAP?

A.

It is crucial for both the law enforcement agency(ies) and the DVSP(s) to understand the purpose of the LAP—to reduce fatalities and near-fatalities by identifying High-Danger victims, informing them of the seriousness of their situation, and connecting them to services. The LAP is not designed to make court cases easier or to get more victims into shelter, though this may be a side effect.

A community that is ready for the LAP has the resources available to respond to the increased demand for services after the LAP is implemented. For DVSPs, this means that the program *must* have a 24-hour domestic violence hotline that law enforcement officers can call from the scene. The 24-hour hotline *cannot* be an answering service during the week nor after-hours or on the weekend. As the LAP seeks to keep the extra time officers are on-the-scene to a minimum, an advocate must be available to take calls 24/7 as they come in from the field. More importantly, officers need to contact the hotline *whenever* they make a High-Danger assessment; as the majority of High-Danger assessments are often made at night and on weekends, the DVSP needs to be available.

For law enforcement agencies, readiness for the LAP means officers must be willing to make the call from the scene in *every instance* in which a High-Danger victim is identified. The officers must also understand that implementing the LAP makes each domestic violence call last about 10-15 minutes longer. The LAP generally works best when law enforcement officers have patrol phones that they can use to make the hotline call. If a department does not issue phones to its officers, other phones can serve as a resource, including a supervisor's phone or the officer's personal cell phone.

Most importantly, the law enforcement agency and DVSP must be willing to commit to sustaining the LAP, and to nourishing the partnership. The LAP works best when there is good communication, collaboration, and trust between agencies (it also serves to strengthen those bonds!).

Q.

How do I know if my domestic violence service program has the capacity to handle the LAP?

A.

DVSPs should be prepared for increased hotline call volume and service utilization. LAP data collected in Maryland indicates that law enforcement agencies can anticipate administering 1 Lethality Screen per 432 people in their population each year (divide that number by 12 to get the monthly estimate). We find that in about 53% of Screens, the victim is assessed as High-Danger. Of High-Danger victims, about 55% agree to speak to the hotline advocate. Of High-Danger victims who speak to the hotline

advocate, about one-third eventually go in for services.¹ While every community is different, programs can use these fractions to roughly anticipate the workload and administrative impact of the LAP, and plan accordingly (e.g., by hiring extra or training volunteer advocates and/or case managers, adjusting shelter space, etc.).

Beyond assessing capacity for increased call volume, DVSPs must also assess their ability and willingness to provide “enhanced” or “differentiated” services for High-Danger victims. This could take the form of reserving next-day crisis counseling appointments or emergency shelter space for High-Danger victims; offering to meet High-Danger victims off-site if they do not want to come in for services; or doing 24-hour follow-up calls or in-person, unannounced home visits, among other “best practices.”

Q.

What are the obligations for sites selected for training?

A.

If we accept your request for training, we provide all of our services cost-free. That said, you do have some obligations. First, you must commit to participating in several teleconferences before and after the train-the-trainer. You also must implement the LAP (and finish training your staff) within four months of the train-the-trainer. Don't worry—we can work with your team to coordinate the train-the-trainer date to align with your in-service or training schedule.

Most importantly, you must agree to follow the LAP protocol without modification: a 24-hour hotline must be in place, the officers must use and not alter the Lethality Screen, and the officers must call the hotline from the scene *every time* a victim is assessed as High-Danger. Finally, sites must agree to collect and submit data to us for at least the first six months following the implementation of the LAP.

Q.

Do all of the agencies/programs who may want to attend the training have to be signing partners on the initial application?

A.

¹ These projections are based on data collected from all implementing law enforcement agencies and DVSPs throughout the state of Maryland between 2006-2013. Many jurisdictions across the country experience a higher Screen administration and High-Danger rate, especially in the beginning stages of implementation. If your resources are already stretched thin, we can have further discussions to try to more accurately anticipate the increased call and service utilization rates for your jurisdiction.

No. While we encourage teams to recruit as many agencies as are interested in and ready for the LAP ahead of application submission, we know that this is not always possible. We also understand that often interest in the LAP is a result of the “domino effect”: once local law enforcement agencies hear that departments in their county or region are attending a LAP training, they want to join the program, too. Teams may submit additional signature pages from the highest-ranking officials of interested agencies and programs after an original team has already been approved. Approval for participation is *not* automatic, though—we still conduct interviews with the highest-ranking officials to ensure their readiness to be trained. We *do not* allow non-approved law enforcement agencies or community-based DVSPs that have not been approved through our process to “observe” or “audit” a train-the-trainer.

Q.

Can we have access to your materials without being trained in the LAP?

A.

The LAP and corresponding materials are considered intellectual property and are protected by copyright. The use of the materials without the express prior written consent of MNADV is strictly prohibited and subject to all applicable laws regarding copyrights. We do not authorize the use of our materials, including the Lethality Screen, without being directly trained by us, or by an agency/program MNADV has trained in the past.

Q.

Can modifications be made to the Lethality Screen?

A.

The 11 questions on the Lethality Screen signify evidence-based factors most predictive of intimate partner homicide. Sites may not alter, in any way, the content or wording of the Screen. The Screen may be aesthetically tailored for each particular community—by adding the DVSP’s hotline number or logos, by incorporating the questions into forms the department already uses, or by digitizing the document for electronic administration.

Q.

Is the LAP discoverable?

A.

We cannot provide legal advice regarding your state and local laws pertaining to discovery. Often law enforcement agencies incorporate the Lethality Screen into other report forms or make it a part of the agency record, which typically allows the Screen to be discovered along with other investigative documents generated by law enforcement. Generally, the files of a DVSP are not discoverable under VAWA, except in the case of a lawful court order or statutory mandate. In our experience, the presence of a Lethality Screen in a DVSP client's file does not change those stipulations. However, we suggest you consult with your local prosecutor and/or legal advisor.

That said, to our knowledge no harm has come from the Lethality Screen being discovered in any legal proceeding, nor are there any written, relevant precedents regarding the Lethality Screen or the LAP protocol.

Q.

Do you provide TA to teams who want to implement the LAP in non-law enforcement contexts?

A.

MNADV has begun working with several hospitals and state-level departments in Maryland to train medical and other social service/court personnel in administering the LAP with individuals experiencing intimate partner violence. Several of our national sites that already implement the LAP with law enforcement are expanding, or have plans to expand, into local hospitals and their state departments, as well.

At this time, we do not provide TA or training to national sites looking to implement the LAP in non-law enforcement contexts. However, we are tracking the inquiries we receive from national partners around LAP in non-law enforcement contexts, and hope to be able to provide more support in the future!

Q.

My city/state is considering legislating the LAP. What is MNADV's experience with mandates to implement the LAP?

A.

Although nearly all of Maryland's law enforcement agencies and 100% of DVSPs have been trained and participate in the LAP, there is no state mandate that obligates agencies or programs to participate. MNADV achieved full participation through a decade's effort in grassroots mobilization.

Some jurisdictions have required that the LAP be implemented. Generally, we would hesitate to endorse any legislation mandating the LAP. Without the prior commitment of the law enforcement agencies and DVSPs bound by the bill, the LAP will not be as enthusiastically embraced, or faithfully sustained, as when participation is voluntary.

If your community or state leaders are considering passing legislation on the LAP, we are available to have discussions about the language or stipulations that should be included to better assure the evidence-based integrity of the LAP within the law-making context.

Q.

How do you work with third-party organizations who are interested in the LAP for local programs and law enforcement agencies?

A.

We gladly work with statewide stakeholders, according to their interest and capacity, to implement the LAP. In the past, we have worked in varying degrees with coalitions, Attorney General Offices, state Departments of Justice, CCR teams, and other statewide domestic violence task forces to implement the LAP on local, regional, and statewide levels.

Q.

How can my team apply and/or who can answer additional questions I have?

A.

To apply, a designated representative for the team may request an application. The team must return its completed application within six weeks of receiving it, so teams should not request an application until they are fairly certain they can complete it within that time period. Start to finish, the application should only take 2-3 hours to fill out, but as it requires various signatures and well-thought-out answers to several narrative questions, it is necessary to get all participating entities on-board before starting the application.

To request an application, or to ask for any other information or TA, please contact **Abby Hannifan**, Project Coordinator for the National Lethality Assessment Program, at ahannifan@mnadv.org.