



ENGAGING SURVIVORS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Survivors play a vital role in combating human trafficking. Survivors should not be seen only as recipients of services; they run organizations, advocate before legislatures, train law enforcement officers, conduct public outreach, and work with government officials. The survivor voice is vital in establishing effective anti-trafficking strategies that address prosecution, protection, and prevention. The appointment of the United States Advisory Council on Human Trafficking in December 2015 established a formal platform for human trafficking survivors to advise and make recommendations to the federal government on anti-trafficking policies and programs. This marked a significant milestone in the anti-trafficking movement, as it demonstrates both to survivors and governments around the world the importance of survivor engagement in all efforts to combat this crime.

Governments, civil society, and businesses should understand how to engage with survivors appropriately and responsibly, whether within the criminal justice system, through the provision of services, in the adoption and implementation of corporate policies, or in efforts to advocate for social change. The following list, although not exhaustive, delineates several guidelines for meaningful engagement with survivors:

DO:

- **Promote survivor empowerment and self-sufficiency.** Survivors of human trafficking should have access to services that are comprehensive, victim-centered, and culturally appropriate, including long-term care, to promote autonomy. Additionally, survivors should have access to vocational training, skill development courses, financial counseling, and educational scholarships.
- **Use a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach.** All engagement with survivors, as well as all anti-trafficking work, should incorporate a victim-centered and trauma-informed approach to minimize re-traumatization and ensure an understanding of the impact of trauma on the individual.

The victim-centered approach seeks to minimize re-traumatization associated with involvement in the criminal justice process by providing the support of victim service providers, empowering survivors as engaged participants in the process, and providing survivors an opportunity to play a role in seeing their traffickers brought to justice.

A trauma-informed approach includes an understanding of the physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma on the individual, as well as on the professionals who help them.

- **Hire and compensate.** Survivors know firsthand how to improve anti-trafficking efforts and should be hired and compensated for their expertise. It is important for agencies and organizations to create opportunities to employ survivors as staff members, consultants, or trainers. Survivors, like any other employee or consultant, deserve financial compensation for their time and expertise.
- **Incorporate input.** Government agencies, victim service providers, law enforcement agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses should listen carefully to survivor recommendations and incorporate survivor input in both the design and implementation of anti-trafficking policies, programs, trainings, and advocacy efforts.
- **Protect confidentiality.** Agencies and organizations interacting with survivors should protect survivors' identities and privacy appropriately and establish policies and procedures on confidentiality.

DON'T:

- **Require participation.** Requiring a survivor to participate in a program deprives him or her of autonomy and the right to self-determination. Survivors should be empowered to make their own decisions about the care they would like to receive.
- **Overpromise.** Law enforcement officials, victim service providers, and government agencies should avoid making promises and commitments they cannot keep. In particular, they should not promise services to gain a survivor's cooperation.
- **Re-traumatize.** When engaging with survivors, do not push them to recount their personal story unnecessarily. Similarly, don't share the details of a survivor's story without gaining permission and providing context for how the information will be used.
- **Sensationalize the individual's experience.** The use of graphic language or shocking imagery to depict human trafficking promotes myths and misconceptions about this crime and can re-traumatize survivors.
- **Photograph or publish information without consent.** It is a survivor's decision to participate in any outreach, marketing, social media, or publicity efforts. Publishing a survivor's name or story without their informed consent could compromise the survivor's safety and well-being. If a survivor is willing, always ask how they would like to be described (e.g., survivor, advocate, etc.) and allow the survivor to review any material for accuracy before publication.

