

Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project Comes to a Close

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Project ending *now*? (Was this decision made out of the blue?)

In 2004, the Georgia Commission on Family Violence (GCFV) and the Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) joined together, with support from the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC), to start the Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project (the Project). This strategic partnership was the first statewide initiative to review domestic violence-related fatalities. The Project grew out of the need to identify gaps in the systemic response to domestic violence that were perpetuating a high rate of domestic violence-related homicide in Georgia.

In the past 15 years, many gaps have been identified and many recommendations have been made to bridge and/or close those gaps. Despite our many accomplishments, GCFV, GCADV and CJCC acknowledge that there remains significant work to be done to address the Project's findings and to eliminate domestic violence in Georgia.

We see the next phase of our work focusing on learning more information about a larger quantity of cases and championing new initiatives to implement past Project recommendations. This decision has not been made lightly. These changes have been approached with great concern for not only the legacy of the Project's work, but also with care for how these changes will affect our partners and stakeholders.

What will the Georgia Commission on Family Violence be doing when the Project ends?

The Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project is only one of several key responsibilities of GCFV. GCFV is a state agency created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1992 to develop a comprehensive state plan for ending family violence in Georgia. GCFV works throughout the state to help create and support task forces made up of citizen volunteers working to end domestic violence in their communities. In addition, GCFV conducts research and provides training about domestic violence, monitors legislation, and other policies impacting victims of domestic violence, and certifies all of Georgia's Family Violence Intervention Programs.

With the close of the Fatality Review Project, GCFV will partner the current Fatality Review Coordinator with a Domestic Violence Data Analyst (TBH), a position that was recently funded by the Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC). Together, the two will cultivate the collection of information about the problem of domestic violence statewide.

This information collection will in many ways be similar to data collected by the Project in its 15 years; demographics of the victim and perpetrator, known systems contacts, and history of abuse will be tabulated. Broadening the work, however, these data points will be evaluated for all known domestic violence-related deaths statewide, and not solely the cases reviewed by the Project's fatality review teams. This expanded data collection also opens up opportunities to assess systemic issues that are more current. A focus on more recent deaths in Georgia offers assurances that we are aware of statewide trends as they develop, rather than years after the tragedies occur, as is often the practice in the current fatality review model.

Further, GCFV seeks to act as a clearinghouse for statewide data. This will be accomplished through the development of information sharing partnerships with other state agencies which will provide additional layers of insight as we continue to study this important issue.

GCFV recognizes the ongoing needs of our systems partners to obtain and utilize domestic violence data for training, grant-making, and community response and remains firmly committed to disseminating data. Under the new focus of our work, we will not only field requests for data, but will also publish a relevant report of statewide domestic violence-related deaths and statistics.

Please visit gcfv.georgia.gov for more information about GCFV projects and programs.

What will The Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence (GCADV) be doing when the Project ends?

The Georgia Domestic Violence Fatality Review Project is only one of several key responsibilities of GCADV. GCADV is a nonprofit coalition of domestic violence organizations that brings together member agencies, allied organizations, and supportive individuals who are committed to ending domestic violence. Guided by the voices of survivors, GCADV works to create social change by addressing the root causes of this violence. GCADV leads advocacy efforts for responsive public policy and fosters quality, comprehensive prevention and intervention services throughout the state.

With the close of the Fatality Review Project, GCADV's will turn towards implementing recommendations and promising practices gleaned from reviewing domestic violence-related fatalities. GCADV will focus on implementing Project recommendations by providing resources and ongoing support to communities seeking to make grassroots change in how their local systems respond to domestic violence. This will take place, all with the ultimate intention of reducing domestic violence-related fatalities.

Please visit www.gcadv.org for more information about GCADV projects and programs.

Will GCFV and GCADV continue to work together on any projects?

As we consciously move in different directions within the work, GCFV and GCADV will remain collaborative partners. This ongoing relationship benefits both agencies and the State that we serve, as we continue work on the shared goals of reducing domestic violence and domestic violence-related fatalities in Georgia.

What will happen with all of the data from the Project?

The 15th Annual Report, expected to be released in late 2018, will be the Project's final in its current incarnation. As we reflect on the Project's work, a concluding report will act as a capstone to highlight key findings, encapsulate Project data, and issue a call to action for future work needed to impact the issue of domestic violence throughout the State of Georgia.

Will I still be able to obtain information about domestic violence in my community and throughout Georgia?

Yes. Both the GCFV and GCADV recognize the ongoing needs of our partners to obtain and utilize domestic violence data for training, grant-making, and community response and remain firmly committed to disseminating data. For these reasons, data collection remains a priority. Under the new focus of the work, GCFV will not only field requests for data, but will also publish a relevant report of statewide domestic violence-related deaths and statistics.

What will happen to the website GeorgiaFatalityReview.com?

The Project's website GeorgiaFatalityReview.com will be maintained for the foreseeable future. The website will house fatality review information, including past Annual Reports, resources and archived webinars, all still relevant to our ongoing work.

What if I want to order copies of past Annual Reports?

You are currently able to request copies of available reports via the website GeorgiaFatalityReview.com and the mechanism for future requests will be identified there. As always, all past reports and many other resources are available via digital download at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com.

What if my community wants to conduct a review?

The Project partners continue to see the value of reviewing domestic violence-related fatalities and remain committed to supporting communities who are engaging in this process, albeit on a more limited basis.

If your community is interested in conducting a review, you can contact GCADV or GCFV in the future to discuss this as an option.

What if I want someone to come talk to my community/organization about the Project?

Both GCADV and GCFV are happy to provide training on the Project's findings and recommendations. You can contact the agencies to arrange training or support by way of the following:

GCADV – (404) 209-0280

GCFV – (404) 657-3412

Where will I be able to find resources and best practices?

Despite the end of the Project in its current incarnation, the recommendations contained in past reports are still very much appropriate for future use. In addition to past recommendations, GCADV and GCFV will continue to work on the statewide level to provide resources and promulgate best practices.

The Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and its subcommittees also maintain a commitment to ensuring that stakeholders throughout Georgia are aware of best practices and resources statewide.

How can I use Project data in my community?

The end of the Project in its current form, and the capstone 15th Annual Report provide a great opportunity to share fatality review data and recommendations in your community.

We would encourage you to:

- Share copies of the Annual Report with other stakeholders in your community. You can request copies of the Annual Report at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com.
- Make distribution of the Report a project of your task force. As you work on your strategy, we encourage you think broadly about who in your community would benefit from this information – consider everyone from Animal Control Officers, faith leaders, your chamber of commerce of human resource organizations, and other non-traditional systems. Engage your entire task force in the plan to distribute the Report – identify who you would like to target, as well as who will be delivering the reports to those people or agencies. Draft a cover letter stating the importance of fatality review and invite them to your task force meeting.
- Make the Report the topic of your next task force meeting. Think broadly about who you invite to the meeting. There might be stakeholders you have tried to engage in the past that would consider a discussion about the fatality review report a draw. The content of the Report tends to have a wide appeal so you may get people to the meeting who don't usually attend. If there are particular recommendations you want to work on identify the people who need to be at the table to make it happen and invite them to the meeting. A broader discussion

about the report could be a good jumping off point and provide important context for why the recommendations are important to address.

- Make the Report the topic of your next staff meeting. The Annual Report is a great catalyst for in-house discussions. Examining the recommendations that apply to your own system can be a good reminder that sometimes evaluating our own internal policies and practices is just as important as communicating and collaborating with other partners/stakeholders. The Report is full of recommendations so it could be good to do some thinking in advance of where you think your agency may want to place some priority prior to the meeting. The Report may also provide ideas for new partnerships to develop in the future, which can help guide your strategic plan.
- Use the data to support requests for grants and other funding. Utilize the Georgia specific data and trend information to demonstrate the need for additional funding.
- The Report is meant to be a road map for change, so identify the recommendations that resonate in your agency and your community and incorporate them into strategic planning for your own agency and for your task force initiatives.
- Use the findings to shape awareness activities in your community. Fatality review information is great for increasing awareness because it helps people see that this problem is occurring right in our own backyards and that there are ways it can be addressed to change the outcome for victims and families. Consider writing an op-ed or approaching someone from your local media with a story about the Fatality Review Project. If you are working to develop a relationship with your media check out our Domestic Violence and the Media guide available for download on the Resources tab at GeorgiaFatalityReview.com.

My task force focuses our work on Fatality Review findings – what will we work on now?

We are aware that findings and recommendations from the Project often set the stage for work of domestic violence task forces and other coordinated community response organizations. GCFV works throughout the state to help create and support task forces made up of citizen volunteers working to end domestic violence in their communities. If your task force or CCR is seeking support in goal setting, please contact GCFV's Family Violence Coordinator, Stacey Seldon at stacey.seldon@dcs.ga.gov.

What if I become aware of a domestic violence-related death? Who do I tell?

Both GCADV and GCFV will continue to collect data about statewide domestic violence-related deaths into the future. If you are aware of a death that has occurred in your community, you are encouraged to contact either GCFV or GCADV with information by way of the following:

GCFV – Niki Lemeshka - niki.lemeshka@dcs.ga.gov

GCADV – Fatmeh Baidoun- fbaidoun@gcadv.org

What did the Project accomplish?

The cooperation of the two statewide domestic violence agencies engaged conversation and collaboration statewide, and often formed a framework on which other CJCC-funded programs developed their capacities. Through our collective work on the Project, which seeks to enhance the safety of victims and the accountability of batterers, much has been accomplished.

Over the past 15 years the Project has:

- Developed a process and foundation for the vital work of domestic violence fatality review in Georgia including a policies and procedures manual, a near fatality review model and a website dedicated to fatality review work;
- Assembled and led multidisciplinary teams in 24 judicial circuits to conduct in-depth reviews of 116 domestic violence-related homicides, suicides and near fatalities;
- Prepared and published objective information gained from these reviews in 14 Annual Reports, that have each given voice to victims so as to learn from their experiences as we seek to prevent future tragedies;
- Identified gaps in system responses and critical points for intervention or prevention, while providing a forum for increasing communication and collaboration among community agencies; and
- Implemented recommendations to create a coordinated community approach to ending domestic violence, including significant efforts towards training varied systems on better responses and creating innovative partnerships with other disciplines.

What if I have other questions or concerns?

We welcome your concerns and questions about the future of the Project. You may contact either GCFV or GCADV by way of the following:

GCADV – Taylor Tabb ttabb@gcadv.org

GCFV – Niki Lemeshka niki.lemeshka@dcs.ga.gov