



# A Window into ECM Task Force Efforts to Address Labor Trafficking

FOUNDATIONS EDITION

## The Enhanced Collaborative Model (ECM) Task Force to Combat Human Trafficking

is a U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) grant-funded program that brings together key partners to develop, expand, or strengthen multidisciplinary task forces to address human trafficking. With this approach, local, state, or tribal service providers; law enforcement; prosecutors; and other collaborators can:

- Identify victims of trafficking,
- Access a comprehensive array of service options, and
- Seek justice for victims by implementing victim-centered and trauma-informed investigations and prosecutions.

### THE WINDOWS SERIES



Foundations Edition



Case Spotlight Edition



Disciplines Edition

## INTRODUCTION

The **Windows Series** offers insights into the ECM model and task forces with examples from the efforts of ECMs nationwide. These examples showcase different structures, successes, innovations, and ideas that:

- demonstrate a commitment to addressing serious crime and supporting victims and survivors;
- illustrate the spectrum of activities and approaches employed by the ECMs;
- share successful strategies to encourage stakeholder cooperation;
- enhance public awareness by highlighting the nature and scope of work;
- offer a behind-the-scenes look at the field and its day-to-day work to a wider audience.

The **Foundations Edition** looks at how different task forces have approached or implemented key parts of the ECM model, including co-leadership models, enhanced collaborative efforts, engagement with lived experience expertise, statewide efforts, and efforts to identify and respond to labor trafficking.

## LABOR TRAFFICKING

For nearly two decades task forces have identified instances of labor trafficking, provided services to victims, and investigated perpetrators across the country. These cases include, but are not limited to, construction (AP News, 2019), hospitality (Schwartz, 2017), restaurants (Office of Public Affairs, 2021), and

domestic servitude (Office of Public Affairs, 2024). “Through its award funding, training and technical assistance, and collaboration with federal partners, OVC has [also] worked to strengthen identification of and responses to labor trafficking victims in the United States.” (Office for Victims of Crime, 2024, p. 10–11).

As noted in recent DOJ grant announcements, “[d]espite these efforts, labor trafficking remains misunderstood, under-identified, underreported, and often unaddressed...” (Office for Victims of Crime, 2024, p. 10–11).

This Window highlights different strategies ECM task forces have used to improve identification, reporting, and responses to labor trafficking.

## Kings County (Brooklyn) Human Trafficking Task Force



**FUNDED PARTNERS** | Kings County District Attorney’s Office & Safe Horizon Anti-Trafficking Program



**GEOGRAPHY** | Kings County, NY with services in all five boroughs of New York City

In 2016, the **Kings County, NY (Brooklyn) Task Force** established a labor trafficking subcommittee to improve its response to labor trafficking. Participants include government agencies, service providers, and legal aid organizations.

The subcommittee’s early focus was to design a labor trafficking curriculum for external partners and expand connections to community stakeholders to collaborate with for training and outreach efforts. The subcommittee also identified sectors with a high incidence of labor trafficking and invited organizations focused

The **Kings County Task Force (Brooklyn)** created a dedicated committee for labor trafficking and developed a data-driven strategy to guide outreach to domestic workers and the construction industry.

on those industries to share in Task Force meetings about their work and their concerns.

In late 2018 and early 2019, the Labor Subcommittee, in collaboration with the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, rolled out a plan to conduct focus group listening sessions with medical professionals, worker rights centers, service providers, faith-based entities, labor unions, community organizations and others, to solicit on the ground perspectives and evidence-based information to guide the work of the Labor Subcommittee.

Currently, because of what's been learned from the listening sessions so far, construction and domestic work are priority sectors for worker outreach and leveraging relationships with organizations working with or connected to these sectors to create a bridge for community outreach and relationship building. To complement these efforts, Safe Horizon, a victim services agency and co-lead of the task force, has developed "Know Your Rights" training materials to increase the identification of potential victims and cases of labor trafficking.

*Unless otherwise cited, this information was provided via an interview with Shaina Fuller; April 2024.*

# North Dakota Human Trafficking Task Force



**FUNDED PARTNERS** | North Dakota Attorney General's Office & Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota



**GEOGRAPHY** | North Dakota

## The North Dakota Task Force

created a specific role - Labor Trafficking Specialist – to help improve statewide efforts to respond to labor trafficking.

This decision to allocate funding for dedicated staff was informed by a survey in partnership with an evaluator to assess statewide priorities. The results from all nine regions<sup>1</sup> indicated labor trafficking efforts as a top goal.

Since 2018, the Labor Trafficking Specialist has worked to create partnerships with the federal and state Departments of Labor, various professional associations, legal service providers, and service provider agencies. The Labor Trafficking Specialist also conducted training with all nine anti-trafficking multidisciplinary teams across the state, developed tailored outreach materials, and staffed cases throughout North Dakota.

Since hiring the Labor Trafficking Specialist, the Task Force has seen increased community requests to provide training, referrals, coordination, and services for labor trafficking clients.

*Unless otherwise cited, this information was provided via an interview with Emily Schwartz; February 2023 and confirmed by Labor Trafficking Specialist Rwatie Matsika in September 2024.*

The **North Dakota Task Force** created a specific role - Labor Trafficking Specialist – to help improve statewide efforts to respond to labor trafficking.

<sup>1</sup>The task force divides the state into nine regions, each with its own multidisciplinary response team overseen by the executive board, to ensure full statewide coverage for response and capacity development.

# Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force



**FUNDED PARTNERS** | Interface Children & Family Services & Ventura County Sheriff's Office



**GEOGRAPHY** Ventura County, CA

## The Ventura County Human Trafficking Task Force (VCHTTF)

developed targeted outreach materials as part of their efforts to improve the response to labor trafficking. Beginning in 2021, the Task Force leveraged their experience and community connections to enhance outreach

and develop these materials, with a focus on direct outreach to workers in sectors generally recognized as having a higher incidence of trafficking, such as farm workers. These efforts included the Task Force's training and outreach subcommittee developing strategies to build rapport with leaders from grassroots farmworker organizations and with potential victims of trafficking within the farmworker community.

One strategy had law enforcement meet with grassroots leaders and victims in an informal setting, with officers wearing plainclothes and not pressing for personal details from attendees. Instead, the focus was on listening and learning more about the community and their experiences and providing a safe space for workers and victims to ask questions about reporting a trafficking crime while providing individuals with needed information to make well-informed decisions. Grassroots leaders in turn provided cross training for key VCHTTF members to convey priorities and values within the Hispanic and Mixteco farmworker communities.

The **Ventura Human Trafficking Task Force** worked with community partners to develop targeted outreach materials to improve their response to labor trafficking.

In addition to better understanding between the community and Task Force members, these meetings and trainings, along with the experience of several Task Force partners that had regularly engaged with farmworkers, resulted in targeted outreach materials and an increase in referrals.

Further, the VCHTTF saw a marked increase in trafficking case referrals from grassroots farmworker organizations because the outreach materials direct people to call local farmworker grassroots organizations. The grassroots organizations then refer suspected victims of trafficking to Interface Children & Family Services, which follows Task Force protocols if/when sharing information with other Task Force partners.

*Unless otherwise cited, this information was provided via an interview with Evelyn Guillen; April 2022.*

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Data-driven strategies can help victim service providers learn more about labor exploitation, identify new partnerships, and develop outreach strategies to identify instances of labor trafficking.
- One way to build task force capacity to respond to labor trafficking is to prioritize funding for positions dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to increase outreach and identification.
- Cross training can help victim service providers understand the communities placed at increased risk and how to help them.
- Creating a trusting and safe environment is important for building rapport with and gaining the trust of individuals experiencing trafficking.

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