


strong  
field  
project | to end  
domestic  
violence

Blue Shield Against Violence

stronger  
together

A project of Blue Shield of California Foundation, in collaboration with the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence, CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, Jemmott Rollins Group, and the Women's Foundation of California



We asked ourselves and domestic violence leaders what more could be done – beyond general operating support – to strengthen the field's existing assets and support innovation to sustain the field in the future.

## how it started

The individuals, organizations, and networks that make up the domestic violence (DV) field in California are doing incredible work. They are committed, compassionate, and smart, stepping in to provide invaluable services and support for those who need it most – when they need it most.

Budget cuts and other challenges have compelled the entire field to think more about *how* to operate and flourish in a difficult economic and social landscape.

As the state's largest private funder of DV services and prevention, Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) is dedicated to ending domestic violence in California. Since 2002, Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) has invested more than \$35 million in DV services and prevention, including nearly \$11 million in general operating support to keep the doors open and lights on at more than 100 DV organizations across California.

As part of our ongoing commitment to the DV field, in 2009 BSAV responded to the field's challenges by asking ourselves and DV leaders what more could be done – beyond providing general operating support – to strengthen the field's existing assets and support innovation to sustain the field in the future.

To ground this work in the realities and needs of the DV field, BSAV engaged in research and reflection, asked questions, listened, and considered what could make a measurable difference. This year-long process included:

- Convening DV leaders and experts across the state to understand the field's strengths and growth opportunities;
- Commissioning studies on the status of the DV field's leadership, organizational capacity, fiscal health, and strategic collaborations;
- Reviewing promising models from other leadership and capacity building programs across the country; and
- Convening a BSAV Advisory Group of diverse DV leaders for input on what is needed to strengthen California's DV field.

## what we heard

### leadership

BSAV surveys, interviews, and grantee reports found that the DV field is at a critical juncture, poised to benefit from developing its leaders by:

- **Planning for succession.** Many DV organizations were started in the 1970s and have founding executive directors nearing retirement, requiring transitional and intergenerational leadership models.
- **Cultivating other leaders.** DV organizations are frequently overly reliant on one leader, necessitating building a robust board and pool of leaders.
- **Reducing staff turnover and burnout.** DV leaders need tools and resources to support staff, improve retention, and decrease burnout.
- **Supporting cultural competency.** Efforts must include cultivating leaders who reflect the diversity of California, including immigrants and people of color.

### organizational capacity

A BSAV survey found that 72 percent of shelters are regularly at or exceeding their bed capacity. While organizations are resilient and creative, maintaining operations and providing comprehensive services are still challenges. Surveys identified the following opportunities:

- **Improving financial management skills.** Nearly half of BSAV grantees report multiple years of deficits. DV organizations can benefit from fund development and financial management support.
- **Reducing dependence on public funding.** Private sources account for only 20 to 25 percent of revenue for DV organizations, while government funds make up more than half. Half of all California DV organizations have no dedicated fund developer. Bolstering fundraising skills is critical.
- **Improving data collection and evaluation skills.** Tracking and assessing outcomes is difficult for DV organizations because of safety and confidentiality concerns. New methods can improve accuracy.
- **Strengthening public outreach.** Developing outreach and marketing skills can expand fundraising, visibility of the issue, and potential partnerships.

### networks and strategic collaborations

DV organizations see great value in collaboration, averaging 10 to 25 partners each, but report feeling isolated. Opportunities include:

- **Breaking past "fortress mentality."** DV work requires discretion to protect survivor privacy, calling for new ways to share information.
- **Honoring unique identity and values.** DV organizations express wariness around diluting their original mission and identity. Strategic collaborations and mergers must leverage the unique assets of stakeholders.
- **Providing resources for learning and collaboration.** Because organizations have been short-staffed and under-funded, many have focused on their own survival, and require support to focus outward on collaboration.

## what we're doing

Responding to what we heard, in 2010 BSAV launched the **Strong Field Project**, a four-year, \$7 million effort to build a strong, coordinated network of DV service providers in California. Research, input from advisors, and conversations with field leaders shaped a three-pronged approach.

- A customized **Leadership Development Program** is developing and empowering a critical mass of individuals, equipped with stronger leadership and management skills – and more robust networks – to meet their goals for better serving the field. Over four years, two cohorts of up to 20 leaders will participate in an 18-month program that includes individual and peer coaching, intensive seminars and curriculum, policy education, networking, and alumni gatherings.
- **Organizational Strengths Grants** are providing a new kind of funding for DV organizations to build capacity (in ways important to them) and to develop and test new practices that will benefit the entire field. Over four years, two cohorts of 15 DV organizations will receive grants for fund development, collaboration and restructuring, communications, technology, and evaluation.
- The **Networking and Knowledge Sharing** component is strengthening the networks that connect California's DV organizations through convenings, trainings, and by fostering a peer learning community to share new models and best practices.

BSAV will also continue complementary activities for the DV field, including funding for core support, technical assistance, and cultural competency.

Committed to sharing lessons learned with the field, BSAV is working with an evaluator to capture learning and measure progress against the Strong Field Project's ultimate goal: building a strengthened DV field, equipped with a critical mass of leaders and organizations that have sufficient capacity and the right support, tools, skills, and knowledge to lead forward a stronger movement to prevent and end DV.

## the road ahead

BSAV is inspired by the DV field's commitment to empowerment, excellent service, and continuous improvement. These assets not only inform the Strong Field Project's values of diversity, learning, collaboration, and innovation, but also set us on a path to help meet the field's most pressing needs.

We set off on this journey with a commitment to partnership with the field, working together to find new approaches that strengthen leaders, organizations, and the field as we all work toward a common vision of ending domestic violence.

[www.strongfieldproject.org](http://www.strongfieldproject.org)

# Strong Field Project timeline

> 2007 **BSAV Advisory Group established and survey of grantee needs**

> 2008 **BSCF Board approves new strategy, including focus on strengthening the DV field and innovation**

> 2009 **BSAV engages in year-long research process**

**Summer 2009:** BSAV commissions scans of leadership, capacity building, financial health, and strategic collaborations for DV field

**Winter 2009:** BSCF Board approves Strong Field Project

> 2010 **Strong Field Project launches**

**January 2010:** Regional workshops in Redding, San Jose, and Pomona

**April 2010:** Cohort I applications released for Cohort I of Leadership Development Program and Organizational Strengths Grants

**June 2010:** Cohort I participants and grantees selected

**July 2010:** Leadership Development Program Kickoff Retreat for Cohort I

**August 2010:** Regional Institutes in Oakland, Lakeport, Los Angeles, and Bakersfield

**September 2010:** The Partnership's Annual Membership Meeting and Training Institute

**November 2010:** Organizational Strengths Grants kickoff convening for Cohort I

> 2011 **Strong Field Project Cohort II selected**

**June 2011:** Applications for Cohort II of Leadership Development Program released

**November 2011:** Applications for Cohort II of Organizational Strengths Grants released

**December 2011:** Leadership Development Program Cohort I graduation and Cohort II kick off

> 2012 **Strong Field Project networks strengthened**

**January 2012:** Strong Field Project Advisory Group welcomes new members

**April 2012:** New Strong Field Project website launched

**May 2012:** Strong Field Project Statewide Institute held in Torrance, CA

**Summer 2012:** Organizational Strength Grants Cohort II announced

our story

## about the Foundation

Blue Shield of California Foundation is the state's largest private funder of domestic violence (DV) services and prevention. Our mission is to improve the lives of Californians, particularly underserved populations, by making health care accessible, effective, and affordable for all Californians, and by ending domestic violence. The Foundation seeks to spur innovation, build partnerships necessary to advance systems change, strengthen safety net providers and networks, foster policy solutions, and cultivate the leaders of tomorrow.

Blue Shield Against Violence (BSAV) is a program of the Foundation, and has awarded over \$35 million to more than 100 California DV organizations since 2002. [www.blueshieldcafoundation.org](http://www.blueshieldcafoundation.org)

## about the Strong Field Project

The Strong Field Project is a four-year, \$7 million effort by Blue Shield of California Foundation's Blue Shield Against Violence program. Started in 2010, the Project focuses on building a stronger, more coordinated network of DV service providers in California. The Project is developing individual leadership skills, stronger organizations, and networking and expanded knowledge-sharing opportunities across California's DV field. [www.strongfieldproject.org](http://www.strongfieldproject.org)

## Strong Field Project partners

**The California Partnership to End Domestic Violence** (the Partnership) plays a leading role in connecting organizations. The Project aims to build on this work so that the field is strongly and constantly connected, able to share best practices, and serve those in need more effectively. [www.cpedv.org](http://www.cpedv.org)

**CompassPoint Nonprofit Services** offers a customized program for leaders from California DV organizations. Focused on leadership and management, the program aims to produce a critical mass of individuals equipped to inspire others, make smart business decisions, and consider new ways of service delivery. [www.compasspoint.org](http://www.compasspoint.org)

The **Women's Foundation of California** oversees the capacity-building grants program for the Strong Field Project. A rigorous application process identifies DV organizations poised to strengthen their capacity – and the field's – through collaboration, innovative organizational structures, improved fundraising, strategic communications, or financial planning. [www.womensfoundca.org](http://www.womensfoundca.org)

**Jemmott Rollins Group** (JRG) plays a key coordination role helping the Foundation manage the Strong Field Project. JRG also works to strengthen the networks and knowledge that connect California's DV organizations through workshops, webinars, and the strong field project website. [www.jemmottrollinsgroup.net](http://www.jemmottrollinsgroup.net)

In addition, a BSAV Advisory Group of 11 California DV leaders ensures that the project is responsive to the field's most pressing needs.