

# Overdose Fatality Reviews and COVID-19

## Virtual Case Review Meetings

The Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) is providing Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) teams with guidance during COVID-19 response. OFR teams across the country want to maintain momentum and stay connected with their overdose prevention colleagues during COVID-19 response. While in-person meetings are not possible, some OFR activities can be done virtually.

## Suggested OFR Activities During COVID-19 Response

While case review meetings are the core activity of OFR teams, the bulk of the work of an OFR occurs between meetings. OFR teams and subcommittees may want to use this time to focus on OFR activities other than case reviews. Some possible efforts that are easily done virtually include:

1. Discussing how newly implemented COVID-19 policy and procedures have positively and negatively impacted services and activities related to local overdose prevention.
2. Reviewing and prioritizing current recommendations and updating their implementation status.
3. Reflecting on the OFR case review process, including meeting approach, and recommending updates and modifications.
4. Revising the case selection criteria and updating the case review schedule.
5. Collecting, analyzing, and presenting aggregate data and examining findings and trends.

6. Recruiting additional OFR team members identified in prior case reviews.
7. Establishing a new OFR team structure, policies, procedures, and schedule.

## Considering Virtual OFR Case Review Meetings

OFR teams may be interested in hosting a virtual OFR case review meeting. As with in-person meetings, the success of virtual case reviews depends on the OFR team's readiness and capacity.

### OFR Team Readiness and Capacity

To determine the OFR team's readiness and capacity, consider the OFR team members':

- **Interest** in doing case review during this stressful and difficult time.
- **Availability** to participate in case reviews. Many participants may have an increased number of competing priorities.
- **Experience** participating in prior OFR case reviews. OFR teams that have reviewed many cases over time may be able to do a virtual case review easier than newly formed teams.
- **Trust** in the OFR team's confidential data sharing process.
- **Comfort** working with other OFR team members.

## OFR Team Technical Capabilities

More experienced and established OFR teams may be well suited to host virtual OFR case review meetings. The team should consider team members' access to the following before planning and hosting a virtual OFR case review meeting:

- Reliable internet
- Private space to participate (even while other household members may be present)
- Secure, HIPAA compliant, teleconferencing/Web conference/virtual meeting platform

## Hosting Successful Virtual OFR Case Review Meetings

Before an OFR team hosts a virtual OFR case review meeting, the team should do the following to ensure that the meeting will be effective and worthwhile.

- Host a practice call to test whether the team members can access and use the virtual meeting platform.
- Review confidentiality expectations and update language to reflect new virtual hosting of meetings. For example, aggregate data can be presented virtually, but all case-specific details can only be shared verbally and not displayed. Participants need to join from a private space in the home, not in a common shared space such as a dining room table, where others may overhear or walk through.
- Review interagency agreements to ensure that a virtual meeting would be in compliance with them.
- Determine how to collect confidentiality agreements from participants. Teams may consider having participants

confirm confidentiality verbally at the beginning of the call; or via electronic signature in the chat box; completing a form that can be signed and returned electronically; or printing, signing, scanning, and emailing an agreement before the beginning of the call.

- Limit the number of team members who can join the call. Consider having only one person join from each agency. This will assist with maintaining confidentiality and facilitating the virtual meeting to allow all participants an opportunity to speak up, ask questions and contribute.
- Update the data sharing procedure. Teams may need to consider using a different procedure to share and collect case information; for example, sending an encrypted email to communicate the case information and using secure cloud storage for sharing and storing necessary case information.

## Requesting COSSAP Training and Technical Assistance

OFR teams can request training and technical assistance (TTA) from COSSAP. To submit a COSSAP TTA request, please complete the brief online application form on the COSSAP Resource Center website, <https://www.cossapresources.org/Program/TTA>. Requestors are asked to specify the type of TTA they are interested in (e.g., information, consultation, training), as well as to provide narrative details on their needs/requests.

Requestors will receive an email confirming successful TTA request submission and contact information for any additional questions or assistance. BJA reviews and matches each request to the TTA provider that can best address it.

Visit the COSSAP Resource Center at [www.cossapresources.org](http://www.cossapresources.org).

## About the Institute for Intergovernmental Research

The Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) serves as the connecting point for COSSAP TTA efforts and collaborates with BJA leadership and fellow TTA providers to work directly with COSSAP site-based grantees. IIR's role includes guidance and contributions by subject-matter experts in priority COSSAP areas of focus; coordination of the COSSAP TTA network's cadre of experts and providers; publication production and design of COSSAP resources; planning, coordination, and delivery of national-level trainings and working group meetings; COSSAP Resource Center development and maintenance; coordination of distance-learning opportunities and resource dissemination; and other complementary activities.

## About BJA

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal law enforcement in achieving safer communities. To learn more about BJA, visit [www.bja.gov](http://www.bja.gov) and follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DOJBJA](https://www.facebook.com/DOJBJA)) and Twitter (@DOJBJA). BJA is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.