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Guidance and Resources Toolkit

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Needs Assessment Toolkit

Reporting and next steps

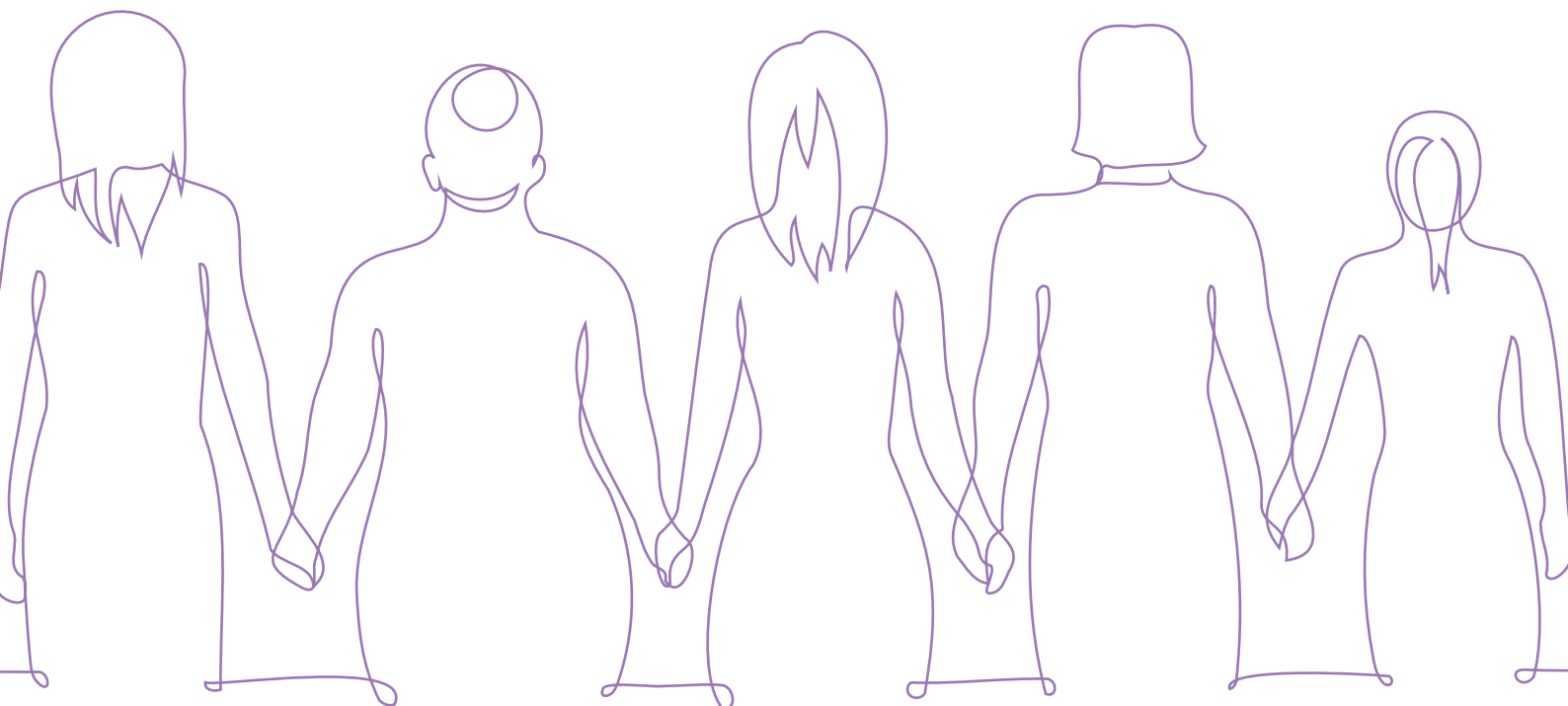
A practical guide to writing up reports and disseminating findings from a VAWG Needs Assessment



Acknowledgement

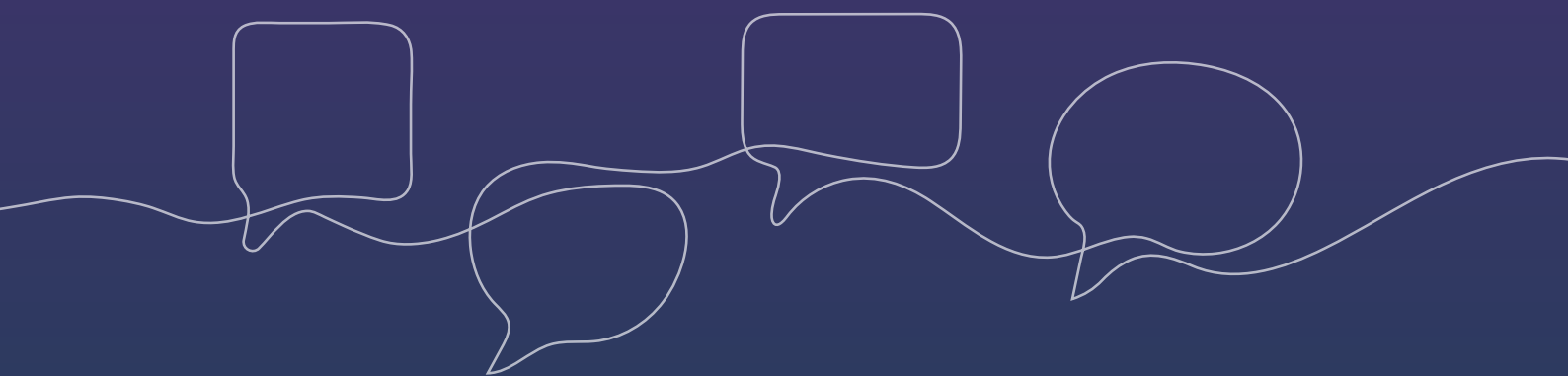
This toolkit has been developed in partnership with the initial testing areas Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Fife, North Lanarkshire, Orkney, Perth and Kinross and West Dunbartonshire and integrates resources created by a range of consultants and third sector and public sector partner organisations.

We want to thank all those who supported the test phase and shared resources, expertise and insight in the creation of this toolkit.



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1. Report structure template

Once data collection and analysis are complete, the final stage of a VAWG needs assessment is turning that evidence into a report, and then turning that report into action. Final needs assessment reports vary according to the needs assessment focus, kinds of data gathered, findings and local context. Below is an example report template drawn from previous needs assessments. This is a generic structure you can adapt for your own reporting needs.

Front matter - Title page, Acknowledgements, contents page

Executive Summary

Typically includes:

- Purpose and approach: why the assessment was undertaken and by whom
- What we found: key issues and challenges (structured around your research questions)
- What would help / what needs to change: headline recommendations

Introduction

- Background and purpose: why this assessment, why now, and how it links to local strategic priorities (e.g. a VAWP's strategic plan)
- The structure of the report: a short paragraph explaining how the report is structured

Methodology

- The mixed-methods approach used (desk research, surveys, focus groups, interviews)
- Engagement activities undertaken, with numbers reached where possible
- How data was analysed (e.g. thematic analysis, descriptive statistics)
- The analytical framework(s) used to interpret findings
- Dates of data collection
- Limitations: gaps in reach, response rates, or representativeness

Area/Context Profile

- Local demographic data
- Existing VAWG prevalence data (police-recorded incidents, MARAC referrals, child protection data)
- Information surrounding relevant local governance and planning landscape (e.g. VAWP structures, related partnerships)

Sector/National Context

- A short section on emerging or fast-changing issues in the VAWG sector (e.g. technology-facilitated abuse, economic abuse, post-separation abuse) to situate local findings within the wider evidence base

Findings: Issues and Challenges

- Data analysis: quantitative findings from surveys, presented with charts/tables where useful
- Learning from those with lived experience: women's, children's and young people's accounts, organised thematically
- Learning from those with learned experience: professionals' and practitioners' accounts
- Analysis using your chosen framework

What Needs to Change

- A synthesis section bringing together what would help, drawn directly from what participants told you

System Response

- An account of the current service and governance landscape, showing how the system currently responds

SWOT Analysis

- A structured summary of system strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

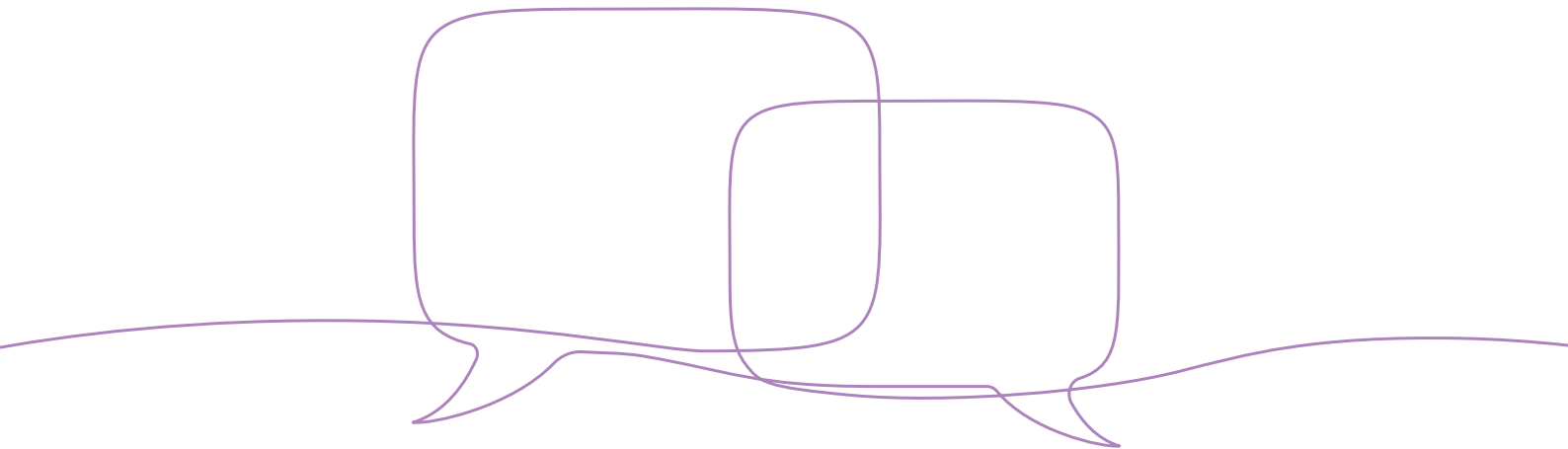
Conclusions

Recommendations

- Guiding principles the recommendations are built on
- Specific, actionable recommendations, ideally grouped into priorities
- Where possible, recommendations mapped to a national or local outcomes framework (e.g. Equally Safe)

Appendices

- Detailed local data tables
- Further policy and legislative context
- Full survey findings
- References and photography/image credits



2. Analytical frameworks

An analytical framework gives your findings a consistent structure, helping readers move from individual stories and data points to a coherent picture of the system as a whole. Test areas have used different frameworks depending on what suited their data and their audience. Two are set out below as options; you are not limited to these, and some partnerships have combined elements of both. The choice of analytical framework should be made based on what best suits the findings and preserves the voices of people who contributed to the evidence gathering.

Option A: The Socio-Ecological Model

Organises findings by the level at which harm occurs or change is needed, recognising that the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that enable or prevent VAWG operate across interacting layers of society, not just at the level of the individual.

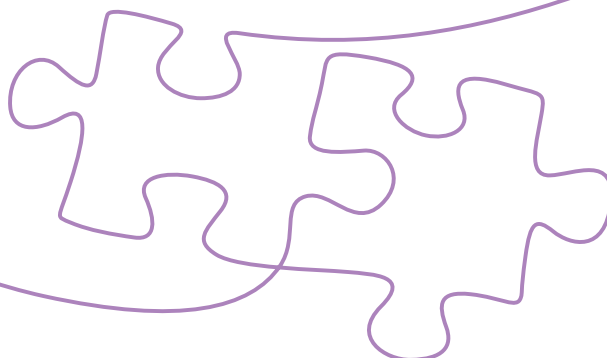
Level	Focus
Societal	Norms that impact on the acceptance of VAWG and that are replicated within systems and structures.
Community	Settings where social relationships occur, schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and factors such as poverty, service availability and economic opportunity.
Interpersonal	Dynamics within intimate partnerships, families and peer groups.
Individual	Personal characteristics, history and experiences that increase risk and shape attitudes and beliefs.

At each level, findings are typically organised into what caused harm and what helped, drawn directly from what women, children, young people and professionals told you. This dual framing keeps the analysis balanced rather than purely deficit-focused, and helps translate findings into recommendations at each level.

Option B: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Prevention

Organises the current system response as well as any gaps within by stage of intervention, drawing on a public health model of prevention. This framework is particularly useful when your report includes a section mapping the current service and governance landscape, as it helps to show where a system is over- or under-invested.

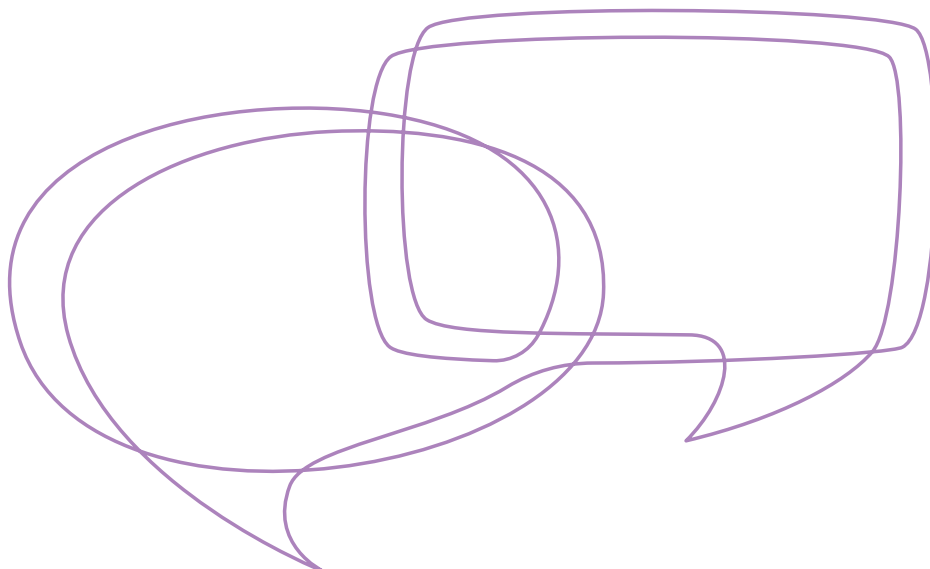
Stage	Focus
Primary prevention	Stopping violence before it starts: addressing root social, cultural and behavioural causes such as gender inequality and harmful norms, typically through education, community work and tackling structural drivers like poverty and housing.
Secondary prevention	Early identification and disruption of harm. This may include trauma-informed identification within non-specialist services (health, housing, education), voluntary support before statutory thresholds are met, and multi-agency coordination to reduce escalation.
Tertiary prevention	Safety, recovery and preventing recurrence. This may include specialist VAWG services, MARAC and high-risk processes, trauma-informed recovery support, and stable housing pathways as the foundation for long-term safety.



3. SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is a useful bridge between your findings and your recommendations. It summarises the current system's capacity to prevent, respond to and support recovery from VAWG in one place, before you move into specific recommended actions. You may also wish to combine a SWOT Analysis with the socioecological or Primary, Secondary, Tertiary prevention model in order to identify strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats across different parts of society or different parts of the system.

Quadrant	Typically draws on
Strengths	"What helped" findings for example trusted specialist services, examples of effective multi-agency working, existing strategic recognition of VAWG, use of lived experience to inform practice
Weaknesses	"What caused harm" findings for example fragmentation, inconsistency, thresholds that exclude people below statutory criteria, gaps in trauma-informed practice, workforce and funding instability
Opportunities	Promising practice mentioned but not yet embedded. This may include models used elsewhere, upcoming legislative or policy changes, untapped partnerships, areas identified for secondary prevention investment
Threats	External pressures largely outside the partnership's direct control for example funding insecurity, rising demand, cost-of-living pressures, workforce burnout, housing shortages



4. Data ethics and anonymisation

Needs assessments handle highly sensitive disclosures. A short data ethics section early in the reporting process helps protect participants and the partnership.

Before you start writing

- Agree how qualitative data (interview notes, focus group recordings/transcripts) will be stored securely and for how long
- Agree who has access to original, non-anonymised data, and ensure this is as limited as possible
- Confirm the consent basis participants were given, including how their words may be used and whether they can withdraw

Before you publish

- Re-read every quote and case example with anonymisation specifically in mind, not just once during drafting; where a quote describes a specific, unusual, or identifying situation, consider paraphrasing instead
- If including data tables, ensure the appropriate disclosure controls are in place
- Consider sharing the report with those you consulted for feedback and ensuring any participants with lived experience of VAWG are happy with any direct quotations used
- Where photography is used, ensure consent has been given and that images do not inadvertently identify participants or locations

Naming limitations

- Every report reviewed for this guide includes a limitations section, consider response rates, underrepresented groups (for example, women from racialised minority communities, LGBTQ+ respondents, disabled women), and gaps in reach. Naming these openly strengthens rather than weakens a report, and signals where future engagement work is needed

5. From recommendations to action

A report's impact depends on what happens after publication. The strongest recommendations sections do three things: state guiding principles, translate them into specific actions, and assign ownership of next steps.

Step 1: Guiding principles

Before listing specific actions, set out the small number of principles all recommendations should be judged against. Examples used by test areas include:

- Gender-transformative responses at the heart of addressing root causes
- Services and professionals recognising VAWG and understanding its impact
- Trauma-responsive approaches embedded across all services, not just trauma-informed training
- Reducing the number of times people have to retell their story
- Lived experience central to shaping change
- Accountability, including recognising where systems may inadvertently collude with perpetrators

Step 2: Group recommendations into priorities

Rather than a long flat list, group related recommendations under a small number of named priorities, each with a short rationale linking back to the evidence.

For example: "Priority 1: Make Safety and Housing the Foundation of the VAWG Response", followed by 4–6 specific recommended actions under it.

Step 3: Map to an outcomes framework

Where possible, map priorities and actions against a recognised outcomes framework (for example, Scotland's Equally Safe outcomes and/ or the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP)). This helps recommendations plug into existing reporting and accountability structures.

Turning this into an action plan

Use the table below as a starting point for translating report recommendations into a plan. This mirrors the project planning approach used in the Set-Up Guide, so the two can sit together as a partnership moves from assessment into delivery.

Recommendation	
Priority area Which grouped priority this sits under	
Lead Named organisation or role	
Supporting partners	
Timescale Realistic, agreed date	
Resource required Funding, staff time, commissioning	
Outcome link e.g. relevant Equally Safe outcome	
RAG status Red/Amber/Green	

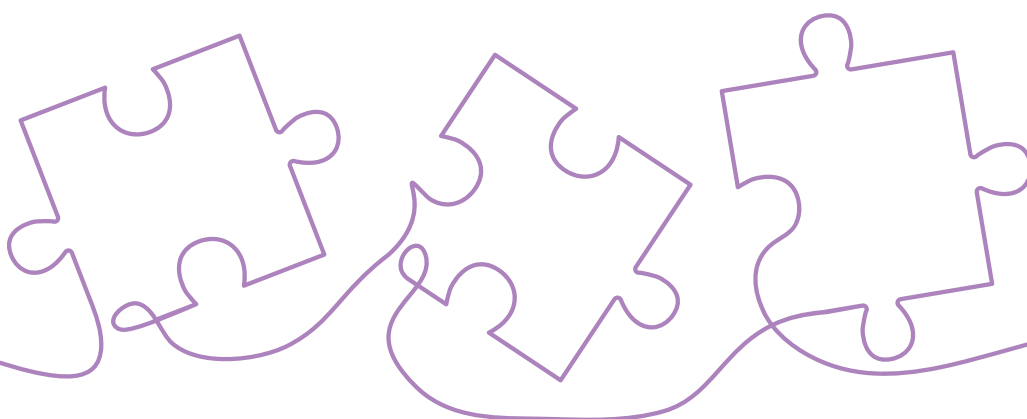
Keep it live

Several reports note that recommendations can lose momentum once a report is published. Building the action plan as a living RAG-rated document, reviewed by the same governance structure that oversaw the needs assessment (see the Set-Up Guide), helps keep it visible and owned.

Framing findings as an improvement opportunity

How findings are framed matters as much as what they say. One test area deliberately worked through, with their steering group, how to present findings that were often hard-hitting without it landing as pure criticism of an already-stretched workforce. Their approach was to consistently pair what wasn't working with what helped and why, and to be explicit in the report that many of the pressures identified (workforce burnout, funding constraints, thresholds) reflect wider, sector-wide conditions rather than failings unique to their area or to individual staff.

This isn't about softening findings, it's about writing recommendations in a way that recognises the challenging context that local services and workforces are currently operating in, which are often part of what a needs assessment uncovers in the first place.



8. Dissemination and next steps

Publishing the report is not the end point. Dissemination of findings is a key part of turning findings from a needs assessment into action. Often this needs to happen in stages, working outwards from the group that oversaw the assessment to progressively wider audiences, including those in leadership roles. It is a good idea to plan this approach early, as each stage can take time to arrange.

Sign-off and governance

- Agree in advance who needs to sign off the final report before publication
- Plan how findings will feed into any wider strategic needs assessment or strategic planning activity already underway

Dissemination of findings

Once test area's approach moved through several distinct stages, each widening the audience:

- Present first to the core partnership that oversaw the assessment, so they hear findings before anyone else and can help shape how it's taken forward
- Hold a separate session for senior managers from services named in the findings who don't normally sit on the partnership, invite them specifically because they may otherwise not have an opportunity to see findings that concern their service directly
- Before any group session with senior managers, consider reaching out to key individuals one-to-one first. Personally, briefing people ahead of a group discussion can help build early buy-in and a sense of ownership, rather than people encountering challenging findings in a room with their peers
- Escalate to a standalone session with your Chief Officer Group (or equivalent senior oversight body), to secure commitment across the key organisations and service areas they represent
- Where relevant, take findings to wider multi-partner structures beyond the VAWP itself, such as a Community Planning Partnership or Integrated Joint Strategic Board
- Identify related partnerships whose own work overlaps with your findings (for example, an Alcohol and Drug Partnership where substance use and VAWG intersect), and plan specific follow-up conversations with them

Communicating findings

- Consider different versions or summaries for different audiences. This may include a full report, a shorter summary for elected members or boards, and accessible versions for people with lived experience who took part
- Plan a dissemination event or briefing session, particularly for the professionals and services named in your findings
- Decide how and where the report will be published, and whether any content needs a plain-language or Easy Read version

Embedding recommendations

- Identify which existing governance structure (steering group, VAWP, subgroup) will own tracking of the action plan
- Set a review cadence and build this into existing meeting schedules rather than creating a new one
- Consider ongoing opportunities for people with lived experience to help shape the resulting improvement or strategic plan, so lived experience continues to inform change beyond the assessment itself, not just the findings that fed into it

Strengthening feedback loops

Where possible, feed back to the people and organisations who took part in the assessment including what was found, and what is happening as a result. This is both good practice and something participants in test areas have specifically asked for.

Ahead of sharing the final report with professionals and services, go back to the stakeholders who fed into the needs assessment with draft findings to ask “is this right, and what do you think should happen next?”. This approach is valuable both for accuracy and for setting up the improvement conversations that follow publication. Plan the time for it from the outset, particularly if your assessment runs on a tight timescale.

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