



# Evaluation Technical Assistance Brief

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## Regional Partnership Grants Cost Study: A Case Study of Seeking Safety

Projects must decide how to use their finite resources to best serve vulnerable populations, such as adults with substance use disorders and children at risk of experiencing maltreatment. Cost studies can provide insight into the budgetary implications of offering specific practices to serve these populations. This brief presents a case study of the costs of using Seeking Safety, an intervention designed to serve adolescents and adults with a history of trauma and substance use issues. This brief features three projects from the fourth cohort of the Regional Partnership Grants (RPG). This study used tools developed in collaboration with an earlier cohort of RPGs (Burwick et al. 2017) and was part of a larger cost study (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, forthcoming).

Although the sample size in this study does not allow for the findings to be generalized, this overview provides benchmark cost estimates and insights to help providers better understand the costs associated with implementing Seeking Safety. This brief begins with an overview of the cost study framework and Seeking Safety. Then it describes the key findings from applying the framework to Seeking Safety and provides information on the benchmark costs associated with implementing this intervention.

### Cost study framework

The cost study sought to gather information on the costs of implementing trauma-specific, evidence-based practices (EBPs) to serve families. A separate brief provides additional information on the cost study framework. The cost study relied on two data sources: (1) a cost workbook of detailed expenditure data, and (2) a staff survey and time log about how staff spent time on each trauma-specific EBP. Exhibit 1 shows the eight resource categories included in the Microsoft Excel-based cost workbook. A person familiar with project finances completed the cost workbook, and grantees reported cost data for a recent 12-month, steady-state period, typically their most recent fiscal year. All staff who spent time delivering the trauma-specific

### Who should read this brief?

The Children's Bureau in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services funded this brief for groups that receive a Regional Partnership Grant or for other agencies interested in evaluating the costs associated with implementing evidence-based practices. The brief highlights costs of implementing Seeking Safety, but the cost study framework used can establish benchmark cost estimates for other evidence-based practices or programs.

EBP, supporting service delivery, or administering activities associated with the EBP were asked to complete the staff survey and time log. This enabled the study team to capture data on staff positions, work hours, training on the EBP, and number of hours spent on activities related to the trauma-specific EBP during a one-month data collection window. See the Appendix for additional information on the cost study methodology.

### Overview of Seeking Safety

The cost study team selected Seeking Safety for this study because it met the criteria that expert workgroup members recommended: it (1) was commonly implemented by RPG projects and (2) served both adults and children. Seeking Safety is a manualized intervention for adolescents and adults with a history of trauma and substance use issues (see Exhibit 2 for a summary of program highlights). The intervention was designed for implementation in a group or individual format, and in a variety of settings, such as outpatient, inpatient, or residential treatment programs. Seeking Safety has been integrated in programs addressing substance use, mental health, domestic violence, and homelessness, and programs serving various populations, such as women, children, and veterans. It has been delivered in correctional, medical, and school settings. The session modules cover 25 topics focusing on three types of safe

## Exhibit 1. Cost workbook resource categories



**Personnel.** Salaries paid to staff working on the EBP, based on full-time annual salary for each position, as defined by the grantee organization, and the average percentage of time spent on the EBP by the staff. Includes aggregated value of payroll taxes and other benefits for staff working on the EBP, reported as a percentage of salary or total amount.



**Contracted services.** Costs for contracted service providers and consultants working with the EBP. These might be available as totals or broken out by components of costs (for example, cost per counseling session or staff training), depending on partner type and terms of the contract.



**Volunteer labor.** For each volunteer position, number of hours worked per week, number of months worked per year, and estimated average hourly wage for a paid staff member in a similar position.



**Supplies and materials.** Expenditures for supplies and materials (for example, office supplies and educational materials); estimated value of donated supplies and materials.



**Equipment.** Original purchase price, year purchased, and expected useful life of any durable equipment or capital assets used by the EBP for more than one year. Examples include computer systems, automobiles, or office furniture.



**Facilities.** Value of annual rent, lease, or mortgage payments for space or facility and proportion used by the EBP. For donated space, estimated annual cost of space based on fair market value and portion of the year the EBP used the space.



**Miscellaneous.** Other direct EBP costs not included in above categories and might include training costs, communications, expenditures on cell phones and other utilities, transportation or mileage reimbursement related to providing services, staff travel expenditures for other purposes, postage/shipping, printer/copier, systems hardware or software, insurance, public affairs, legal services, banking fees, and taxes paid by the grantee organization.



**Indirect costs.** Indirect (overhead) costs allocated to the EBP (for shared functions within an agency, such as human resources, technology, marketing, communications, or building maintenance) and not reported under other resource categories.

coping skills: cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal. The typical dosage is 29 sessions over 12 to 24 weeks, but the number and duration of sessions and the sequence of topics depend on participants' needs. Individuals implementing Seeking Safety do not require any specific qualifications or training, but the program developer does offer training services (California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare 2020).

### Application of the cost study framework to Seeking Safety

To apply the cost study framework to Seeking Safety, the cost study team collected data from three grantees implementing Seeking Safety in their RPG projects. This section highlights key findings from the analyses of the cost workbook and the staff survey and time log.

## Exhibit 2. Seeking Safety highlights

### Seeking Safety

**Population:** Adolescents and adults with a history of trauma and substance use issues

**Format:** Group or individual format

**Setting:** Various, including outpatient, inpatient, and residential treatment programs in correctional, medical, and school settings

**Content:** 25 topics focusing on cognitive, behavioral, and interpersonal safe coping skills

**Program length:** 29 sessions over 12 to 24 weeks, on average

**Staff qualifications and training:** No specific degree or experience is required

Source: California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare 2020.

### Cost workbook key findings

The grantees offering Seeking Safety reported a wide range of total operating costs. The most expensive operating costs were 10 times more than the least expensive (ranging from \$7,451 to \$79,680). This difference was driven by the cost for staff implementing Seeking Safety (based on costs for salary and fringe benefits and the percentage of time staff spent delivering the intervention), as well as the percentage of the grantees' indirect costs that were allocated to Seeking Safety. However, these total amounts represented a small percentage of the grantee's total annual expenditures (Exhibit 3).

The top three largest costs of implementing Seeking Safety were (1) personnel, (2) indirect costs, and (3) facilities costs (Exhibit 4). Exhibit 5 offers examples of costs in each of these categories.



**Personnel.** In addition to costs for salaries, all three grantees paid for fringe benefits for staff, including social security (Federal Insurance Contributions Act), health insurance, life insurance, and workers compensation, among others. One grantee also paid for overtime for staff. For the three grantees in the study, personnel costs comprised, on average, 61 percent of total costs to implement Seeking Safety.



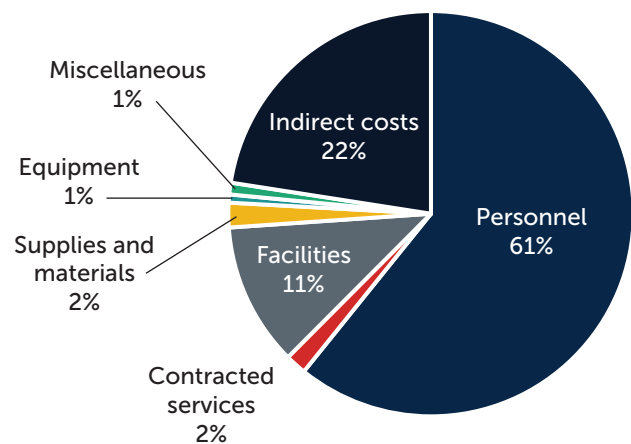
**Indirect costs.** Grantees reported that indirect (overhead) costs within their respective organizations accounted for an average of 22 percent of their total costs to implement Seeking Safety. These costs often covered administrative and supportive staff salaries, general operating supplies, and technology support.



**Facilities.** Some grantees used one building to implement Seeking Safety, and others used up to three buildings. In addition to paying for the physical space, the grantees paid for utilities in these facilities. The facilities costs were, on average, 11 percent of total costs to implement Seeking Safety.

Although smaller percentages of the overall costs to implement Seeking Safety, grantees also incurred costs for supplies and materials, contracted services, equipment, and miscellaneous costs. Exhibit 5 offers examples of the types of costs that grantees reported in each category.

**Exhibit 4. Percentage allocation by resource category for Seeking Safety**



Source: Cost workbooks completed by grantees in March 2022. Client counts retrieved from RPG performance measures and evaluation data system in June 2022.









Note: Total annual costs were restricted to the implementation of the evidence-based practice and were adjusted to a national average. Pie chart totals might not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

**Exhibit 3. Seeking Safety annual cost and cost per individual or family**

	Total annual cost for EBP	Total individuals or families served	Total annual cost per individual or family	Percentage of grantee total annual expenditures used for EBP
Grantee 1	\$79,679	30	\$2,656	0.78%
Grantee 2	\$32,676	13	\$2,514	0.45%
Grantee 3	\$7,451	26	\$287	0.08%
<b>Mean</b>	<b>\$39,936</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>\$1,819</b>	<b>0.46%</b>

Source: Cost workbooks completed by grantees in March 2022. Client counts retrieved from Regional Partnership Grants-Evaluation Data System in June 2022. Note: Total annual costs were restricted to the implementation of Seeking Safety and were adjusted to a national average. Total individuals or families served show the number of individuals or families who received services during the reporting period. EBP = evidence-based practice.

**Exhibit 5. Examples of Seeking Safety costs by cost category**

Cost category	Example of costs
 Personnel	Staff salaries, fringe benefit costs, and paid overtime costs
 Contracted services	Contract with a medical director to review and approve treatment plans, and a contract with the Division of Child Welfare to provide additional support to families
 Volunteer labor	None of the grantees reported costs for volunteer time to support the implementation of Seeking Safety
 Supplies and materials	Curricula, books, handouts, educational materials, toys, and program supplies, such as markers and craft supplies
 Equipment	Laptops, computer accessories, furniture such as tables and chairs, and a lease for a printer
 Facilities	Building space and utilities
 Miscellaneous	Electronic health record system, travel and mileage reimbursement, insurance, and repairs and maintenance
 Indirect costs	Costs for administrative and support staff, general supplies, and ancillary expenses such as telephones, maintenance/janitorial expenses, and information technology supplies and upgrades

**Staff survey and time log key findings**

Staff across all three grantees spent an average of 6.8 percent of their total work time implementing Seeking Safety. One staff member provided Seeking Safety every workday during the data collection period, but other staff delivered Seeking Safety for 1 to 11 days during the 30-day data collection time frame. Staff spent most of their time on clinical service delivery, averaging almost 50 percent of their time spent on Seeking Safety, and they spent the least amount of time on management tasks (such as general EBP outreach and program administration and management), at less than 5 percent of time (Exhibit 6). See the Appendix for definitions of program activities.

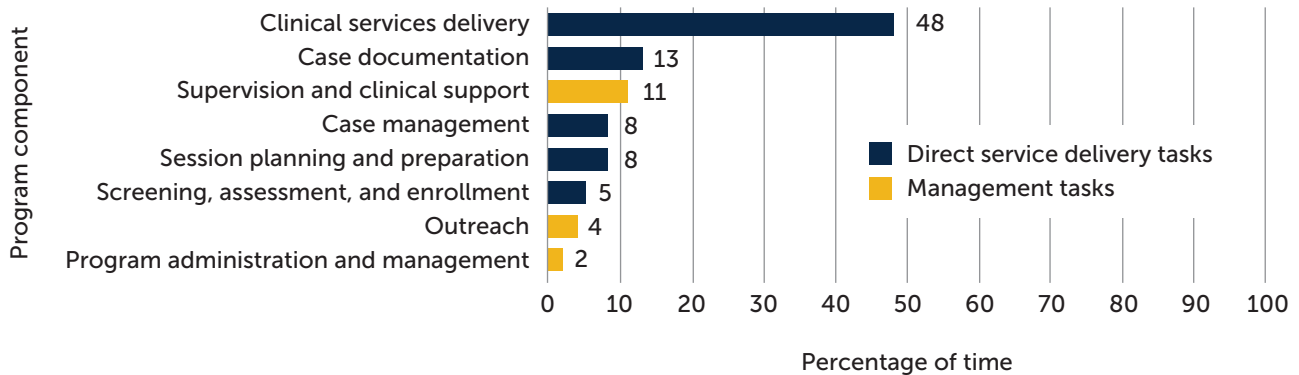
Grantees offered Seeking Safety in three different modes, including group service delivery, individual service delivery,

and virtual options as required during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- One grantee delivered services to families in clients’ homes.
- One grantee delivered services for individuals in clients’ homes and communities and virtually, as COVID-19 restrictions and client preference dictated.
- One grantee delivered services in a group setting at an outpatient clinic.

Exhibit 7 shows that staff who implemented Seeking Safety as an individual service spent more time on implementation than those implementing it as a group. Staff who used group service delivery used, on average, 5.3 days during the 30-day data collection period for an average of 32 minutes per day. Staff who implemented

**Exhibit 6. Average percentage of staff time spent on implementing Seeking Safety**

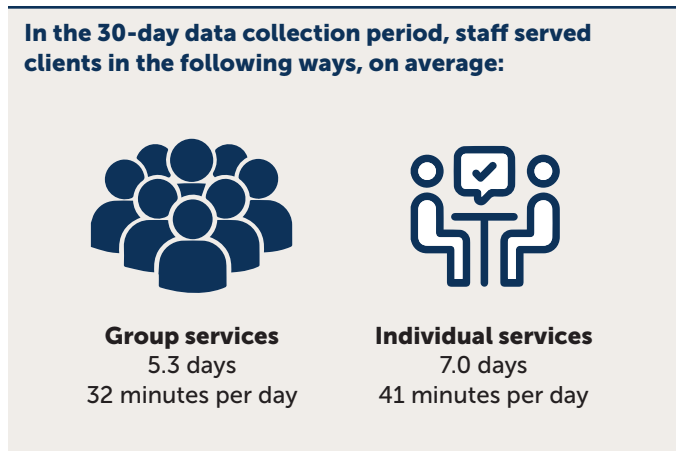


Source: Staff time use logs were completed in March 2022.

Notes: Results are based on 12 staff from 3 grantees. Direct service delivery tasks include services delivered to groups and individuals

individual service delivery did so for 7 days, on average, during the 30-day data collection period. Staff who delivered individual services spent an average of 41 minutes per day on Seeking Safety. For group and individual services, most of the time Seeking Safety was implemented in person. Of the 12 staff administering Seeking Safety, 2 staff delivered services remotely, and only for 2 days of the 30-day data collection period.

**Exhibit 7. Average staff time delivering Seeking Safety, by mode**



**Limitations**

This cost study design has several limitations to consider when interpreting its findings. The study relies on data from a small sample size (three RPG projects), so the findings were not representative of all RPG projects or other programs and cannot be generalized. In addition, the cost study team estimated the value of some resources that grantees reported they used at no cost, which might not accurately reflect the true cost of those resources. Furthermore, all data in this study was self-reported, which could be a source of bias or error.

**Summary**

Information on expected operations costs and resource allocations to implement and sustain a practice can help projects decide how to use their finite resources to best serve families. The cost study tools developed under RPG provide insight into the budgetary implications of offering specific EBPs. By applying this cost study to Seeking Safety in three separate RPG projects, the cost study team identified that the largest costs for these programs were for personnel, indirect costs, and facilities, but that staff spent a small portion of their overall work hours on implementing this EBP. The cost study team also identified that the total cost to implement the program was less than 1 percent of total annual expenditures for all three programs. These findings suggest that programs in similar contexts as the three highlighted in this study could implement Seeking Safety without incurring significant costs for additional resources.

**References**

Burwick, Andrew, AnnaMaria McCutcheon, Lareina LaFlair, Jennifer Herard, and Debra Strong. "Understanding the Costs of Services to Address Trauma in Adults and Children: Data Collection Instruments and Guidance for Cost Analyses of Trauma-Specific Evidence-Based Programs." Washington, DC: Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 2017.

California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare. "Seeking Safety (Adolescent version)." San Diego, CA: California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, 2020.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Targeted Grants to Increase the Well-Being of, and to Improve the Permanency Outcomes for, Children Affected by Methamphetamine or Other Substance Abuse: Eighth Report to Congress." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, Children's Bureau, forthcoming.



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## Appendix

### Cost study methodology

The cost study team estimated total and per-participant costs using data from the cost study. The cost study team also used the staff survey and time log to explore the costs associated with how staff allocated their time to different service activities while implementing the trauma-specific EBPs.



**Estimating total program costs.** To estimate total program costs, the cost study team summed the value of all the resources grantees reported using during the one-year reporting period. Because resources are often shared across programs, for each cost reported, respondents were asked to report the cost to the program during the reporting period and indicate the percentage of that cost that was used specifically to implement the trauma-specific EBP (rather than other programs within the organization). If respondents reported using facilities at no cost to the program, the cost study team estimated the value of the office space using commercial rental rates for comparably sized buildings in the metropolitan area where the program operates.

Before analysis, reported costs were adjusted to allow for comparison across grantees. Because these programs operated in different parts of the country with varied costs of living, costs were adjusted to the national average for comparison. To do so, the cost study team calculated the wage index using the average

hourly wage for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors at local (where grantees are located) and national levels. The index was then applied to all costs to adjust them to a national standard for comparison.



**Estimating total costs per individual or family.** To estimate the total cost per individual or family, the cost study team defined a participant as any individual or parent-child dyad who was served by the EBP during the cost study period (as identified in staff time logs). Total costs were divided by the number of participants or participant dyads to produce an estimated cost per participant. Using this approach, estimates of the average cost per participant will not account for variation in service intensity or duration.



**Analyzing staff use of time.** The cost study team generated descriptive statistics of survey responses and time logs to calculate the percentage of staff time allocated to each designated activity.

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### Definitions of staff activities

The cost study team instructed the grantees to use the following definitions when completing the staff survey and time log.

**Clinical service delivery.** Delivery of therapy in group or individual sessions.

**Case documentation.** Writing and processing group or individual case notes and progress reports.

**Supervision and clinical support.** Providing or receiving ongoing training and clinical supervision focused on Seeking Safety, including conducting and reviewing fidelity assessments.

**Case management.** Activities related to individual case management and interagency coordination or referrals on behalf of a client.

**Session planning and preparation.** Activities to prepare each group or individual session of Seeking Safety.

**Screening, assessment, and enrollment.** Activities to screen or assess clients to determine eligibility and inform treatment plans. Activities to enroll clients into services.

**Outreach.** Activities to inform referral agencies and potential new clients about services.

**Program administration and management.** Activities related to ongoing general management of Seeking Safety services.