



**SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE  
TEAM DEVELOPMENT**  
**A GUIDE FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS**

*This project was supported by Grant Number 2009-TA-AX-K042, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

*The content of this publication may be reprinted with the following acknowledgement: This material was reprinted, with permission, from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's publication entitled Sexual Assault Response Team Development: A Guide for Victim Service Providers. This guide is available by visiting [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org)*

*© National Sexual Violence Resource Center 2011. All rights reserved.*

# SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM DEVELOPMENT

## A GUIDE FOR VICTIM SERVICE PROVIDERS

---

### WHAT IS A SART?

Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) are coalitions of agencies that serve sexual assault victims. Core membership for SARTs typically includes victim advocates, law enforcement officers, forensic medical examiners, forensic scientists, and prosecutors. Multidisciplinary SARTs work together to formalize interagency guidelines that prioritize victims' needs, hold offenders accountable, and promote public safety.

SART models range from informal, cooperative partnerships to more formalized, coordinated, and multidisciplinary responses on local, regional, state, tribal, or territory levels.

In general, SARTs are committed to victims' rights and needs, organize their service delivery to enhance evidence collection, and educate the community about services available for the

intervention and prevention of sexual assault (National Center for the Prosecution on Violence Against Women, 1998).

The focus of this Technical Assistance Guide is to help sexual assault service providers build, expand, formalize, and maintain strong interagency responses to sexual violence. It includes a brief overview followed by *Practice Tips, Ways to Build SART Excellence, and Key Resources*.

### Determine the SART Jurisdiction(s)

A SART's *jurisdiction* is the area that it serves. A jurisdiction may be a local community, a state, a territory, a tribal land, a campus, a military installation, a national park, or a multi-city/state/team region.

The Minnesota Model Protocol Project uses a matrix as a tool to help team members consider how best to coordinate interagency roles as well as their primary and secondary responsibilities (Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2000).



### Jurisdictional practice tips

- Identify all law enforcement responders and prosecuting attorneys within the team's legal jurisdiction. (Consider local, state, federal, tribal, campus, military and juvenile venues);
- Define primary and secondary responsibilities for team members with specific attention to medical, legal, and advocacy providers to determine specific agency jurisdictions in the response to sexual violence.

### Building SART excellence

- Address specific problems victims may encounter when navigating multi-jurisdictional service areas (consider governmental and non-governmental service providers);
- Assess other jurisdictional issues such as victims that are sexually assaulted on cruise ships at sea, victims traveling in foreign countries, and sexual assaults of trafficking or undocumented victims.

### Key resources

For online access to key resources, visit:  
<http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart-jurisdictional>.

- *The Criminal Justice Continuum and Specific Justice Systems and Victims' Rights*: These resources provide an overview of federal, state, juvenile, military, and tribal justice systems.
- *Enforcing Criminal Law on Native American Lands*: This document describes the jurisdictional complexities of policing in and adjacent to Indian Country.
- *The Need for Courtesy Reports*: This article explains the need for law enforcement officials to be willing and able to take courtesy reports for sexual assaults that occurred outside their jurisdiction, particularly in cases such as disasters like Hurricane Katrina and college students reporting when they return home.

## ASSESS COMMUNITY READINESS

Using data to inform planning can be especially useful for creating or expanding SARTs. Information teams collect and answer questions about the frequency of sexual assault in a jurisdiction, where it tends to occur, victim demographics, and perpetrators' mode of operation (MO). The data can then be used to compile resources, examine service delivery and address risk factors. Additionally, obtaining data is a crucial first step for creating benchmarks to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of SART responses over time.

### Practice tips to assess SART readiness

Document service availability, accessibility, and contact information for the following agencies, organizations, and institutions:

- Medical, legal, military, educational, tribal and advocacy providers that respond (or may respond) to sexual assault;
- Providers that serve the specific needs of certain groups, including individuals with disabilities, older persons, trafficking victims, and specific cultural populations.

Once a list or chart of service providers is created, SARTs should determine how frequently and by whom the referral list will be updated.

### Building SART excellence

- Evaluate the response to sexual violence through victim experience surveys, focus groups, or interviews.
- Evaluate the quality of services victims received when SART agencies refer victims to other community resources;
- Identify and address gaps in the availability of community support services for victims;

---

## USING DATA TO INFORM PLANNING CAN BE ESPECIALLY USEFUL FOR CREATING OR EXPANDING SARTS.

---

- Determine available options for victims not pursuing a criminal justice response;
- Disseminate a community resource/referral list for providers not actively involved in the SART.

### Key resources

For online access to key resource tools, visit <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart-readiness>

## IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

The long-term sustainability of a SART rests on its ability to uncover and build upon the unique strengths and assets of people, institutions, and organizations within a particular region. Coupling community assets with SART objectives can open up a broad avenue of support that is responsive to the needs of both victims and the criminal justice system.

To determine collaborative opportunities, SART organizers can look for natural allies among individuals or groups who have a stake in the prevention and/or intervention of sexual assault. One approach to identifying allies is to look creatively within the jurisdiction and assess which service providers might assist victims medically, legally, economically, spiritually, psychologically or financially. Additionally, SARTs can consider groups and social structures that might stand to gain by

supporting a SART. Such potential collaborators could include educational institutions, public health agencies, substance abuse agencies, faith-based organizations, domestic violence agencies, or mental health facilities.

Partnerships beyond those with direct services may also help the SART's planning and outreach efforts. For example, local corporations and businesses might be able to donate meeting spaces and equipment, such as photocopiers/computers. Businesses, whether large or small, may provide assistance with publishing SART documents, technological expertise for interagency communications/data collection, or direct financial support for a SART's overhead expenses.

Tapping local resources not only helps to sustain a SART; it is a strategic form of public awareness that can prompt more community ownership in both the prevention and intervention of sexual violence.

### Practice tips for expanding community alliances

- Identify organizations, institutions, or companies that could help SARTs meet a continuum of care for victims. (Consider housing and safety needs, medical/reproductive health assistance, transportation, public assistance, employment assistance, child care, etc.);
- Assess whether the SART model fits into other crime victim initiatives or multidisciplinary team efforts in the community. For example, SARTs may consider networking with domestic violence coordinating councils, child abuse councils, or fatality review teams in order to

stay informed about issues that may directly or indirectly impact the response to sexual violence;

- Identify community assets that can assist SARTs with cross-cultural service delivery and resources;
- Identify professional organizations and community groups that may be receptive to prevention education presentations.

### Building SART excellence

- Create a flow chart to educate the community agencies about the role of SARTs in the response to sexual violence;
- Identify the commonalities, differences and respective roles among community service providers and establish referral policies;
- Develop a media strategy to promote the SART;
- Establish interagency cross-training with community agencies that provide (or could provide) services to sexual assault victims.

### Key Resources

For online access to collaboration resources visit <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart-collaboration>.

- 
- To help communities assess the readiness and/or level of community partnerships, the Wilder Research Center developed an online survey to be used to assess factors that influence successful collaboration.
  - *Building Stronger Sexual Assault Survivor Services through Collaboration*: This document describes key roles for community sexual assault coalitions or task forces. The manual can be useful for communities starting SARTs or



expanding collaborative partnerships. Included in this resource are samples and checklists for needs assessments, MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding), mission statements, and self-evaluation instruments.

- *Collaboration: A Training Curriculum to Enhance the Effectiveness of Criminal Justice Teams*: This curriculum is designed to assist multidisciplinary criminal justice teams in establishing or enhancing collaborative relationships. Regardless of whether a team

is newly formed or long-ago established, or whether it is tasked with a specific project or with broader purpose (such as a multi-agency council mandated to oversee all criminal justice activities in a jurisdiction), all teams can benefit from this curriculum.

- *Collaboration Primer*: This document, designed for healthcare professionals, offers useful tips that can be adapted across disciplines. It provides foundational as well as more abstract elements of successful partnerships. A checklist

of questions and issues to consider before embarking on collaborative arrangements and examples of model partnerships is included.

- *Community Tool Box–Tools*: This toolbox includes information intended to promote community development. There are sections on leadership, strategic planning, community assessment, grant writing, and evaluation. Each section includes a description of a task, advantages of carrying out the task, step-by-step guidelines, and checklists.
- *Looking Back Moving Forward–Workbook*: This

publication is geared to improve the community response to sexual assault. It is designed to assist interagency councils with organizing and following the steps for developing and implementing multi-disciplinary, multi-agency, victim-centered protocol. This workbook has suggestions for letters, media releases, meeting agendas and other tools that can be easily customized.

- *Making Collaboration Work: The Experiences of Denver Victim Services 2000*: This bulletin documents the Victim Services 2000 collaborative model in Denver. It discusses leadership, use of technology for case management, community advocacy, and lessons learned.



## DEFINE SART PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES

SART protocols/guidelines are agreements between agencies about the provision of sexual assault services and the roles and responsibilities of core responders. Ultimately, protocols provide a way for team members to institutionalize interagency expectations in order to maintain high quality, consistent responses over the long-term.

SART protocol development requires that each agency on the team customize their individual agency responses into an ideal multidisciplinary, coordinated response. The Minnesota Model Protocol Project uses a responsibility matrix to show distinct and interrelated responsibilities among team members as a catalyst to develop a SART protocol. Blank rows at the end of each section provide spaces for SARTs to add other tasks as SARTs evolve over time.

When creating guidelines or protocols, teams should



balance the need for structure and certainty with a system that allows for flexibility based on victims' specific needs and case variables. For example, once policies are written, there could be legal or procedural repercussions when procedures are not followed, no matter how compelling the reason. To offset potential problems, some teams refrain from using the term protocol and write their policies as guidelines to minimize legal repercussions when policies are not followed.

Once team policies are established, many SARTs formalize the process through memoranda of understanding or agreement (MOU/MOA). MOUs/MOAs are important in the structuring of position/agency relationships.

### Practice tips for protocol development

- Document team member responsibilities in responding to sexual assault;
- Integrate individual agency responses into team guidelines or protocols;
- Educate all SART agencies and allied organizations on the protocol.

### Building SART excellence

- Develop a plan for quality assurance. This could include victim surveys, town hall meetings, focus groups or case reviews during team meetings;
- Create confidentiality guidelines for case reviews at team meetings;
- Review protocol regularly to ensure emerging issues are addressed proactively.

### Key resources

For samples of protocols and guidelines visit <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart-protocols>.

## DEVELOP A STRATEGY TO KEEP TEAM MOMENTUM

Keeping team momentum entails building SARTs' capacities in a range of areas, such as in organizational development, business planning, evaluation, conflict resolution, fundraising, leadership development, marketing, team building and training, risk management, program design, meeting facilitation and networking opportunities.

To start, SARTs may consider evaluating how the team functions and provides services. By evaluating the process, SARTs can address team issues regarding:

- The interagency working environment
- The team's infrastructure

Despite the best efforts of SART members to cooperate with one another, disagreements among disciplines are inevitable. Team members bring personal and professional experiences, agendas, beliefs, and perceptions into dialogues. If disagreements or resistances to ideas are not resolved, the momentum of SART could diminish.

### Practice tips to help keep team momentum

- Document SART accomplishments to build on what is working well;
- Ask how the team's success can best be measured. What are the intended outcomes? How will the team know if it has succeeded?
- Create a prioritized list of outcomes. What do victims need? What does the community expect? What outcomes do funders want to see? What outcomes do law enforcement and prosecution want to see? What do advocates want to see?

## Building SART excellence

- Assess emerging issues and how those issues are being addressed (consider case law, scientific and technological advances that impact evidence collection, and sexual assault trends nationally);
- Prepare contingency plans for disaster responses that could impact sexual assault survivors.

## Key resources

For online access to resources on keeping up team momentum, go to <http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart-collaboration>.

- *Collaboration Framework—Addressing Community Capacity*: This framework is designed to help individuals and practitioners who are either starting a collaboration or need

help in strengthening an existing collaboration.

- *Collaboration Multiplier* This tool can help SARTs forge alliances with diverse disciplines.
- *Collaboration—A Training Curriculum to Enhance the Effectiveness of Criminal Justice Teams, Instructional Manual*: This curriculum is designed to assist multidisciplinary criminal justice teams in establishing or enhancing collaborative relationships. All teams can benefit from this curriculum, whether they are newly formed or firmly established. The manual includes information on team values, vision, problem identification, roles/responsibilities, concurrent discussion groups, group dynamics, team and project lifecycles and goals/objectives/critical work activities.
- Ohio State University created a fact sheet that can assist in leading communities through conflict.



---

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### National Sexual Violence Resource Center SART Project

[www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart](http://www.nsvrc.org/projects/sart)

The National Sexual Violence Resource center provides training, technical assistance, networking opportunities and online resource collections related to SART development and sustainability. This includes the operations of the National SART Listserv.

### National SART Toolkit

<http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/sartkit>

The National SART Toolkit is an online collection of resources for communities that are considering building a SART team or those that want to improve their existing coordinated response to victims of sexual assault. It includes sections on the history of SARTs, SART development, victim centered practices, innovative practices and sample tools.

---

## REFERENCES

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA). (2000). Best practices in the investigation and prosecution of sex assault cases. Retrieved from: <http://www.mncasa.org/Documents/best%20practices.pdf>

National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women. (1998). Confronting violence against women: A community action approach. Alexandria, VA: Author. Confronting Violence Against Women: A Community Action Approach.



123 North Enola Drive, Enola, PA 17025

Toll free: 877-739-3895 • [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) • [resources@nsvrc.org](mailto:resources@nsvrc.org)

---

On Facebook: [facebook.com/nsvrc](https://facebook.com/nsvrc) • On Twitter: [twitter.com/nsvrc](https://twitter.com/nsvrc)