

A Ten-Factor Framework for Sexual Assault Response Team Effectiveness

Ten Internal & External Factors That Facilitate Success for
Systems-Change Sexual Assault Response Teams

Developed by the
Sexual Violence Justice Institute
at the Minnesota Coalition
Against Sexual Assault



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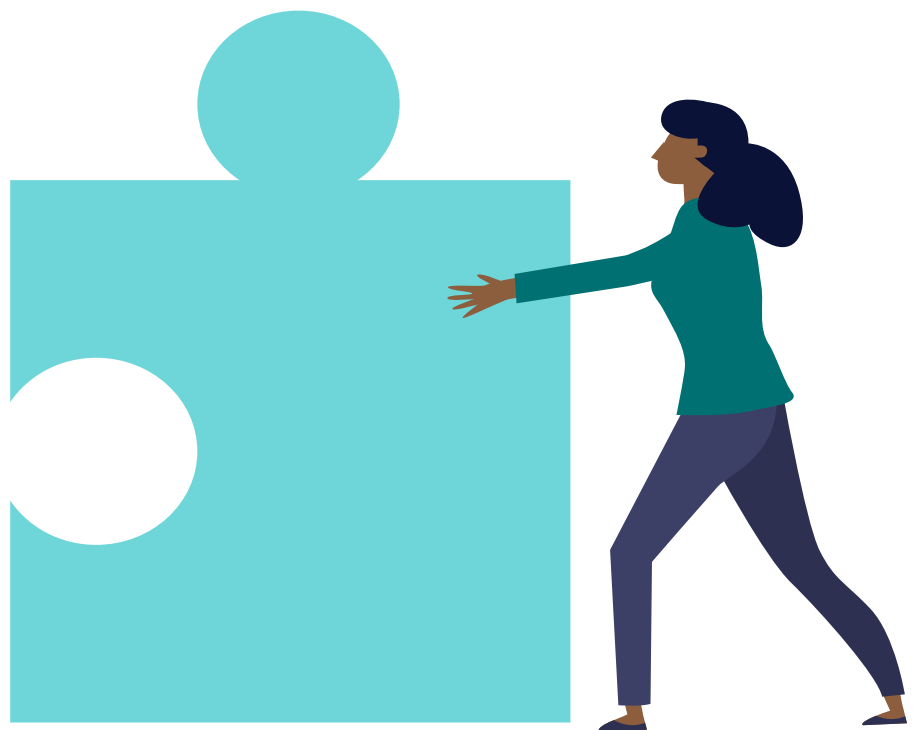
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Introduction

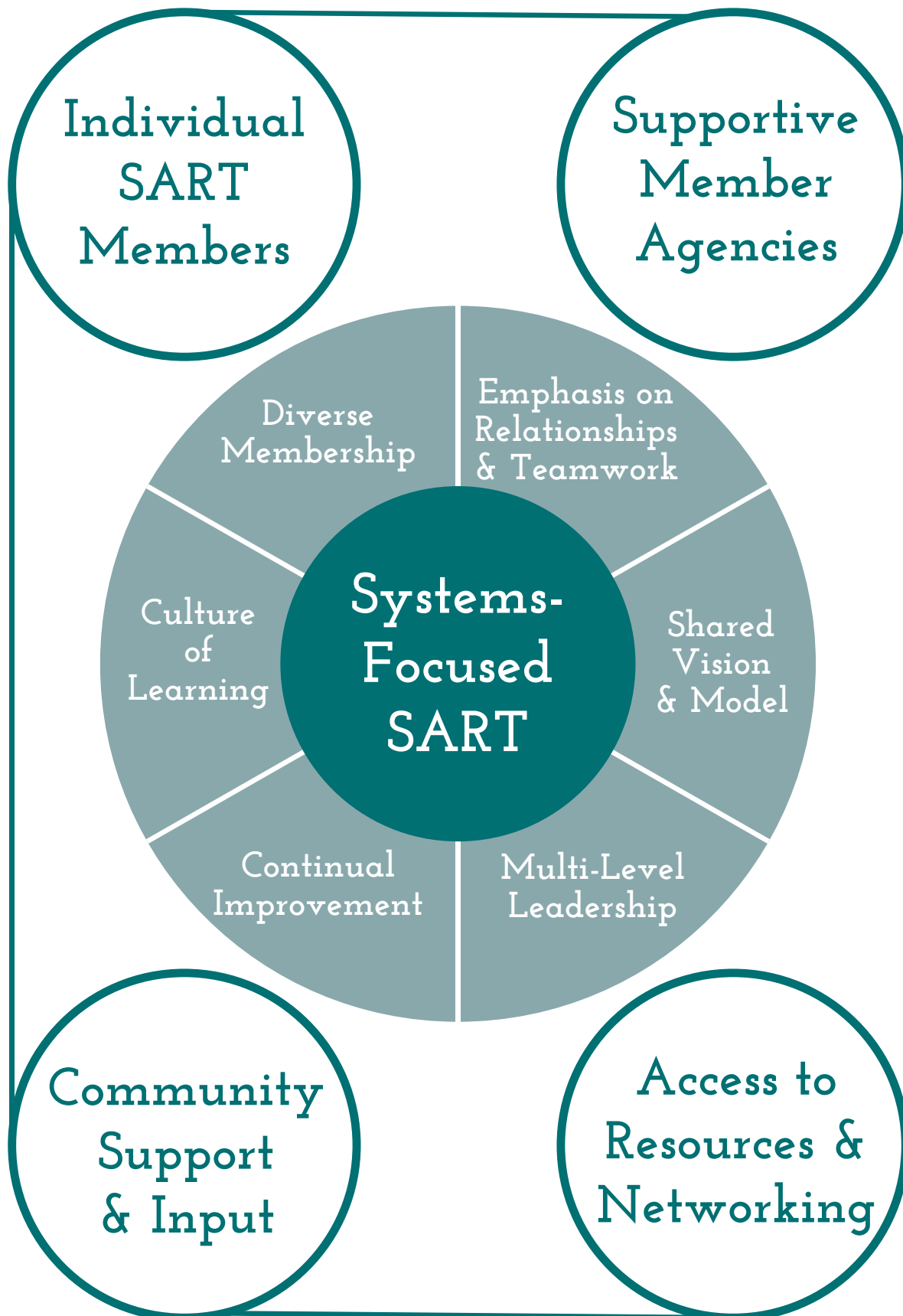
Systems-change sexual assault response teams (SARTs) are community-based multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) that work to create long-term improvements to local systems of response to sexual violence. SARTs enable communities to maximize the effectiveness of their available resources and responses, and to improve relationships between institutions like law enforcement, victim services, prosecution, and local hospitals. For STOP administrators, funding systems-change SART work is an efficient way to leverage existing local resources and meet the 20% sexual assault funding set-aside. For a more in-depth introduction to systems-change SARTs, [click here](#).

The following framework for SART effectiveness breaks down ten factors that can help to facilitate the success of systems-change SARTs. These ten factors include six internal team characteristics and four external supports.

This framework was informed by the input of seventeen teams across the nation that SVJI staff engaged in a consensus-building process during site visits in 2015-2016. These SARTs varied in structure, governance, composition, and demographic makeup. Each team met SVJI's definition of a SART engaged in systems-change work. There was consensus from all participating teams on the key internal and external elements that best support systems-change SART effectiveness. To learn more about this resource's participants and methodology, see [Appendix II](#).



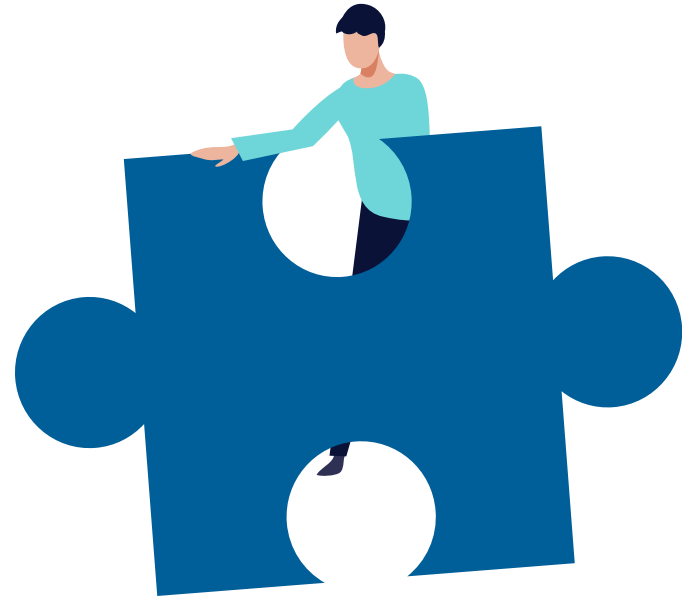
A Ten-Factor Framework for SART Effectiveness



Internal Factors

Six Characteristics of Successful Systems-Change SARTs

Shared Vision & Model



When a systems-change SART is created, it is crucial that all members and member agencies agree on an appropriate model for the team. The team's model should include its intended structure, leadership, and decision-making processes, along with its purpose and the scope of its work. It is equally important that a SART's primary stakeholders share a common vision for the team's future and its intended impact on the community.

Positive outcomes related to a shared vision and model for systems-change SARTs include:

- Increased role clarity within the team
- Reduction of intra-team confusion and conflict
- Clarity of purpose within the team, which can improve member and community engagement

To read more about the development of a shared vision and model, see [page 16 of Appendix I](#).

Multi-Level Leadership

While many SARTs have a designated leader or facilitator, responsibility and power should be equitably distributed amongst team members and the member agencies with which they are affiliated. It is important that leadership come from multiple

disciplines within the team and that interdisciplinary power imbalances are acknowledged and addressed.

Positive outcomes related to multi-level leadership within SARTs include:

- Incorporation of the unique perspectives and knowledge of all team members and their respective disciplines
- Decreased potential for power imbalances/power hoarding within the team
- Increased engagement/buy-in from all members
- Support from member agencies and their leadership, which can improve implementation of SART protocols and other systems-change work

For more information about multi-level leadership within SARTs, see [page 18 of Appendix I](#).

Culture of Learning

By establishing a culture of learning among its members, a SART can emphasize the importance of: (1) seeking to understand the unique context of every situation, (2) documenting and examining successes and setbacks, (3) identifying emerging strategies to effect systems-change, and (4) applying new information to the team's work in order to continually improve.

Positive outcomes related to the establishment of a culture of learning include:

- Increased awareness of social positionality and how it affects the experiences of victim/survivors
- Increased openness to new ideas and perspectives
- Emphasis on using missteps as opportunities for accountability and learning, rather than incidents resulting in punitive action

To learn more about the development of a culture of learning within SARTs, see [page 19 of Appendix I](#).

Continual Evaluation & Improvement

Closely related to the establishment of a learning culture within a systems-change SART is the team's commitment to continual growth and improvement. The ongoing cycle of assessing the status quo, making changes and improvements based on that assessment, and evaluating the success of those changes is the foundation of the [systems-change model of SART work](#).

Positive outcomes related to continual evaluation and improvement within SARTs include:

- Evolution of the team's policies, protocols, and routine practices to meet the dynamic, evolving needs of survivors/the community
- Increased awareness of new or emerging issues in the community that current SART work is not addressing
- Longer-term, more active collaboration between members and member agencies, as there is no "finish line" after which the team would dissolve or become defunct

To read more about the use of continual evaluation and improvement in systems-change SARTs, see [page 19 of Appendix I](#).

Diverse Membership

The multidisciplinary foundation of systems-change SART work requires members to think beyond the boundaries of their own institutions and disciplines. Different agencies and individuals possess unique networks, assets, and points of leverage—which can be used strategically and collaboratively to benefit the collaborative work of the team.

SARTs that include representatives of all [core SART disciplines](#) typically thrive because of the effectiveness of this multi-dimensional approach. It also benefits systems-change SARTs to include representatives of other relevant disciplines. Furthermore, it is critically important that systems-change SARTs strive for team

membership that is demographically consistent with the makeup of the community being served.

Positive outcomes related to diverse SART membership include:

- Buy-in and engagement with all core disciplines related to the response to sexual violence
- Increased diversity of perspective, experience, and resources available to the team
- Decreased risk of important issues or gaps in service going unnoticed/unresolved

For more information about diverse membership within SARTs, see [page 20 of Appendix I](#).

Emphasis on Relationships & Teamwork

Although SART members individually represent a diverse variety of disciplines and member agencies, within the context of the team they should operate together as a cohesive collaborative body. Collaboration is the ultimate vehicle for change in SART work, and strong individual and interagency relationships are what ultimately make effective collaboration possible.

Positive outcomes related to an emphasis on relationships and teamwork include:

- Improved communication between SART members and member agencies, leading to more seamless and effective implementation of multidisciplinary protocols
- Improved relationships between member agencies
- Increased likelihood of team longevity and success

To learn more about the importance of prioritizing relationships and teamwork within SARTs, see [page 21 of Appendix I](#).

External Factors

Four Key Supports Needed by Systems-Change SARTs

Confident Individual Team Members

It is imperative that individual SART members bring a high level of confidence and motivation to the team's systems-change work. In order to effectively represent their individual agencies and disciplines within the team and play a meaningful role in achieving the team's goals, SART members must enter the team with the belief that they are capable of successfully advocating for systems change.

Positive outcomes related to the individual confidence of SART team members include:

- Active participation and assumption of responsibility and leadership roles by all or most team members
- Willingness of members to share thoughts and ideas and to address disagreements
- Ability of SART members to advocate for the implementation of SART work within member agencies

To learn more about the importance of confident individual SART members, see [page 22 of Appendix I](#).



Supportive Member Agencies

The support that a SART receives from its member agencies is key to its success in maintaining team cohesion and creating meaningful systems change. Member agencies should be committed to the team's collaborative multidisciplinary work and to its goal of systems change, and they should support the implementation of the practices, protocols, and policies developed by the SART. Member agencies should also support the SART by allocating time and resources to SART goals and activities.

Positive outcomes related to member agencies' support of SARTs include:

- Better and more consistent implementation of SART-developed protocols, policies, and best practices throughout member agencies
- Increased team resources, including additional time allotted to SART members for SART-related work
- Increased engagement of all member agency employees, including agency leaders, with the work of systems change

For more information about member agencies' support of SARTs, see [page 22 of Appendix I](#).

Access to Resources & Networking

Effective systems-change SARTs generally have consistent access to local, state/territorial, and national resources and networks for support and training. These teams often attend and/or facilitate trainings in order to pinpoint current challenges and address new opportunities to create systems change. Networking for SART members often takes place in person at trainings and conferences or remotely via conference calls, electronic correspondence, etc.

Positive outcomes related to SARTs' access to resources and networking include:

- Increased flow of new ideas, information, and emerging practices into the team, strengthening the culture of learning and cycle of continuous improvement within the team

- Heightened collaboration and improved relationships between team members and technical assistance providers, other SARTs, community members, etc.
- Opportunities for team members to develop skills and knowledge that will benefit their work within their individual disciplines, as well as within the scope of the SART.

To learn more about resources and networking for systems-change SARTs, see [page 23 of Appendix I](#).

Community Support & Involvement

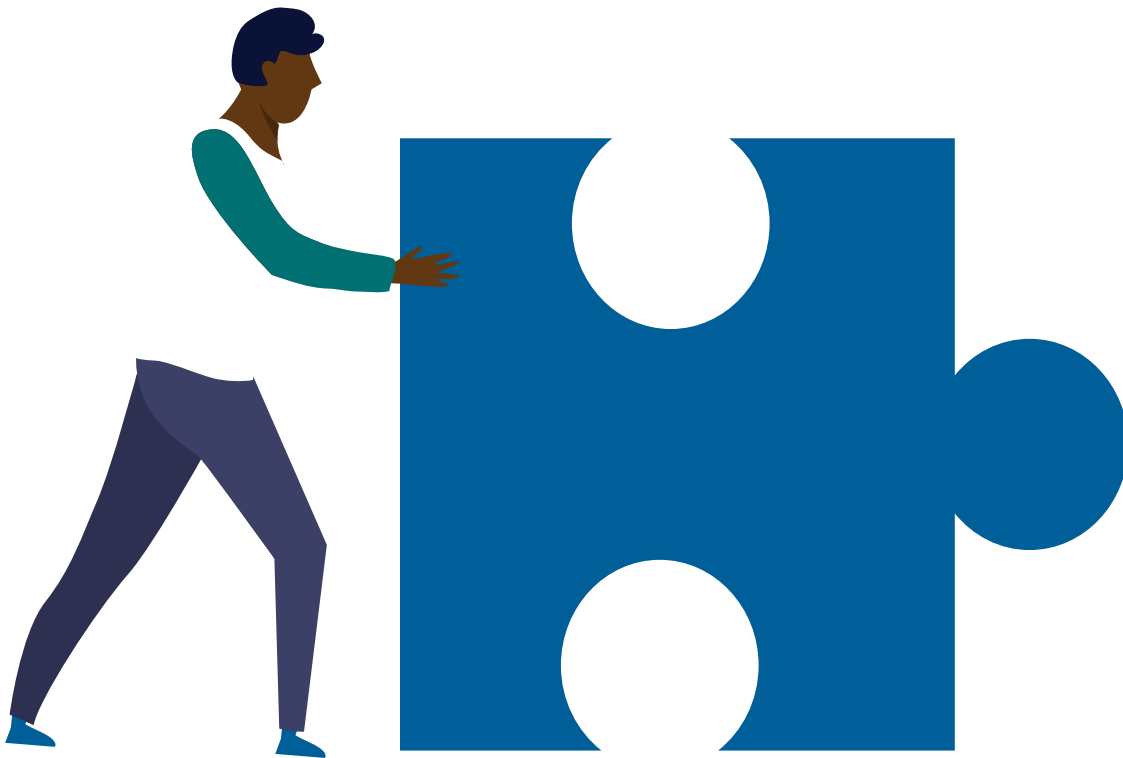
Because SARTs are community-based, it is crucial that they receive support and involvement from their communities. It is equally important that communities feel invested and engaged in the work of their local SARTs. Community members and leaders should ideally be fully supportive of and engaged with the work of the team.

Positive outcomes related to community support for systems-change SARTs include:

- Increased team influence on the community's awareness of and attitudes toward sexual violence and local responses to it
- Increased awareness of present or emerging issues within the community, based on community input
- Greater availability of advocacy and other community-based services to victim/survivors, based on increased community investment

To learn more about the importance of community support for SARTs, see [page 24 of Appendix I](#).

Recommendations for STOP Administrators



STOP administrators have a unique and important role to play in leading the nationwide response to sexual violence and creating the conditions that allow systems-change SARTs to develop and succeed. Regardless of a state or territory's current level of familiarity or engagement with systems-change SARTs, there are many potential opportunities for STOP administrators to encourage and facilitate the development of SARTs in their jurisdictions.

During the implementation planning process, STOP administrators can:

- Dedicate a portion of the STOP sexual assault set-aside to funding local or state-level SART-related projects
- Add a SART coordinator, member, or technical assistance provider to the planning committee

- Host one or more meetings with SART members, technical assistance providers, and other stakeholders. Use these meetings to learn about the needs, challenges, and barriers that SARTs are experiencing and how STOP funding can be used to address them.

During the RFP/subgrantee-selection process, STOP administrators can:

- Create RFPs that prioritize and encourage multidisciplinary collaboration within the response to sexual violence
- Fund SART initiatives focused specifically on creating systems change
- Prioritize the funding of SART initiatives that include components of the ten-factor framework, such as: ongoing evaluation processes, providing members with access to TA and training opportunities, and creating opportunities for community engagement
- Prioritize the funding of SARTs that obtain memorandums of understanding (MOUs) signed by leadership from all core SART disciplines
- Require that STOP-funded SARTs obtain signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that include leadership from all core SART disciplines as a condition for funding in order to identify service and collaboration gaps and better provide

During the process of post-award monitoring and support of subgrantees, STOP administrators can:

- Fund trainings on how to develop, sustain, and improve a sexual assault response team
- Provide access to targeted technical assistance and training around systems-change, multidisciplinary teaming, and SART-specific work
- Develop spaces for local SART leaders to connect, share standards of excellence, and

discuss new strategies for creating systems change

- Encourage and monitor the continuous development and implementation of SARTs' learning, evaluation, and improvement plans
- Assess existing SARTs' strengths, weaknesses, and outcomes in relation to the ten-factor framework in order to determine what factors may be missing and what types of training and support teams need most
- Connect regularly with teams in order to connect them with resources and STOP-funded supports, including TA providers

STOP administrators can also provide SART members and stakeholders with access to the following free resources:

- The SVJI/MNCASA [SART Tools and Resources page](#)
- [The Sexual Assault Response Team Starter Kit](#), for new and developing teams
- Technical assistance, training, and resources for SARTs in rural areas from [SVJI's Rural Technical Assistance Program](#)
- [The National Sexual Violence Resource Center's SART listserv](#), which provides a forum for connection and collaboration between SART members, leaders, and TA providers nationwide

For additional resources,
information, and/or technical
assistance, STOP administrators
can contact SVJI's STOP Technical
Assistant Project at
svji@mncasa.org or visit the STOP
technical assistance project website.

Appendix I

Supplementary Information on the Ten Factors

Shared Vision & Model

When a systems-change SART comes together, it is crucial that all members share a comprehensive understanding of: 1. sexual violence 2. its impact on the community and 3. the community's current response(s) to it.

This mutual understanding is key to the future success of the SART, because it creates a shared framework and point of reference for members to use when developing the team's model and vision.

A SART's focus, structure, leadership, and decision-making processes are all heavily informed by the team's model. When all members and member agencies understand and are engaged with the team's model, role clarity is improved, and the team as a whole is able to function more smoothly. Furthermore, a systems-change SART's model serves to guide and facilitate the eventual development of the team's coordinated multidisciplinary response protocols, which form the basis of the team's systems-change efforts.

In Figure A, you can see an outline of two potential SART models, with "SART A" serving as an example of a systems-change SART.

A common vision for the work and intended impact of a SART is also essential to the team's success. It is natural that team members from different disciplines may enter the team with varying ideas of what a "successful" response to sexual violence looks like, but the team as a whole should work to define a shared vision for the team and its holistic goals within the community.

By working from a common understanding of sexual violence within their community and developing a shared vision and model for the team, systems-change SART members ensure that they will share common goals and points of reference in their ongoing collaborative work. As a result, team members will experience greater role clarity, the potential for intra-team conflict will be reduced, and the SART as a whole will function more smoothly.

	SART A	SART B
Focus	Community-based systems change	Cooperative work on individual sexual assault cases
Structure	A formalized multidisciplinary team	An informal cooperative partnership
Leadership	A SART coordinator housed in one of the team's member agencies; multi-level leadership roles from all members/ member agencies	No established leadership
Decision-Making Processes	All team members contribute to decision-making, with input from member agencies and community members	Members consult with one another while making independent decisions related to their respective disciplines

Figure A. Two examples of potential SART models.

Multi-Level Leadership

Conflict and power imbalances are inevitable within any collaborative venture. Imbalanced or ineffective leadership within a team can lead to decreased engagement from other team members and a general lack of collaboration. However, by implementing a multi-level leadership structure, SARTs can ensure that all members and member agencies play a role in leading the team's work and remain fully engaged.

Within many SARTs, a designated SART leader, facilitator, or coordinator is housed within one of the team's member agencies and assumes primary logistical responsibility for the team. A SART coordinator might organize and facilitate team meetings and meet with individual members between meetings in order to ensure ongoing collaborative engagement, among other tasks. A SART coordinator should not, however, assume all responsibility for leadership within their team. Every member of a SART should assume some sort of leadership role within the team, whether that role is as the chair or facilitator of a subcommittee, a presenter on a topic of particular relevance to the team, the lead on a particular project, or any number of other potential leadership roles.

It is also important that no particular discipline within a SART be privileged over the others. The input of law enforcement, prosecution, community-based advocacy, medical professionals, and other disciplines within the team should be equitably prioritized and incorporated into the team's work.

Additionally, the leadership from within a SART's member agencies should be consistently engaged with the work of the team. Individual team members will likely need to consult with their respective agencies, including agency leadership, for approval and implementation of systems-change SART activities, especially the team's multidisciplinary response protocols. Continuous engagement with agency leadership will help to ensure that the team's activities have broad, consistent support across all disciplines, particularly from those with decision-making power within member agencies. This support is pivotal to the overall effectiveness of the SART's systems-change efforts.

Culture of Learning

Systems-change SARTs do complex work in situations that require a high level of responsiveness and adaptability. Every victim/survivor is unique and experiences sexual violence within the singular context of their own life and identity. Every community is similarly unique. It is important that SARTs and SART members consistently seek to further their understanding of a diverse range of individual and community perspectives, particularly the perspectives and experiences of marginalized and underserved community members.

A SART with a strong learning culture also seeks out and embraces opportunities to learn from local and national experts, peers, and community members. All team members value training and technical assistance, and view change as an opportunity to innovate practice.

The implementation of a learning culture should never reduce the accountability of any SART members or member agencies. However, mistakes made by or within the team should be viewed, when possible and appropriate, as opportunities for continued growth and learning.

Establishing a learning culture within a systems-change SART creates space for continuous evaluation and improvement of the team's policies, protocols, and practices, which enable the team to better meet the diverse and evolving needs of all community members. Because ongoing assessment, evaluation, and improvement are so essential to the three-phase systems-change model, it is crucial that all team members and member agencies embrace and encourage a culture of learning within the SART.

Continual Evaluation & Improvement

SART members and member agencies should work to understand how victims/survivors are experiencing the current response to sexual assault in their community and how that experience affects them. What barriers are they experiencing? What needs are not being met? Continual assessment and

evaluation of community needs, current practices, and victim/survivor experiences and outcomes will reveal what is and is not working within the overall community-based response to sexual violence. In this way, the SART may be able to identify deep, systemic issues in the response that would not be apparent to responders within any single discipline.

Furthermore, perceived team effectiveness is highest among SARTs that regularly use evaluation to assess their work. While limited resources can make it difficult for some SARTs to do comprehensive evaluations on a regular basis, effective teams use methods such as interviews with responders, group interviews with victims/survivors, satisfaction surveys, and case file reviews to better understand and improve their communities' responses to sexual violence.

Diverse Membership

Multidisciplinary teams are effective precisely because of their diverse and collaborative nature. By bringing together a group of people with a wide breadth of training, knowledge, skillsets, and lived experiences, MDTs like systems-change SARTS are able to address community-based problems with holistic, community-based solutions.

When professionals in different disciplines are isolated from one another and not working collaboratively, they may all be addressing the same systemic problems in disparate ways. All of the individual core SART disciplines contribute invaluable knowledge, experience, and resources to their communities' overall responses to sexual violence. However, the impact of those individual contributions is stymied when the disciplines do not work collaboratively.

It is therefore imperative that SARTs include representatives from all of the [core SART disciplines](#) within their communities, in order to address the primary facets of the community-wide response to sexual violence. SARTs will further benefit from participation from representatives of other relevant community-based organizations, such as:

- Colleges and universities
- Civil legal agencies

- Faith-based communities
- Culturally specific service agencies
- Prisons
- Mental health providers

Organizations like these do not fall within the core SART disciplines, but they are all very often involved in local responses to sexual violence. Their participation in a SART team will further expand the team's perspective and base of information and resources. Furthermore, the participation of a diverse range of team members will improve the team's ability to implement systems change efforts, as the team members will help to ensure the engagement and commitment of member agencies.

In addition to professional diversity, it is important that the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic makeup of systems-change SARTs be as consistent with the makeup of the community as possible. If the team's membership is not demographically consistent with the community as a whole, barriers and emerging issues specific to underrepresented portions of the community may not be appropriately and efficiently addressed.

Emphasis on Relationships & Teamwork

Relationship-building requires intentional work at the beginning of a SART's development and continual attention as time goes on. As a team initially comes together, there may be preexisting relationships and/or tensions between members, member agencies, or disciplines that must be taken into account as the group works to build rapport.

Additionally, new tensions may arise as teams develop, and these tensions should be acknowledged, processed, and addressed openly by the team, in order to avoid escalating tensions and conflict in the future.

Communication both during and between team meetings plays a crucial role in the relationship-building process. It is important for all members of the team to be open and honest with one another, and to respect the differences of opinion

that will inevitably arise as the team progresses through its systems-change work. It is equally important that all members actively listen to one another and seek to understand one another's points-of-view.

Consistent communication between meetings should be established via an email listserv, a text message group, or other means in order to ensure continuous relationship-building and collaborative effort.

By building positive working relationships and centering them on the team's shared purpose and vision, SARTs can foster the trust, rapport, and mutually supportive atmosphere necessary to navigate challenging conversations and collaboratively tackle tough issues.

Confident Individual Team Members

Every member of a sexual assault response team brings a unique perspective and skillset to the table, and all perspectives should be valued within the team. However, it is also important that each member value and have confidence in their own perspective and set of skills, as this confidence will enable them to be an assertive and effective team member.

If a SART member unilaterally privileges other members' ideas and opinions over their own, that member will likely refrain from sharing many of their own thoughts, and the team will lose the valuable perspective of that member and the discipline that they represent. Thus, it is crucial that individual members enter the team with a sense of professional confidence, while also remaining open to the thoughts and ideas of others. This balance between confidence and humility is what allows individual team members to effectively represent their respective agencies and disciplines, while also functioning within a cohesive collaborative unit.

Supportive Member Agencies

Though individual SART members are the primary representatives of their respective agencies and disciplines within the team, it is not enough for the

members themselves to be invested and engaged in the work of the SART. The team's member agencies, and particularly agency leaders, must also be supportive of the SART's work in order for it to be consistently implemented across all SART disciplines.

The support of member agencies is also crucial in terms of the team's resources. Participation in a SART is typically only a small part of a given member's day-to-day professional responsibilities, and the buy-in of a member's agency will likely determine whether they are allotted additional time, funds, or other resources to use for SART-related work.

In addition, while it is not necessary for all member agencies to be knowledgeable about facilitating multidisciplinary teams, it is important that the lead agency have the skills and knowledge to effectively guide the SART's collaborative work. The lead agency typically hosts the team coordinator and should consistently connect with technical assistance and training opportunities in order to provide the team with the best guidance and support possible.

Access to Resources & Networking

In order to create ongoing systems-change that meets the dynamic, evolving needs of a SART's community, teams and team members must have access to relevant, up-to-date resources and networking opportunities. State/territorial and national organizations exist throughout the United States to provide technical assistance, trainings, and resources to professionals, agencies, and teams doing work around the response to sexual violence. The state/territory coalition against sexual assault is often an excellent first stop when seeking to identify these resources. The Sexual Violence Justice Institute (SVJI) at MNCASA provides technical assistance, resources, and training to systems-change SARTs, which can be accessed [here](#). For more information about SVJI's resources, trainings, and technical assistance,

SART members should also have opportunities to network and exchange information and ideas with other professionals and stakeholders, whenever possible. Networking can take place in-person at community events, trainings, or conferences, and it can also be accessed remotely via email, phone, and online

discussion groups. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center hosts a SART discussion group, as well as discipline-specific groups, which can be joined [here](#).

Community Support & Involvement

Community support and input are key to the success of any sexual assault response team. Without the support and investment of the community, a SART may be unable to attract and retain the support of community leaders, including local government officials, agency leaders, and effective team members. Wide community buy-in provides an incentive for local officials to support the team, for agencies in SART-related disciplines to join the SART and strengthen its membership, and for current SART members to remain engaged and enthusiastic about the team's work.

Community support for a SART can also impact the general level of community awareness of sexual violence and the needs of local survivors. Input from the community can, in return, help the team to better understand the community's current and emerging needs. Ultimately, community support and input can lead to changes in SART policies, protocol, and practices; increases in the availability of community-based services for survivors; and higher levels of overall success for systems-change SART work.

Appendix II

Participants & Methodology



Participants

In 2015-2016, SVJI staff engaged 17 teams from Wisconsin, Virginia, Washington, D.C., Oregon, Colorado, Minnesota, Pine Ridge Reservation (SD), and Coeur D’Alene Reservation (ID) in a consensus-building process during site visits. This convenience sample was obtained through recommendations from U.S. state and territory leaders in the response to sexual violence. These SARTs varied in location, including rural, small town, multi-county, large town, and urban collaborations. They also varied in structure, although all 17 teams met SVJI’s definition of a systems-change SART.

A few examples of the various structures of these teams include:

- SARTs that included the core disciplines (advocacy, law enforcement, medical, prosecution, probation, adult protection) and were facilitated by a professional in a part-time SART coordinator position
- SARTs that included the core disciplines, but had no established formal leader/facilitator position
- One SART that operated as an independent nonprofit
- SARTs with formal collaborations between advocacy, medical, and human services, and agreements or relationships with law enforcement and prosecution that varied in terms of formality

Methodology

Using the Multi-Attribute Consensus Building method, teams used their lived experience to rate the importance of various characteristics and supports to their systems-change work and discussed any differences in ratings. There were 16 categories of characteristics utilized, with each team reviewing 2 or 3. Each of the categories contained 4 to 8 items. At least 3 teams rated each category. The rating process was followed by a group discussion, during which we were able to better understand the individual and group ratings and solicit examples.

Results from all 17 teams were combined and the items that all teams agreed on became the essential characteristics and supports discussed in this report. Only items that received 100% consensus as “most important or essential” among reviewing teams are included in this report. Items that were of mixed importance are not included. The SVJI STOP Administrator Advisory Committee and state-level technical assistance leaders provided feedback on the findings.

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