

What is the Sexual Violence Justice Institute?

The [Sexual Violence Justice Institute](#) at the [Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault](#) (SVJI@MNCASA) is a national resource for expertise in the criminal justice response to sexual violence. Part Two of this three-part series for STOP Administrators provides guidance around leveraging statewide efforts to enhance the local response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Context

Developing an effective response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation has emerged as a priority issue both nationally and at the state-level, demonstrated by the enactment of new laws, increased funding, and enhanced collaborative efforts to better serve victims and support the investigation and prosecution of exploiters. No single agency has the capacity or ability to handle all aspects of a response, which requires multi-level, multidisciplinary, and multi-jurisdictional coordination of resources in order to comprehensively meet the needs of victims, and successfully prosecute both buyers and traffickers. By leveraging existing resources, enhancing and expanding existing partnerships between advocacy and other systems partners, and engaging victim/survivors in the design process, multidisciplinary teams can tailor a long-term, sustainable systems response that meets the specific needs of their community.

The Case for Collaboration

Multidisciplinary collaboration is essential to building the long-term, sustainable systems response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. Victims are diverse, as are their needs, and no single agency or organization has the capacity to meet those needs.¹ Both government and non-government (community-based) service providers must effectively collaborate in order to ensure that the overall systems response is victim-centered, trauma-informed, and prioritizes victim confidentiality.

This goal is achieved when essential systems participate in a protocol development process,² by which each member agency commits to develop, adhere to, and regularly evaluate and improve the agreed-upon protocols. Protocols formalize roles and responsibilities, integrate sustainable training and capacity-building, and guide not only how each agency responds, but how agencies interact with other team members in order to meet the needs of victims.

Collaboration at the Local Level

Studies have shown that communities with multidisciplinary collaboratives focused on combatting human trafficking are more likely to identify victims and achieve successful prosecution of offenders.⁴ *What works in one part of the state may not work in another*, however, and a single model protocol would never successfully meet the needs of every region or community.⁵ Instead, systems partners must collaborate at the local level to customize a systems response that leverages the resources and meets the needs of their specific community.

“The state, the court, the people, the prosecutors – they think they know about your life, that you’re a menace to society, they just assume but they don’t really know what’s going on. All they do is look at your record, they don’t know what’s going on.”

Survivor, *Voices of Safe Harbor*³

Key Considerations

How are sex trafficking and sexual exploitation occurring in the community?

Narratives⁶ shaping a community's systems response should reflect the demographics of that community's victim population, as well as the various forms or methods both buyers and traffickers are using to exploit those victims.

What resources can be leveraged or enhanced to meet the needs of victims in the community?

Resources can include available services (both government and community-based), participating agencies, funding sources (both private and governmental), and strategic partnerships among systems in a given community.

What factors impact effective collaboration?

Multidisciplinary collaboration must be able to adapt to a given community's geography, population, culture, and practices; and must take into consideration relationships with neighboring jurisdictions and sovereign nations (Tribal Governments), as well as the organizational capacity and commitment of essential systems partners.

"[We need] a new community resource – to get help . . . to live a stable lifestyle, course on the effects of sex trafficking on your health, parenting courses, budgeting, finances, how to raise your credit score, counseling, GED, housing program, Life Track program, afterschool program, how to prevent risky sexual behaviors, shelter referral and bus tokens. A place in the community that youth and young adults can go to that's safe."

Survivor, *Voices of Safe Harbor*

Lessons Learned from Minnesota: Leveraging Statewide Efforts to Enhance the Local Response

Statewide efforts can support and enhance the development of an effective community-driven response. In addition to legislative and policy change at the state-level, stakeholders can combine efforts in order to lay a solid foundation for local-level initiatives.

Increase awareness and buy-in

Make use of statewide taskforces⁷, high profile cases, and media reports to encourage culture change and the prioritization of the issue across the state.

Leverage public and private funding⁸

Leveraging private funding and support will help supplement state and federal grant funding.

Establish common values and philosophy⁹

Clarifying language and expectations around commonly used terms (e.g.: “victim-centered” and “trauma-informed”) and the implications of these terms for each discipline, as well as uniting disciplines under an agreed upon set of values will help multidisciplinary collaboratives navigate common tension points.

Identify and promote best practices¹⁰

By gathering the expertise of national and state-level experts, communities will have access to foundational and discipline-specific best practices that will help them shape their response.

Navigate common tension points¹¹

By engaging in a statewide dialogue around common tension points (e.g.: detention vs. shelter, mandated reporting vs. confidentiality, diversion vs. decriminalization for adult victims), communities will be better prepared to deal with these issues as they develop their own response.

Recommendations for STOP Administrators

STOP Administrators can encourage grantees to maximize the impact of their grant funding by leveraging state-level efforts to enhance the systems response at the local level.

Long-term, sustainable response

Encourage and support multidisciplinary collaboration at the local level, including engagement and commitment to a protocol development *process* that will assess a community's status quo, ensure a victim-centered response, and regularly evaluate whether the systems response is in fact meeting the needs of both victims and the community.

Leverage existing resources

Engage state coalitions and other established networks with a proven track record of best practices in building the capacity of domestic violence and sexual assault service providers, as they are already serving victims and collaborating with systems partners.

Meaningful engagement of victim/survivors

Support initiatives that have demonstrated the meaningful engagement and involvement of victim/survivors in the design and development of programs and protocols.

"I've heard time and time again, 'I'm doing what's best for you,' [but] only I know what's best for me."

Survivor, Voices of Safe Harbor

References

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11. *Id.*

Contact us with questions or technical assistance requests

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