

Bridging the Divide: Promising Practices for Transforming Sexual Assault Response Team Collaboration Across Jurisdictions

by

Heather Blanton & Madeline Gonser



Challenges in Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration

Cross-jurisdictional coordination often introduces complexities that hinder timely support for victims/survivors. Addressing these barriers requires intentional strategies and collaboration.

Key Challenges Include

- **Legal and Procedural Variances**
Differing laws, reporting requirements, and consent protocols.

Case Example: A victim/survivor reports an assault that occurred in one state but seeks medical care in another. The two states have differing definitions of sexual assault, which complicates how the case is documented and prosecuted. For instance, one state may require physical evidence for a case to proceed, while the other may rely more heavily on victim/survivor testimony.

Impact: These variances can delay justice and create confusion for both the victim/survivor and SART team members.

- **Resource Disparities**
Unequal availability of essential services across jurisdictions.

Case Example: A rural jurisdiction may lack access to trained Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) or forensic labs, forcing victims/survivors to travel long distances for care. In contrast, urban areas may have more robust resources but face overwhelming demand.

Impact: Victims/survivors in resource-limited areas may experience delays in receiving critical services, and SARTs may struggle to coordinate care and support across regions.

- **Communication Gaps**
Limited tools for timely and effective information sharing.

Case Example: A victim/survivor moves to a new jurisdiction after reporting an assault. Limited communication between the jurisdictions results in delays in transferring case information, leaving the victim/survivor feeling unsupported and the case unresolved.

Coordination Tools

- Sample MOU
- Referral protocol template
- Secure communication platforms

Impact: Inefficient communication can hinder the coordination of care and legal proceedings, especially in cases involving multiple jurisdictions.

Actionable Strategies for Collaboration

Given the challenges posed by inefficient communication in multi-jurisdictional cases, implementing these actionable strategies can enhance collaboration and support for victims and survivors.

Case Example: A victim/survivor seeks support after an assault that occurred in a neighboring county, but conflicting jurisdictional policies create barriers in accessing forensic exams and legal advocacy. Recognizing this issue, a SART team develops a cross-jurisdictional protocol, streamlining communication between agencies across city and county lines. They establish agreements ensuring victims/survivors can access forensic exams, advocacy, and law enforcement services regardless of where the assault occurred. By coordinating across multiple jurisdictions, the SART removes logistical hurdles and improves access to trauma-informed care.

Interstate Agreements and Protocols

- Research existing agreements and if needed, develop Memorandum's of Understanding (MOUs) between neighboring states that address victim/survivor support.
- Collaborate with relevant partners to ensure effective implementation and establish dedicated protocols.
 - Cross-jurisdictional protocols for:
 - Case referrals and information-sharing.
 - Jurisdictional authority (especially in tribal, military, and campus cases).
 - Coordination for mobile or rural communities.

Documentation Essentials

- Cross-jurisdictional consent forms
- Case transfer checklists
- State by state legal reporting summary

Reporting and Documentation

- Familiarize teams with sexual violence laws and reporting requirements across jurisdictions.
- Implement standardized documentation practices to ensure consistency in recording victim/survivor consent and case details.
- Establish clear procedures for handling cases that span multiple jurisdictions, preventing gaps or delays in mandated reporting.

Consent Requirements

- Develop procedures for obtaining and documenting consent for services, reporting, and information sharing while respecting differing state laws.
- Provide victims/survivors with clear information about their rights.

Critical Services and Financial Accessibility

- Under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), jurisdictions must cover the cost of forensic exams even if victims/survivors choose not to report to law enforcement.
- Familiarize SART team members with state-specific payment policies and funding sources, including Crime Victims Compensation programs.
- Collaborate across jurisdictions to streamline payment processes and ensure victims/survivors can access exams without financial barriers.

Access and Equity Tools

- VAWA forensic exam coverage
- Crime Victim Compensation links
- Mobile advocacy & telehealth models

Equitable Resource Access

- Conduct assessments to identify disparities in resource availability across jurisdictions.
- Explore creative solutions like mobile outreach, telehealth services, and partnerships with community organizations.

Strengthening Referral Networks

- Build partnerships with key organizations (rape crisis centers, legal aid, medical facilities) in neighboring jurisdictions.
- Organize regular meetings to discuss legislative updates, share promising practices, and improve collaboration.
- Map resources available in each jurisdiction and establish communication protocols for sharing information and coordinating referrals.

Improving Communication

- Schedule regular inter-jurisdictional meetings and leverage secure platforms for real-time updates and data sharing.
- Develop templates for standardized documentation to streamline information exchange between jurisdictions.

Addressing Confidentiality and Ethical Challenges

Navigating legal requirements while safeguarding victims'/survivors' privacy is a critical component of cross-jurisdictional coordination.

Case Example: During a community outreach event, a victim/survivor approaches a SART team member to disclose their story but requests complete anonymity. Later, the victim's/survivor's information unintentionally becomes linked to identifiable details in public materials, raising ethical concerns.

To navigate situations like these, it is crucial to implement strategies that prioritize victim/survivor dignity and comply with confidentiality standards.

Safeguarding Victim/Survivor Privacy

- Develop and enforce protocols for handling sensitive information to ensure victim/survivor confidentiality at all stages.
- Incorporate trauma-informed practices, emphasizing the importance of informed consent in sharing any victim/survivor details.
- Use secure communication tools and data storage systems to minimize risks of unauthorized access or data breaches.

Confidentiality Practices

- Confidentiality agreement templates
- Informed consent template
- Data security tools

Staying Legally Informed

- Develop mechanisms to regularly update SARTs on changes to sexual violence laws, reporting requirements and trauma-informed approaches to legal obligations.
- Familiarize the SART team with privileged communication statutes in service jurisdictions.
- Review SART team member responsibilities to ensure compliance with mandated reporting laws in the state.
- Develop a decision-making framework to guide mandated reporting responses.

Legal Navigation Tips

- State-specific reporting laws
- Privileged communication summaries
- Ethical decision-making frameworks

Collaborative Problem Solving

- Facilitate discussions with multidisciplinary team members about ethical/confidentiality dilemmas to foster shared understanding and cohesive approaches.
- Create a confidentiality review committee to provide guidance on challenging situations and ensure alignment and victim/survivor-centered principles.
- Develop clear protocols for ethical decision making, prioritizing the victim's/survivor's needs and rights while maintaining compliance with confidentiality.
- Utilize SVJI's What Can We Talk About? Honoring Victim/Survivor Confidentiality in SARTs to assist in navigating confidentiality.

Enhancing Victim/Survivor Trust

- Actively engaging victims/survivors in shaping confidentiality policies to ensure their voices are heard and respected.
- Provide transparency regarding SART team protocols and procedures, ensuring victims/survivors understand how their information will be handled.

Engaging Communities for Impact

Community outreach and engagement empower SARTs to amplify their impact by building robust networks and promoting victim/survivor-centered response across various communities. Emphasizing cross-jurisdictional collaboration ensures cohesive efforts that address challenges stemming from different laws, resources, and geographical contexts.

Case Example: A victim/survivor needs a forensic exam but faces multiple obstacles. There is no exam site in their county, and transportation options are limited. To address this, the regional SART team identifies gaps in access across jurisdictions and collaborates with hospitals, advocacy groups, and rideshare services to ensure victims/survivors can receive exams regardless of location. They develop a streamlined referral process allowing victims/survivors across county lines for care without delays while securing agreements ensuring forensic exam costs are covered no matter where the assault occurred. By bridging geographical and jurisdictional barriers, the SART improves access and victim/survivor support across multiple jurisdictions.

Outreach and Education

- Develop clear and consistent messaging about legislative changes and their implications for victims/survivors.
- Utilize multi-jurisdictional platforms, such as state-wide newsletters or virtual seminars, to bridge gaps between urban and rural areas.

Community Engagement Tips

- Outreach planning checklist
- Transportation & access solutions
- Partnership-building strategies

Targeted Outreach

- Coordinate outreach efforts with organizations in neighboring jurisdictions to create consistent responses that address overlapping community needs.
- Partner with local leaders to expand reach and engage underrepresented voices.

Resource Sharing

- Establish centralized directories and interactive maps to facilitate easy access to cross-jurisdictional resources, ensuring all SARTs have equal opportunities to learn and implement promising practices.
- Regularly update shared resources to reflect real-time legislative changes and promising regional practices, enabling SART teams to stay aligned and informed.

Training & Networking Tools

- Peer learning roundtable guide
- Scenario-based training modules
- Shared resource directory templates

Collaborative Networking

- Host cross-jurisdictional roundtables and training sessions where teams can share insights and challenges, fostering peer-to-peer learning.
- Build a comprehensive peer network to encourage continuous dialogue and resource sharing across jurisdictions.

Tools and Additional Resources

Strengthening collaboration and supporting victims/survivors requires providing SART members with practical, adaptable tools. Offering accessible templates, checklists, and training resources empowers teams to streamline their processes, ensure consistency, and remove barriers across jurisdictions.

To help SART teams implement consistent and victim/survivor-centered practices, the following tools and resources are suggested to support collaboration, streamline processes, and enhance accessibility.

Legal Compliance Checklist

- Understand mandatory reporting laws
- Review privileged communication regulations
- Stay current on legal requirements specific to each jurisdiction

Quick Reference

- Legal compliance checklist
- Documentation template
- Resource directories

Documentation Templates

- Victim/survivor consent forms
- Case detail documentation
- Interagency coordination notes
- Confidentiality agreement templates for SART members

Training & Capacity Building

- Pre-Recorded Training Sessions
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Inter-jurisdictional collaboration
 - Victim/survivor-centered advocacy
- Interactive Workshops
 - Collaboration and team-building
 - Ethical dilemma discussions
- Scenario-Based Learning
 - Case studies
 - Role-playing exercises

Resource Checklist

Statewide Resources

- Highlight shelters, medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, and legal aid services to facilitate victim/survivor access and SART team coordination.

National Resources

- Include directories such as:
 - [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\) | Directory of Organizations](#)

For more information or guidance, please contact us at svji@mncasa.org or visit www.mncasa.org for more on our victim/survivor-centered work with Sexual Assault Response Teams.

This work is supported by Grant Number 15JOVW-22-GK-04025-MUMU awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this program are those of the trainers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice.