# Sexual Assault Response Teams & Systems Change

**Sexual Violence Justice Institute**
**MNCASA**
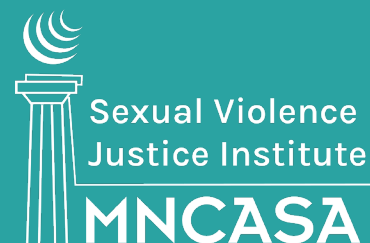
## What is a SART?

A Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is one strategy a community can use to improve their systems response to sexual violence. A team is made up of multi-disciplinary representatives who focus on collaboration for systems change. This typically includes law enforcement, prosecution, advocacy, medical, and corrections. Some communities also invite representatives from other disciplines or primary points of disclosure, such as mental health, campus systems, military installations, and organizations that assist victims/survivors.

There are two primary types of SARTs: Acute Response SARTs and Systems Change SARTs. While both aim to support victims/survivors and improve outcomes, they differ in focus, scope, involvement, and results. The following chart highlights the key distinctions between these two approaches, helping to clarify their unique contributions to sexual assault response.

| CATEGORY | ACUTE RESPONSE SARTS | SYSTEM CHANGE SARTS |
|---|---|---|
| Focus | Immediate support for victims/survivors and case-specific coordination | Broader system improvements across multiple cases |
| Scope | Singular case and responding individuals | Multiple cases and involved agencies |
| Involvement | Police, advocates, and communication across agencies | Policies, training, and agency-wide and interagency communication |

| CATEGORY | ACUTE RESPONSE SARTS | SYSTEM CHANGE SARTS |
|---|---|---|
| Results | Small and targeted to those involved | Long-term and widespread |
| Example | A victim/survivor reports an assault, and law enforcement, medical staff, and advocates ensure an immediate and coordinated support response. | A review of multiple cases reveals gaps in access to services, leading to the development of new training and policies. |

## What is Systems Change?

Systems change involves improving practices, policies, and collaboration among agencies to enhance victim/survivor experiences and outcomes. It addresses service gaps, ensures trauma-informed practices, and promotes interagency cooperation.

### IT FOCUSES ON:

- Enhancing practices and policies (i.e. creating trauma-informed police training).
- Addressing gaps in services (i.e. ensuring victims/survivors have access to advocates).
- Improving victim/survivor experiences (i.e. assessing services to meet the needs of victims/survivors).

System Change SARTs implement changes to better support victims and survivors, staying informed about promising practices as part of an ongoing cycle of reflection, learning, and improvement.

# Phases of System Change

## Steps to Achieve Systems Change

One continuous improvement model for SARTs to follow is the Sexual Violence Justice Institute's Phases of Systems Change. This includes three phases that can guide teams as they work together in improving the response to sexual violence.

### 1. ASSESS THE STATUS QUO: EVALUATE WHAT'S WORKING AND WHERE THERE ARE GAPS.

Examples:

- Conducting a community survey to identify barriers victims/survivors face (i.e. long wait times for medical exams).
- Interviewing victims/survivors to understand their experiences with law enforcement and advocacy services.
- Mapping existing resources, such as sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs), to see if gaps exist in rural areas.

ASSESS THE STATUS QUO

SYSTEMS CHANGE

MEASURE THE CHANGE
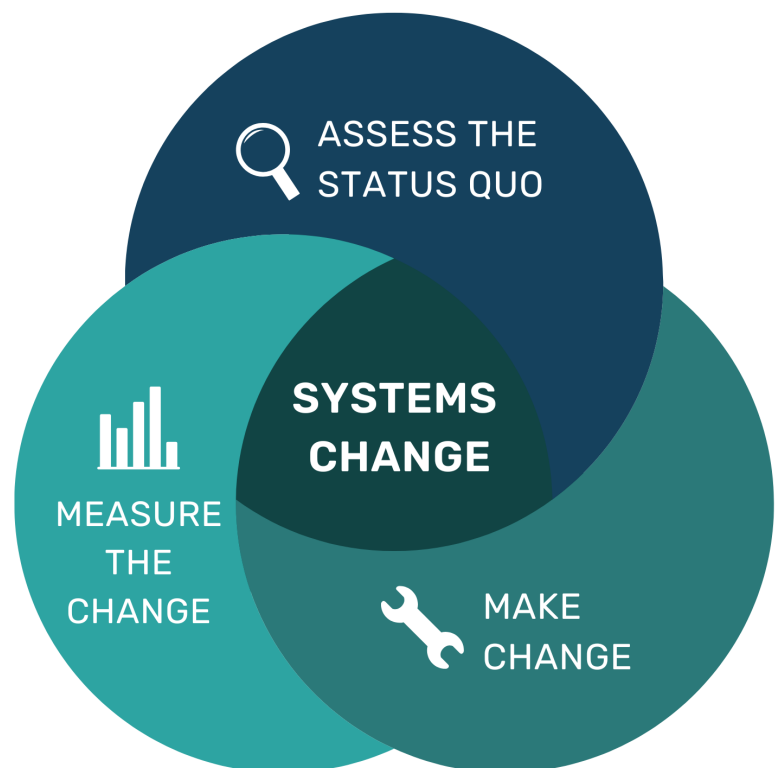
MAKE CHANGE

This continuous cycle ensures communities are always improving how they respond to sexual violence.

## 2. MAKE CHANGE: IMPLEMENT IMPROVEMENTS BASED ON THE ASSESSMENT.

Examples:

- Developing interagency protocols to reduce delays in victim/survivor support.
- Hosting joint training sessions for law enforcement, medical staff, and advocates to improve collaboration.
- Creating a new policy to prioritize timely access to evidence collection kits.

## 3. MEASURE THE CHANGE: CHECK IF THE CHANGES MADE ARE EFFECTIVE.

Examples:

- Using surveys or focus groups to gather feedback from victims/survivors after implementing new policies.
- Tracking data on response times or the number of victims/survivors using improved services.
- Reviewing case files to see if new protocols are being followed consistently.

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information on SARTs or systems change, reach us at svji@mncasa.org.