Core Characteristics of SARTs Focused on System Change

Clear Mission, Purpose, and Vision

Team operates as an intentional network of people and organizations that have the same vision in creating a high-functioning, supportive system to response to sexual assault

The team has clearly stated goals and purpose that include improving the system response to sexual assault

The team values victim-centered responses to sexual violence. It promotes an empathetic or humanistic response to victims of sexual assault

Teams develop guidelines, protocols, etc. to support and guide their work as a team

The team discusses issues related to sexual assault and the promotion and implementation of a multi-disciplinary response

What SARTs say...

How they got to a clear mission, purpose, and vision

County-wide best practices and protocols are important. We have protocols in place for victim advocates and everyone else. We all understand that these protocols represent our baseline—its jurisdiction-wide and we are all speaking the same language. As a team it was an extremely challenging process to develop the protocols but it has been worth it. We took the time and hashed it out so now we can take the product out to the different agencies and use it. The process of hashing it out helped build investment. It was important that everyone realized that we each have a role to play—DA, patrol, advocates, etc. and everyone is important because one cannot do it alone. Also the relationships that were built during the process are key to making sure it continues.

-District Attorney, CO

We develop goals and activities on a yearly basis. Having these written down has helped us navigate changes. It was really helpful to help give us direction when we got a new team coordinator!

-Team Coordinator, MN

Our shared mission comes from the individual members. We all come to this work because we care deeply about the people affected. For me, I found my passion for helping people through my work as a student resource officer. That led into coaching, teaching, and working with victims as a detective.

-Detective, CO

Part of what makes the team work is what we value, we also show up and participate. We take on the tough stuff! We get broad perspectives from team members. Your point of view is not the only one. One way is not the only way. That’s what got us through those protocols. That congealed our team. We had tough conversations. Called people out. Recruited people to engage in the team where we saw gaps. Protocols provided a starting place. We moved the discussion forward because we didn’t settle. We identified what was best. You just can’t duplicate other protocols, it has to be good for the community.

-District Attorney, CO

By person it is institutionalized. But protocol helps us institutionalize it in our organization.

-Investigator, CO
Teams include a mix of front line responders and leadership, including law enforcement, detectives, victim advocates, and healthcare providers.

The team uses an agreed upon process for convening and chairing its meetings.

The team conducts regular, structured meetings in a consistent meeting space.

Teams have a can-do attitude; and members have the confidence that they can be effective.

The sexual assault advocate plays a dual role that includes being part of the team process to share the experience of victims and supporting victim's involvement in the criminal justice system.

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Core Characteristics of SARTs Focused on System Change

The little things are important

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What SARTs say...

About the importance of the little things

As our core group stalemated we realized we need other perspectives. It also helped us realize we had too small of a group—broadening the group helped. It was a turning point. To bring in others from the disciplines to broaden perspectives.  
— Law Enforcement, CO

Team members do have a can-do attitude and confidence that they can be effective. An on-going example is shown through our team’s attendance. Each meeting is well attended and representative of various agencies. The members have always focused on purposeful and positive, pro-active communication—this isn’t a meeting where negativity regarding system challenges is fostered. This attitude has been essential for the effectiveness of the team in terms of membership retention and interest.  
— SANE Program Director, VA

On our team, the coordinator is also the community sexual assault advocate. While another advocate is present during the meetings to represent the advocate role and allow the coordinator to focus on her role, there are times where the coordinator must don her other role. The team feels that her dual role strengthens her effectiveness in both roles. For example, they feel that her knowledge of the system response helped her to recognize an issue regarding sexual assault reporting that could jeopardize not only criminal investigations and prosecutions, but advocacy confidentiality as well. For this issue, the coordinator/sexual assault advocate acknowledged her role deviation, posed the issue, and then resumed her coordinator role and allowed the other advocate to assume the victim’s perspective.  
—SART member, MN

I’m a huge fan of the advocates. They are our greatest resource. They play a huge role in making sure the victim knows what’s going on in their case. With all my other cases, I don’t have time in my day-to-day work to keep victims in the loop. I only contact them when something big comes up. Advocates are the link to what’s going on. They are also a huge part of the communication and create understanding about victim issues on the team. I don’t understand how people get by without them.  
— Detective, CO
Core Characteristics of SARTs Focused on System Change

**Improving the Response**

- Team members identify gaps/issues in the system and the team takes action, as needed, most often within their own organizations.
- The team embraces opportunities to improve how the system response functions in sexual assault cases.
- The team regularly measures, evaluates, and reflects on its impact to refine its goals and activities.
- Team members use their time together to formally (e.g. case review or mapping) or informally identify strengths and weaknesses in their system’s response to sexual assault, including the criminal justice, human service and health care.
- Team members take initiative when they see an opportunity to do something that will improve the system response to sexual assault.
- The team gets information from a variety of sources to measure and maintain quality assurance (e.g., case management, data collection, tracking convictions, collecting incident reports, victim surveys, focus groups).

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**What SARTs say... How they improved the response**

*Using evaluation, we found that our system was broken. We have many different agencies funnelling into one office, doing different things. We asked: why do we have such disparate quality in investigation? We found that if everyone is on the same page it improves quality of cases.*

– SART Member, OR

*The use of advocacy by law enforcement in sexual assault investigations was not a welcome concept at first. For me personally, it took my recognizing that emotional injuries were present in victims, and I was doing nothing about those injuries, for me to try something different. Initially, I didn’t think advocacy was going to benefit the investigation, but I believed it would benefit the victim. Over time, through a review of cases, I have seen how much advocacy benefits the investigation and prosecution as well, by having better informed and prepared victims who are also dealing with their emotional injuries. Much of this growth has come through the work of a well-established multi-disciplinary team.*

– Sheriff, WI

*The team’s monthly meetings are invaluable to building a network of trust that support improvements. Within the team, there are three key norms that have been established: 1. Issues are presented to the team in order to achieve the best victim-centered response, not to levy blame. 2. Agencies take responsibility for errors. 3. Everyone works towards identifying and implementing a solution. Because of these norms, the team can both formally and informally discuss weaknesses in our response. A few years ago, a formal case review was undertaken which resulted in significant policy and protocol changes. More recently, at the team’s last meeting, the sexual assault advocate raised some issues regarding sexual assault reporting. The team comfortably discussed the issues and the coordinator followed up with a meeting with the law enforcement agencies to further the discussion. As a result of this meeting, a training memo was issued to correct a minor issue and a checklist was drafted to facilitate police officers’ reporting process.*

– Team Coordinator, MN
Multi-Level Leadership & Agency Buy-In

Members at the table are at the level of authority where they can influence their agency policy.

Home organization allocates resources and staff time to support collaboration.

Home organizations are supportive of team mission, vision, & purpose.

Home organizations are committed to responding collaboratively to sexual assault.

Home organizations are increasingly open to change in agency policy and practice overtime.

What SARTs say...

What multi-level leadership and agency buy-in looks like

The SANE presented research to the group on a new test. The Sex Crimes Sergeant conducted further research into the costs and options with two different crime labs. This was presented to the group and then the Commander was able to make an informed decision, find money, and implement the new test. Another example is when the group made a decision together to change the welcoming process for victims arriving at the police department. The change included a process where victim specialists meet victims downstairs instead of a detective announcing the victim’s name in the lobby. – Coordinator, CO

In my case, I am the director of the forensic nurse program which affords me some level of authority to make decisions. However, I also stay actively involved in case work by peer review and seeing the occasional patient. My team of nurses attends meetings as well. It is important for the SART to be made up of people who do the work and those who can make executive decisions. One example comes to mind, regarding the expanding of services to human trafficking and discussing those victims at the SART meeting. Those in leadership positions discussed the impact on their agency, while those who provide direct services to these individuals discussed the more practical issues of getting things done. -SANE Program Director, VA

We had to balance power. LE can seem the most powerful. There were a lot of conversations. It was painful. The higher ups didn’t know the community agencies and didn’t value at first. People at the table had to push their higher ups. We had enough credit to cash in and influence their endorsement of protocol. What brought the chiefs along? The DAs had political capital and individuals at their agency pushed it. They had faith in the members of the team. Some leaders lobbied others. -District Attorney, CO

You have people who have authority and ability to make change attending the meeting. If we went higher in the chain of command it would take longer. They can influence, but they still understand the reality on the ground! -Investigator, CO
Team members regularly participate in meetings and activities—including law enforcement and prosecution.

Team members participate in and follow through on projects. The team membership takes initiative to start new projects.

Team encourages and hears input from all active members.

Team functions as a core planning group that are responsible for planning, designing, and the implementation.

The team supports its members to become “change agents” in their organization.

The team engages with the team coordinator to generate ideas that help with planning on an ongoing basis.

Active Participation

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**What SARTs say...**

How they got to active participation

The SART has some “core” members who represent each discipline, who are consistently in attendance and help guide policy and protocols. The core members represent, prosecutors, law enforcement (local and schools), advocates, and medical. The core members equally bring to the table, changes in the law and operating procedures that effect the handling of our cases. By doing so, the group is able to come together to educate and/or strategize how to incorporate or deal with those changes in an effort to maintain the high level of case management. To a lesser degree, it also helps shape how we choose to present and/or handle those changes in the courtroom.

–District Attorney, VA

Initially all team members were reserved in all team meetings. Many people remained silent and did not express their opinions. This dynamic gradually changed as individual team disciplines began writing and presenting their part of the protocol. At two meetings in particular, tempers flared between group members and the overall tone of the meeting was very heated and filled with conflict. However, all team members were allowed a chance to speak. What imprinted in my mind was the level of intensity of team members. Those two meetings, held early on in the process, created the foundation for navigating team discussions on difficult topics. We witnessed each other at our worst, survived, and moved forward together fully committed to finding a solution to the conflict. I know that the team is working well as a unit when all team members have the courage to speak at meetings, even if they are a lone voice on the issue. Sometimes a team has to burn it all down before something new can grow.

–Law Enforcement, MN

We don’t equally share the workload. The coordinator does more of the work. But everyone else has also been committed, showing up, doing work. There is a really equal sharing at a high level.

–Law Enforcement, CO

In the big picture, more institutional change takes place when everyone at the table takes ownership over the work—there is a sense of collective responsibility over the process.

–Advocacy, SD
Team prioritizes the opportunity for people to get together to figure out how they can do the things they see that need to be done by creating a forum, fostering formal and informal opportunities to network, and generating ideas. These activities build relationships which then enables stakeholders to form new partnerships and take action.

Team members value collaboration.

Members see themselves as part of a team.

The lead agency is knowledgeable about multi-disciplinary collaborative teams.

The team is resilient, if someone highly connected leaves, the team remains strong.

Team members have developed professional relationships with each other.

Team members know where resources are in the system (knowledge, skills, capacity to do the work).

We are all so protective about what we do in our professional work, we forget how important it is to collaborate. We become better at what we do, and there is a smaller negative impact on victims. The team allows us to find out best practices! This is what we need. We need to share ways we can do our job better.

- Detective, CO

I’ve developed a relationship with the DA. We touch base and keep track of cases. We try not to duplicate efforts. The coordination gives us the ability to be proactive for the victim.

- Detective, CO

The team attributes their success to their regular contact. As a small community, they often see each other outside of the monthly SMART meetings. This frequent contact reinforces the team’s cohesion. The team also feels that this familiarity increases each members’ willingness to be accountable and move towards solutions.

- SART Coordinator, MN

The most important thing is to have people who want to be there. It is a tough job, so it’s important to have the relationships to have the tough conversations and make good decisions.

- Advocate, CO

I think it is important that everyone participates, but it’s not a deal breaker. If someone goes out of town or leaves for another job, there is the infrastructure to communicate.

- Law Enforcement, CO

You really do need to respect the work of the people on the team with you. You can differ in opinion, but recognize that we are all here for the same reasons. We all have different roles, if we all work together we can do better for victims.

- District Attorney, CO

The benefit of being part of a SART is that you’ve got the resources you need when you have a case that stumps you. The team gives you the “who” and “where” to go with the case. SART also gives you the protocols so things are handled the same on all the cases. It makes all the cases easier. It helps us not to duplicate work and be on the same page about what has been done. So, when I am conducting an investigation, I am in contact with my DA a lot now. Now, the DAs know what we can or cannot do, and I know what the DAs will want.

- Detective, CO