

Considerations for Team Formation

Establishing your team membership and focus is an essential part of your plan to improve the response to sexual violence in your community. The focus for teams using the 8-Step Protocol Development Cycle is to create a victim-centered response while improving the criminal justice response. The Cycle is designed to be a continual process of assessing the current response, creating and implementing a plan for improvement, and evaluating for success. The following information will give you an overview of considerations for forming or expanding your team. It is based on “Establishing the Interagency Council” from *Improving Community Response to Crime Victims* (Boles and Patterson) and the Institute’s experience working closely with sexual assault multidisciplinary teams for over a decade. For consultation on your team’s development, contact us at 800-964-8847 or svji@mncasa.org.

Membership Considerations

The team should be comprised of agencies or organizations that will have a specific role outlined in protocol. *Individuals* who have valuable experience or perspectives that will inform the team’s work should be considered for an advisory committee. For example, a team may ask a group of survivors to serve on an advisory committee that will review the survey design for hearing from other victims/survivors, review drafts of proposed protocol, and give input to the design of public forums. Other common types of advisory committees are: elected officials, media, clergy, and persons from underserved populations in your community. Establishing advisory committees can also be a way to start connections with individuals or organizations that the team may foresee inviting to join the team in the future. For example, a team with a military base in their community/jurisdiction may decide that it’s too early in the team’s process and development to include this focus on their team. Asking some individuals to be a part of an advisory process may help build the relationships and insight that can lead to successful involvement of the base in future cycles of the team’s work.

Agency membership—the types of agencies represented on the interagency team

For the team to be successful in its work of designing and implementing a victim-centered, inter-agency protocol, the following core agencies must participate: law enforcement, prosecution, medical, advocacy, and corrections. Other agencies involved in the response to victims/survivors of sexual assault may be encouraged to join as well. For example, representatives from counseling agencies, public health agencies, social services (e.g. adult protection), interpreter services, and local colleges or universities have all been valuable members on Minnesota teams. If or when the team starts to consider adolescent issues—another set of public and community agencies would merit team membership. Most teams starting the process benefit from a narrower scope at first (e.g. responding to adult victims) and then addressing additional issues (e.g. adolescent victims) in future cycles of the process.

Individual Representatives—the kind of individuals who should represent member agencies

After the team’s participating agencies are identified, team members should be selected that will regularly attend meetings and contribute to the team’s work on behalf of their sponsoring agency. Ideal agency representatives selected for the team will be individuals who are knowledgeable both about agency procedure and sexual violence, and are available to attend regularly and commit to the work

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required. If agency directors do not have the time to commit to the team's work (which is usually the case), they should appoint staff who will be empowered to meaningfully contribute on their behalf.

Jurisdiction considerations

Many agencies—particularly in rural areas—respond to sexual assault cases across jurisdictional/geographic lines (e.g. multiple counties, tribal/county, federal/county). Teams in Minnesota have often been county or reservation-based following the lines of law enforcement and prosecutorial jurisdiction for criminal cases. New teams and/or teams that are just starting to use the Protocol Development Cycle often benefit from starting with one or two main jurisdictions and then expanding their focus in future cycles. Another approach is to launch additional teams or run some teams simultaneously to communicate at key intersection points. We encourage teams to determine the scope that will fit for them at their current stage of work.

Additional Considerations:

Teams will benefit from having interagency agreements, memorandums of understanding, or a joint letter of commitment that clearly describe the intent and nature of the project, participation expectations, in-kind contributions or limitations, and include signatures from the head of each participating agency and/or governing body. Many funding entities require such agreements as a condition of funding a project. If such agreements are already in place, review them for suitability for this project and adapt or revise as needed.

A principal sponsoring agency should be selected that will take the lead for supporting the team's work. The principal sponsoring agency often serves as the fiscal agent for team funding and houses the team's coordinator. However roles are divided among participating agencies, for the whole or part of the project, it should be clear who will oversee logistical support for the team (e.g. complete reports, support and supervise the team coordinator, seek and manage in-kind donations, handle complaints).

New Teams:

New collaborations have the benefit of very few existing expectations or teams habits that sometimes makes change difficult. On the other hand, starting something new is challenging in its own right. It's important that project champions don't undersell the commitment or expectations for what will be involved in the work the team selects. Change can happen in many ways—at its best, team collaboration is an investment in deeper system improvement that are more difficult to accomplish on a cases by case or agency to agency basis. Coming together as a team often provides immediate payoffs such as understanding or clarifying agency roles and responsibilities. Some payoffs come later in the process, after individuals and agencies develop the trust necessary to risk exposing strengths and weaknesses in their current response.

The ease of forming a new team will vary according to the level of interest and accessibility of the core agencies that are required on the team. Most agencies want to know what value they will receive by

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participating on the team, what tangible and intangible costs are associated with team participation and the nature of the commitment that is necessary. How these questions are addressed will vary from site to site and team to team. To discuss the particulars of your situation and learn how other teams have answered these questions, feel free to contact us at the Sexual Violence Justice Institute @ MNCASA.

In addition, our *Readiness Assessment Survey* found at http://www.mncasa.org/svji_ntap.html highlights other factors that point to a community's preparedness to follow this team approach.

Existing Teams:

If your community already has a team formed, chances are that team members already have an identity and a sense of what the team's focus is or should be. How might those views compare to what is recommended here? If the focus of your team's work will be changing—for example from issue by issue problem solving to following the Protocol Development Cycle or changing from a focus on domestic violence response to the response to sexual violence—consider how individual team members and participating agencies will view and understand this. An early conversation about the potential short and long-term payoffs might be worthwhile. If the team will be expanding its scope and adding new members (e.g. moving from primarily criminal justice system agencies to involve more community agencies), consideration about how to effectively welcome and involve those team members will be important. A team might allot time at meetings to have each member discuss their agency's philosophy and role in the response to sexual assault cases, any rules, laws or guidelines that shape their response, and what they hope to gain and contribute to the team's process. Another approach might be to have a separate orientation for new members to train them on the work done to date by the team, basics about sexual assault response and the criminal justice system (depending on their current knowledge base), and identify the specific issues and knowledge they can bring to the full team.

However your team might evolve thoughtful attention to acknowledging and working with change, both for individual members and the team as a whole generally improves transition.

Beyond Convening

We've seen many great benefits that come when teams commit to applying the Protocol Development Cycle. One of the truly great benefits of these teams is the tendency to move beyond meeting, convening and independent problem-solving. When teams deliberately apply the principles just outlined, we have found that teams are able to: sustain momentum, tap into their natural creativity, adapt to changes in team dynamics, and are willing to take risks to self-correct when the process may not be leading to the intended results. We have found that over time teams exemplify and reflect the true meaning of collaboration.