

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 Three of this three-part series for STOP Administrators provides guidance around developing a community-driven systems 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.

Community-Driven Systems Change

Collaborating towards a long-term systems response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation is a cyclical process that continuously seeks to improve the way victims encounter and experience the many different systems (including advocacy, healthcare, social services, and the criminal justice system) within a community.

This process:

- Focuses on the overall systems response, not existing cases;
- Assists agencies with different priorities, concerns, obligations, and limitations *negotiate* towards agreement;¹
- Provides mechanisms for incorporating the victim/survivor voice in the design of the systems response;
- Can adapt to changes in the community's status quo, new laws, and emerging best practices.

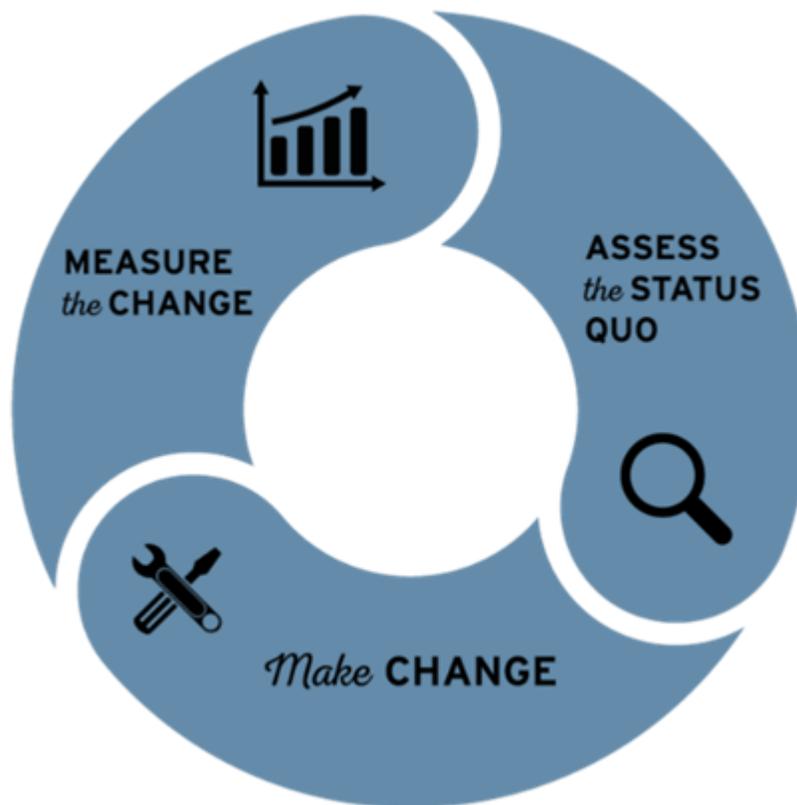


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Keys to Effective Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration

Multidisciplinary collaboration is essential to building a long-term, sustainable systems response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation. The following best practices can enhance the effectiveness of multidisciplinary collaboration:

Formalized commitment

Formalized commitment through a memorandum of understanding or interagency agreement signifies buy-in from agency leaders to the process of systems change, and institutionalizes agency-wide changes to the systems response from the top down.

Systems-level advocacy

In multidisciplinary collaboration, the role of an advocate is to bring the unique perspective gained from navigating systems (criminal justice, health care, etc.) at the side of victim-survivors. Systems-level advocacy ensures that changes to the systems response are made with the impact on victims in mind.

Adherence to confidentiality

Depending on each member's profession, as well as state statutes, maintaining victim confidentiality can be a legal, ethical, and professional obligation. For programs that are funded through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), confidentiality is a requirement which applies *regardless of any cooperative or confidentiality agreements that may be in place within a multidisciplinary collaboration.*²

Ability to manage conflict and agreement

Agreement is not always a good thing.³ In an effective multidisciplinary collaboration, team members use conflict as an opportunity to engage in difficult conversations around making actual change to the systems response. When teams ignore or are unwilling to work through these tension points in a productive way, the result is a response that is surface-level, unsustainable, and ultimately ineffective.

System Practitioner Tips: Cooperation, Coordination, and Collaboration

Multidisciplinary collaboration is oftentimes confused with other forms of multidisciplinary work: *cooperation* and *coordination*.⁴ These are separate and distinct activities that happen both independently and simultaneously. Each is essential to the overall systems response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term or informal relationship that exists without any clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort • <i>EXAMPLE: A law enforcement agency refers all adult victims of sexual exploitation to a local community-based advocacy program for prostituted women. While there is no formalized policy in place, the two agencies have agreed that if the victim/survivor completes the advocacy agency's educational and support program within a specified amount of time, no citation for prostitution will be issued.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer-term relationship focused on a specific effort and under a common mission statement • <i>EXAMPLE: A local human trafficking taskforce is formed in order to identify <u>existing</u> incidents of human trafficking, serving victims, and investigating and building cases.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalized relationship among multiple agencies and focused on long-term systems change • <i>EXAMPLE: A sexual assault multidisciplinary action response team (SMART) integrates sex trafficking protocol development into its existing work, <u>improving the overall system's response</u> to sexual assault.</i>

Primary recommendations for STOP Administrators

Meaningful engagement of victim/survivors

Support multidisciplinary collaborations that have demonstrated the meaningful engagement and involvement of victim/survivors, *as well as underserved populations*, 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*⁵

Confidentiality

Encourage strict adherence to victim confidentiality through formalized mechanisms of accountability (such as a confidentiality agreement) and regular review of the applicable state and federal law, as well as the professional and ethical obligations and rules that apply to each participating agency.

“You don’t want to tell someone something difficult to talk about if they aren’t going to keep it confidential.”

Survivor, *Voices of Safe Harbor*

Cultural responsiveness

Support collaborations that have documented their commitment to cultural responsiveness in their memoranda of understanding and have integrated strategies for meeting the specific needs of underserved populations (such as victims of color, Native victims, and LGBTQ victims) in their work plans.

“Including and opening up opportunities for ceremonial things or prayers and stuff and not making [Native Americans] change things about their daily lives because some Natives put out tobacco every day and burn sage and are really traditional in that way and if they were put in a shelter and sometimes they don’t have that opportunity, they should be able to have that opportunity to have their ceremonies.”

Survivor, Voices of Safe Harbor

Navigating common tension points

Encourage initiatives that strategically and productively navigate common tension points in the systems response to sex trafficking and sexual exploitation, including:

- Adult vs. Child victims;
- The use of juvenile detention for victim/survivors when shelter is not available;
- The use of harm reduction strategies;
- Victim/survivor confidentiality vs. Mandated reporting; and
- Clarifying language and expectations around commonly used terms (e.g.: “victim-centered” and “trauma-informed”) and the implications of these terms for each discipline.

“If you lock someone up it’s going to make someone do it again, it’s not their fault, they are kids.”

Survivor, Voices of Safe Harbor

Resources

Ramsey County Attorney's Office and the Sexual Violence Justice Institute (SVJI) at the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MNCASA), "Safe Harbor Protocol Guidelines" (2016) www.mncasa.org

Office for Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center, Human Trafficking Task Force e-Guide (last accessed August 11, 2016), <https://www.ovcttac.gov/taskforceguide/eguide/>

Minnesota Department of Public Safety, "No Wrong Door: A Comprehensive Approach to Safe Harbor for Minnesota's Sexually Exploited Youth" (2013)

SVJI @ MNCASA, "7 Rules for Becoming Victim-Centered" (2013) www.mncasa.org

References

1. Anita Boles and John Patterson, "Improving Community Response to Crime Victims: An Eight-Step Model for Developing Protocol" (1997)
2. National Network to End Domestic Violence, "FAQ's on Survivor Confidentiality Releases (2015) http://nnedv.org/downloads/safetynet/OVW/NNEDV_confidentialityreleasesfaq_2015.pdf
3. Washington Coalition Against Sexual Assault, "Multidisciplinary Teams" (2011) http://www.ncdsv.org/images/WCSAP_multidisciplinaryteams_2011.pdf
4. SVJI @ MNCASA, "Language of Collaboration" (2008) www.mncasa.org
5. Hennepin County No Wrong Door Initiative, "Voices of Safe Harbor: Survivor & Youth Input for Minnesota's Model Protocol on Sexual Exploitation and Sex Trafficking of Youth" (2015)

Contact us with questions or technical assistance requests

Sexual Violence Justice Institute @ Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault
161 St. Anthony Avenue, Suite 1001 | Saint Paul, MN 55103