

Framework for Writing the SART Biennial Report

Introduction

In 2021, the 87th Texas Legislature passed SB 476, requiring that every county in Texas form an adult Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). A SART is comprised of community partners such as law enforcement, advocates, and healthcare providers whose focus is to provide a trauma-informed response to adult survivors of sexual violence. And per the law, the following must occur:

- ✓ **Formation and Participation:** All 254 counties in Texas have established and are participating in a SART
 - Counties smaller than 250,000 people have the option to partner with nearby counties to form a multicounty or regional SART.
 - When multiple members overlap in county service, this should be considered.
- ✓ **Focus:** **Adult survivors** must be the center of a multi-disciplinary approach to sexual assault in their community.¹
- ✓ **Collaboration:** Sexual assault responders and individual agencies should work together in order to ensure survivors in their communities are being served.
- ✓ **Attendance:** Primary members, designated by law, are in regular attendance and actively participating. There members are representatives from:
 - Sexual Assault Program
 - Prosecutor/District Attorney's Office
 - County Sheriff's Office
 - Law Enforcement
 - Mental or Behavioral Health Provider
 - Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner/Healthcare Provider
 - Any additional members considered necessary
- ✓ **Processes:** Protocols are necessary, in order to share how each individual agency interacts and serves survivors, and discusses the intersections with other community partners
- ✓ **Evaluation:** Protocols are evaluated by a case review on a biennial basis during odd numbered years by submitting a report to the County's commissioner's court.

This document will cover the required elements of the biennial report, provide guidance on report structure, and discuss next steps.

¹Hekmat, H. & Modali, D. (2022) *Establishing a SART in Your Community*. TAASA Regional Training.



Questions you may have about the biennial report:

Why is the biennial report important?

In addition to being a mandated requirement and a way to gauge accountability, the report is incredibly important. This report is a way for SARTs to see where they are and what they would like to work on.

Where does the biennial report go?

The biennial report will be submitted not only to the commissioner's court in your county but to TAASA as well. Directions will be provided at the end of this framework guide.*

Will my SART be able to review other reports?

TAASA will be reviewing the biennial reports and developing an evaluation that includes information about the reports across the state. This report will be made public and shared with key stakeholders such as the Council of Governments (COG) and the Governor's Office. TAASA can also send out this evaluation to the SARTs so you and your team can learn more about what sexual assault response looks like across the state.

What is the biennial report?

The SART biennial report is a crucial document that provides an overview of the activities, achievements, and challenges faced by SARTs in Texas. This report should include the team's progress and gives the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of individual agencies as well as the **interagency** protocol.

Interagency: Protocols should include how agencies work together to ensure survivors are afforded their rights and receive trauma-informed care.

What if you are part of the regional SART or a SART that includes multiple counties?

The report should still include all the same requirements for each county in the SART. Only one report is necessary but each county is responsible for submitting a copy of the report to their county commissioners court.²

- For example, if your SART serves three counties, please submit the report to all three counties.



Continued on next page.

² https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.351.htm#351.252_7b

What if there is part of the report we are unable to provide at this time?

TAASA understands that it is going to be an ongoing project across the state. If you are unable to provide certain pieces of the report, please address identified gaps and provide a **written explanation of any required information that was not able to be included.**

FOR EXAMPLE:

If your county has a low report of sexual assault cases and not much sexual assault data, think about including:

- other important data points
- why you think that you are not seeing reporting of sexual assault in your community
- discuss what your SART plans to do in the next two years to increase reporting and resources to sexual assault survivors in your county(ies)

If one of the law enforcement agencies was unable to provide the number of sexual assault cases they investigated or one of the advocacy providers were unable to provide the number of survivors that they provided hospital accompaniment for, focus on:

- the agencies that were able to provide data
- a brief explanation why this data was unable to be shared
- how your SART plans to address this gap in the future

What Should Be Included in the Biennial Report?³

The following is an overview of what should be included in your report:

- 1. List of response team members participating in quarterly meetings**
 - Consider including your by-laws or pieces of your by-laws that are relevant
- 2. Complete copy of protocols**
 - This is an important piece to include as it shows the process of each individual entity of the SART
- 3. Sexual assault data from each member organization**
 - Please share relevant information that you have seen for the past 2 years. As this is the first report, you may want to also share any other relevant numbers in a timeframe of your choosing that establishes what your community has seen.
- 4. Summary of at least 1 adult sexual assault case review used to assess effectiveness of the protocol**
 - Think critically when choosing a case for review.

Keep in mind that the most important part of selecting a case is consent from the survivor.
- 5. Any additional results from protocol evaluation, such as survivor feedback surveys**
 - This is also the opportunity for the SART to provide what they have learned from the case review. What were the successes? What were the gaps? What can be changed in your SART's protocols to better serve survivors in your community?



³How to Prepare for the SART Biennial Report. TAASA.

How to Structure the Report

Please take this opportunity to structure the report in the best way your team sees fit. Below are suggestions of a format that you are welcome to use.



Title Page

This allows you to include your SART name or share what counties your SART represents. You may also want to share the year of the report and any other information you'd like to include on your cover page. This could be contact information, when was the report completed, any graphics, etc.



Please make sure to include how to connect with your SART in case the commissioner's court, TAASA, or other stakeholders want to contact you.

Table of Contents

This is a good way for folks reading your report to know what information is going to be covered and where.

How can you structure your table of contents?

- Executive Summary of the report
- SART Overview
- Outline of Activities and Trainings (feel free to change the title to what fits best for your report)
- Data and Findings
- SART Protocols of XX County
- Case Review: Evaluation of Protocols

Executive Summary

Begin the report with a concise summary, highlighting the objectives, main activities, and initial suggestions for improving effectiveness. You can briefly mention the insights gathered over the past two years, the objectives of your SARTs, and offer a snapshot of the challenges, accomplishments, and suggested improvements. These elements will be elaborated upon in the report's conclusion section.

SART Overview

This should include your membership and structure of the team and the purpose. Sharing your mission and vision would be a good way to convey this information. If you have created by-laws, this would be a good place to share them or at least the elements mentioned above.

Outline of Activities and Trainings

The mandated members are required to complete at least **4 hours of cross-training** related to sexual assault each year. This section can be used to share how you met these requirements, as well as any additional training, activities, or projects the SART has attended, created, or are working on..

Data and Findings

This section can include graphs, tables, statics and/or narratives that help tell the story of the data collected in your county. This should include all required stats or an explanation of why they were not able to be provided. The intent behind these numbers is to track a case from reporting through prosecution. However, we know that the timing of the criminal justice process and tracking may make this difficult for this initial report.⁴

Who should share data and why is it important?

All the mandated members of the SART should provide atleast 2 years of sexual assault data. It would also be beneficial if the other members attending could provide any data or insight to services they have provided for survivors in this section.

WHAT DATA MUST BE INCLUDED?⁵

- ✓ The number of sexual assault reports received by local law enforcement agencies
 - ✓ Number of investigations conducted as a result of those reports
- ✓ Number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition
- ✓ The number of reports of a sexual assault which no indictment was presented (or an explanation to why the team could not provide this information)

Or an explanation of why this data was unable to be collected.

NOTE

The intent behind these numbers is to track a case from reporting through prosecution. However, we know that the timing of the criminal justice process and tracking may make this difficult for this initial report.

What else should you consider when sharing data?

Widening the time period of the data shared.

- For example, instead of 2 years, if there has been relevant information in the past 5 years, please expand the data shared to that timeframe if it gives a better overview of what you are seeing in your community.

Expanding the data by including other crimes (especially if sexual assault reports are limited)

- This would be the opportunity to share data on other crimes that could relate or correlate with sexual violence. This includes indecent assault, family violence, trafficking, unlawful electronic transmission of sexually explicit visual material and aggravated assault.
- This could also include the number of sexual assault survivors seeking or receiving services without reporting.

TIPS

- Designate meeting for all members to bring their data and discuss their findings
- Create a data committee to help compile data from agencies
- Create an online form or shared document where members can submit their data throughout the year *if using this option be sure only members have access and that identifying or sensitive information *is not included*

⁴ https://www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/sartkit/develop/data-print.html

⁵ [https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.351.htm#351.252\(A\)](https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.351.htm#351.252(A))

SART Protocols

Protocols are policies, procedures, and agreements to guide SARTs collective response. The purpose of SARTs creating protocols is to share each member’s process in ensuring survivors are afforded their rights while also addressing overlap and how members work together.⁶

Why do protocols matter?

Protocols help eliminate gaps while defining roles and partnerships. This helps create a standard and sets expectations for how SART members in the county respond to survivors and helps SART members understand how SART members work together.

What should be included in the protocols?

Each entity’s process should be shared as well as highlighting where they may interact with other members of the SART and how to make those interactions productive and supportive for the survivor.

What should each mandated team member include in their protocol?

Sexual Assault Program

- ✓ Services provided and how survivors can get connected to services
- ✓ Responsibilities of the program
- ✓ Processes for receiving services, including:
 - Hotline services
 - Intake
 - Hospital Accompaniment
 - Legal Accompaniment
 - Law Enforcement Accompaniment
 - Counseling
 - Any additional services
- ✓ Include how the program interacts with the other mandated members. For example:
 - How do advocates interact with the SANE?
 - When might the advocate contact the district attorney’s office?
 - How can law enforcement request an advocate for an investigative interview?



Note: You can also include information about how the program interacts with other members who are a part of your SART.

District Attorney’s Office/Prosecutor

- ✓ How survivors get connected or are contacted
- ✓ The responsibilities of the office
- ✓ What their process includes such as:
 - Meeting with the survivor
 - Meeting with the investigating officers
 - What materials should be provided
 - Utilizing expert witnesses to explain trauma/address common myths around sexual assault
 - What happens during the court process including initial contact, plea agreements, trial, sentencing, etc.⁷
 - Affording victims their rights (ex. protecting pseudonyms, keeping victims informed, etc.)
 - Anything additional that might occur (ex. sexual assault protective order processes following a conviction)
- ✓ Include how the DA’s office interacts with the other mandated members and any additional members who are currently at SART meetings. For example:
 - When the DA’s office might get in contact with Law enforcement
 - Interactions with the advocacy agency

⁶ <https://www.nsvrc.org/sarts/protocols-and-guidelines>

⁷ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/CR/htm/CR.56A.htm#56A>

SART Protocols Continued

County Sheriff's Office

- ✓ How survivors may get connected or report
- ✓ Responsibilities of the office
- ✓ What their procedures include:
 - Initial report
 - Dispatching priorities
 - Meeting with the survivor
 - Investigative processes as well as protocols for responding officers and assigned investigators
 - Affording victims their rights
- ✓ Include how the sheriff's office interacts with the other mandated members and any additional members who are currently at SART meetings. For example:
 - Working with the advocacy agency to convey the reporting process
 - Interactions with medical personnel on the initial reporting number

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner or Healthcare Provider

- ✓ How survivors may report or may get in contact with SANE
- ✓ Responsibilities of the Forensic Nurse/ SANE
- ✓ What their process looks like:
 - Initial presentation at the hospital and contacting the SANE and advocate
 - Meeting with the survivor
 - Conducting the exam
 - Interview
 - Maintaining chain of custody
 - Process of submitting the kit
 - Medical care and discharge
 - Next steps
 - Complaint processes and contacts
- ✓ Include how SANEs interact with the other mandated members and any additional members who are currently attending SART. For example:
 - The process of working with the program advocate during accompaniment
 - How kit pickup is coordinated with law enforcement

Law Enforcement

- ✓ How survivors may report or may get in contact with law enforcement
- ✓ Responsibilities of peace officers or law enforcement agency
- ✓ What their process looks like:
 - Initial report
 - Evidence collection and submission to crime lab
 - Meeting with the survivor
 - Interactions and connecting with Victim's Services
 - Timeline for contacting survivors and follow-up investigations
 - Interview
 - Providing Interpretation
 - Next steps in the case (case filing, obtaining warrants, case closure criteria, entering ViCAP, CODIS)
 - Case supervision
 - Affording victims their rights
- ✓ Include how Law enforcement interacts with the other mandated members. For example:
 - The process of the program advocate attending law enforcement interviews
 - The interaction at the Sexual Assault Nursing Exam with the Forensic Nurse or Examiner.
 - Working with an immigration agency to complete a U VISA status Certification for an a survivor



SART Protocols Continued

Behavioral Health Services Provider

- ✓ Responsibilities of a behavioral health services provider
- ✓ How survivors may report or may get in contact with a behavioral health services provider, such as a counselor or therapist
- ✓ What their process looks like:
 - Initial intake and referral
 - Meeting with the survivor
 - Any processes that are not confidential that can be shared
- ✓ Include how behavior health may interact with the other mandated members and any additional members who are currently attending SART. For example:
 - What is the referral process from the program?
 - What is the referral process from law enforcement?

Additional members

- ✓ Roles and responsibilities of additional members
- ✓ How survivors get connected or contacted
- ✓ Intake and services provided to the survivor and the processes
- ✓ Interaction with the mandated members of the SART



What else should be included in your protocols?

- Ongoing services for the survivor
- Any updates based on legislative changes that impact survivor rights
- Conflict resolution: The process of procedures the SART has put in place
- Confidentiality and how that will be addressed as members collaborate and interact with the survivor and each other

Evaluation of Protocols: Case Review

This part of the report will go through each one of your agencies protocols through the lens of a sexual assault case that happened in your county. **Remember you only need to review ONE case every two years for the biennial report.**

Why is completing a case review every two years important?


This gives the SART the opportunity to evaluate their protocols and see what is working and what may need to improve or be updated. In other words:

- To what extent were your protocols followed within each case?
- Did each agency follow the protocol?
- Was the survivor afforded their rights?
- Did the protocol create any barriers?

How should the SART begin the process of evaluating their protocol through a case review?

All formal SART members should be included in the protocol and evaluation process. As you begin, gather SART members from various disciplines to select a case for review.

- You may want to create an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the mandated members of the SART and any additional members participating in case review. Consider including:
 - Why you are creating the MOU
 - The piece of the law that discusses case review ⁸
 - What will be shared and anything specific from agencies that may be redacted
 - Signatures from a representative from each agency, including date.

 **Note: If you take this approach, a new MOU will need to be created and signed prior to each biennial case review**

- Consider forming a case review working group to ensure confidentiality and necessity of participation, while also not sharing the survivor’s case with anyone who is not needed.

Develop procedures for selecting and reviewing the case including:

- What type of case will be selected and reviewed (active, inactive, disposed)
- Do you have a framework for conducting case reviews? ⁹
 - How will the case be discussed?
 - Who participates?
 - What information will be presented?
- Is there a rubric or evaluation form for participants to use when assessing the effectiveness of agencies, protocols, and systems?

This means the case has come to an end and has been classified as completed.

The most important piece of reviewing a survivor’s case is getting their consent and protecting their confidentiality, so how do we do that?

- ✓ **Develop a procedure for obtaining the survivor’s informed consent¹⁰ in advance**

Texas Local Government Code Sec. 351.258 (f) A response team may only review a sexual assault case of an adult survivor with the signed, written consent of the survivor.

Informed Consent:

Survivors have the right to receive information and ask questions about about how their case will be discussed so that they can make fully informed decisions about allowing their case to be reviewed.

⁸ <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Docs/LG/htm/LG.351.htm#351.254> (A)

⁹ [What Do Sexual Assault Cases Look Like in Our Community?](#) (2022) MNCASA

¹⁰ <https://code-medical-ethics.ama-assn.org/ethics-opinions/informed-consent>

Evaluation of Protocols: Case Review Continued

How will you obtain permission from the survivor?

Consider who is currently working with the survivor and their relationships. Trust is very important and the survivor may have certain people they have worked with whom they feel most comfortable.



Consider the questions the survivor might have:

- Why do you want to review my case?
- What is the purpose of the review?
- Who has access to the information?
- Who will be present?
- Will you share the results of the evaluation with me, the survivor?

The consent must specify:

1. the information or records covered by the release;
2. the reason or purpose for the release;
3. the person or agency to which the information is to be released.



Although SART will provide a consent form to the survivor that provides detailed information on what the SART will be discussing, what will be in the report, and how their confidentiality will be kept, **certain agencies like behavioral/mental health and advocacy programs, are still required to obtain individual consent forms directly from the survivor. The privacy requirements of all agencies must be considered and upheld.**

Now that you have received consent, how do you conduct the evaluation?

- ✓ **Collect all available evidence, documents, and reports related to the case, ensuring sensitive information is handled confidentially and securely.**
 - 💡 Remember that some of the information required by the report can be pulled from existing records, however, other aspects of the report, such as tracking the trajectory of individual cases, must be done by combining data from SART members.¹¹
- ✓ **Review and go through the case with each mandated member's process. You can structure the report by going through each entity and also how you all interacted during this case to serve the survivor.**
 - 💡 If creating a checklist is helpful, go through each member's process to create that checklist.
- ✓ **SART members share their findings and observations, exchange information, and discuss potential strategies for moving forward. Some questions you can answer in this section of the report include:**
 - What areas did you all work well together?
 - What changes should be made?
 - What was the outcome?
 - If the case is ongoing, what is going to happen next?

¹¹<https://mncasa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Case-File-Review-Fillable-PDF.pdf>

Evaluation of Protocols: Case Review Continued

What else should be included in the protocol evaluation?

Based on the collective expertise of the SART members, a comprehensive plan is developed to address the survivor's needs, pursue justice, and provide necessary support.

Questions to consider:

- How did the survivor get in contact with each resource?
- Did the survivor report?
- What was the outcome?
- What could you learn from this survivor's case?



Throughout the review, please make sure you are adhering to the consent form and protecting the confidentiality of the survivor who graciously agreed to let you review their case.

Conclusion

Summarize the key takeaways from the report, express gratitude to team members and partners, and reiterate the commitment to supporting survivors of sexual assault. Consider addressing the following questions:

- What were the challenges and successes so far?
- What recommendations have come to surface?
- What was SARTs overall impact?
- What are the next steps or goals of the SART for the next 2 years?



Woo hoo, you did it!



You completed the report! What is next?

How do you submit the Biennial Report to Commissioners Court?

Per SB 476, the biennial report must be submitted to the commissioner's court by December 1st during **odd** number years. Please consider the following as you prepare to submit:

- ❑ **Preparation of Your Report:** Ensure that you have completed your SART biennial report with all the required information, materials, and data. Schedule a time to review the report with your team.
- ❑ **Create a Cover Letter or Email:** Draft a concise cover letter or email addressed to the county commissioner's court. In the cover letter, briefly explain the purpose of the report, highlight key findings, and express your gratitude for their attention to the matter.
- ❑ **Contact Information:** Visit your county's official website or contact the county clerk's office for your commissioner's court contact information.
- ❑ **Submission Method:** Determine the preferred method of submission for the commissioner's court. They might have specific guidelines for submitting reports, which could include mailing, hand delivery, or electronic submission via email.
 - ❑ Designate a member of your SART, which could be the coordinator or presiding officer, to submit the report.
 - ❑ Mail or Deliver: If required, mail or personally deliver the package to the designated address, following any specific instructions they provide.
 - ❑ Confirmation: If you have the option, consider requesting a confirmation of receipt to ensure that your report has been received by the commissioner's court.
- ❑ **Follow Up:** After a reasonable amount of time, follow up to ensure that your report has been reviewed and acknowledged.
- ❑ **Remember:** Each county's commissioner's court might have slightly different procedures or preferences, so it's a good idea to verify any specific requirements before submitting your report.

💡 Things to keep in mind:

If you would like to present in person and appear in court, please check your commissioner court guidelines. Some courts may need you to submit weeks in advance to when you will be able to be put on the agenda. **Reminder that your biennial report must be submitted by December 1st.** However, you can present in front of the court after that date.

If you choose just to submit through electronically or mail, and not appear in person, the commissioner's court may contact you to schedule time for your team to come to a session. Please make sure your coordinator or presiding officer's information is provided so the court has the ability to contact your SART.

Who else should receive a copy?

After submitting to the commissioner's court, please send a copy of the report to TAASA as confirmation.

- ➔ Email sart@taasa.org with the subject line: **Biennial Report for <insert County or Counties here>**

What happens now that the biennial report is submitted?

First of all, celebrate! Not only completing and submitting the report, but also the milestones your SART has achieved so far!

TAASA's SART Project Coordinator will be compiling the biennial reports and providing an analysis to major partners across the state, including the Governor's office, Texas Council of Governments, and the SARTs across Texas.

TAASA hopes to use the knowledge shared in the biennial reports to better serve survivors and address any needs and challenges SARTs are facing in their communities.



Help! I still have questions!



That's ok! As you go through this framework, more details will be provided about the biennial. If you still have additional needs, TAASA would love to support you. Please reach out directly Deepika Modali, TAASA SART Project Coordinator at dmodali@taasa.org.

You may also visit TAASA's website, www.taasa.org, which not only includes TAASA's [An Introduction to SARTs in Texas](#) guide, but also additional support and information.