

A Guide to CART Program Components and Implementation

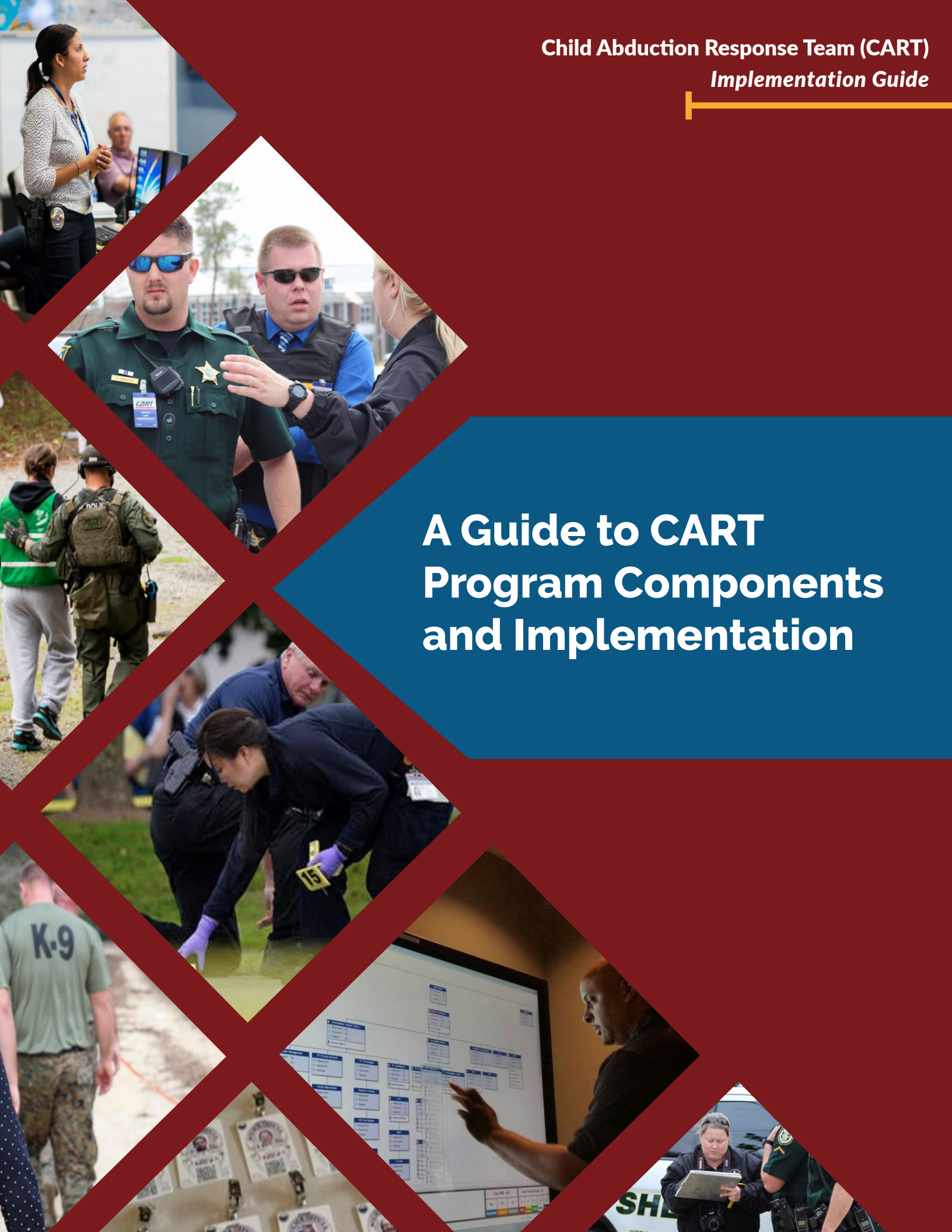


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Introduction to Program Development

A Child Abduction Response Team (CART) is a multiagency, often multi-jurisdictional, program trained and equipped to respond in the search for and recovery of an endangered missing or abducted child. Like AMBER Alert programs, CART programs serve as a critically important tool agencies can employ in an endangered missing or abducted child incident to promote a rapid and comprehensive community response.

The National CART initiative was established in 2006 by the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and is administered through the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP). CART continues to gain the interest of chief executives from law enforcement agencies (LEAs) across the United States, Tribal nations, and internationally. The CART initiative continues to expand and evolve, with jurisdictions completing AATTAP's CART curriculum eager to integrate and implement the program standards and operational protocols obtained through classroom, tabletop, and self-paced training.

In addition to the foundational three-day CART training program, AATTAP assists agencies and teams through on-site and virtual technical assistance, targeted mentor training (TMT), tabletop exercises, review and advisement on team structure and protocols, and application for and achievement of USDOJ CART certification.

While fully covered in the [CART Certification Guide](#), it is helpful to be aware of the USDOJ CART Certification Program objectives when considering the information outlined in this guide. Certification objectives are as follows.

- Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the CART before, during, and following an activation.
- Front-load (identify, secure, and plan for the deployment of) resources for response to an endangered missing or abducted child incident.
- Establish standards for teamwork, interagency cooperation, and unified response.
- Further agencies' efforts around CART program implementation, ongoing maintenance, and sustainability.

AATTAP offers this *Guide to Program Components and Implementation* in recognition and support of CART program interest, initiatives, and efforts across the U.S., in Indian Country and Alaskan Native Villages, and internationally. This publication is built upon the knowledge and expertise of trained law enforcement, emergency response, and child-protection professionals who have contributed to the CART program curriculum and regularly share their experiences through AATTAP's CART training courses and workshops. From AATTAP's subject-matter expert cadre—and through the diligence, commitment, and ingenuity of veteran and new CART programs—we can collectively ensure a better and more comprehensive response when a child is missing.

The CART strategy incorporates three elements:

- 1. Trained members with established roles and assignments**
 - 2. A ready-made list of equipment that is available to aid in the search and investigation**
 - 3. A network of nontraditional community resources the team can access to assist in the investigation**
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Section 1

Getting Started

The success of a CART program rests on the foundation of an effective plan. When starting a CART, stakeholders must develop and achieve concurrence around a vision of how the team will function within their collective jurisdiction.

Because CART uses a multidisciplinary approach, those responsible for team development and implementation must carefully consider and establish its structure and membership to effectively staff and execute all CART functions. Considerations include, but are not limited to the skill- and training-specific roles to be included, who should fill those roles, resources to be secured and readied for deployment with team operations, and the defined service area for the CART.

Executive Commitment

For a CART to function appropriately within its defined jurisdiction, both initially and over time, there must be buy-in from the administrators of all critical agencies involved. Some teams have found success by presenting an established, well-defined CART policy to their agency head as a starting point for understanding and adopting the CART concept and building their programs. Regardless of how the team forms, agency heads must give all individuals responsible for CART development their full support and empowerment to formalize, integrate, and implement CART protocols.

Partner Agencies

Partner agencies should designate liaisons responsible for the following critical commitments.

- Successfully complete the foundational three-day AATTAP CART training
- Commit at least one resource available for CART activations
- Participate in all formative CART program planning and coordination
- Commit staff to attend all quarterly CART program meetings
- Participate in all CART training and exercises (all roles from agency assigned to the team, from telecommunications through command staff)

Through the training and technical assistance mentioned in the Introduction to Program Development (see previous page), AATTAP can deliver information, case-study examples, templates, and planning advisement across all foundational areas of CART development and implementation.



Governance and Operations

Regular meetings of the CART are essential in providing updates and sustainability actions for the team. Stakeholders who comprise the CART's steering committee should develop and agree upon team response criteria, composition and selection criteria, and operational protocols. These should address team notification, team roles and responsibilities, training requirements, critical assignments, and other issues in the CART components detailed in Section 2 of this guide.

Once protocols are in place, the steering committee can either remain as an oversight group or disband and transition oversight functions to the CART coordinator. Either way, the viability and ongoing functionality of the CART are best assured if its plan and operations are actively incorporated and consistently updated within all participating agency policies, procedures, and in-service training. *This unified adoption and incorporation of CART protocols by all participating agencies is the foundation for institutionalizing the program and maintaining its credibility and functionality year after year.*

As the CART officially gets underway, frequent contact and resource list updates, quarterly training and mock activation exercises (both tabletop and field-based), and regular communication with all team members and agency CEOs are essential in maintaining a well-connected and influential program. The role of the CART coordinator in overseeing and ensuring these activities will be outlined further in Section 2.

The Champion

Often, a CART program gains success largely because of the efforts of one individual who becomes the “champion” for the cause. Regardless of high caseloads, competing projects, and other work, the champion remains dedicated to keeping the project alive and going strong.

Identify the champion on your team. It could be the CART coordinator or someone who acts as the organizer, later passing on the torch. Although a strong champion is an asset to the development of the program, that person should not become the sole organizer to the extent that other team members neglect their responsibilities or lessen their sense of ownership. The champion must be careful to lead—not do—or the project may risk failure when the champion transfers to another assignment or receives a promotion, as often happens.

The keys to the success of a CART program are full commitment and institutionalization by all CART participants within their respective agencies.



Costs Associated with CART

A common question when agencies consider implementing a CART is how the program will be funded. When this question was posed to established teams, most reported their agencies would assist in a child abduction case regardless of whether they had a CART in place. Dedication to resources was not an issue. The resources activated by a CART, such as K-9 teams, search and rescue operations, and case investigators, are existing resources that would be committed whether an incident occurred in their or a neighboring jurisdiction.

Some CART programs develop and utilize a fundraising component to assist with resource acquisition. Others rely on private donations. Some have leveraged other funds in conjunction with emergency management to obtain additional equipment, which can be used in circumstances other than CART activation. Overtime has traditionally been the responsibility of each agency participating in the CART program.

Just as agencies fund many special response teams for various law enforcement needs, they also provide resource development for their CART program. Most established teams report that funding and costs are always an issue, but these challenges have not stopped them from implementing their CART, primarily because of the significant buy-in and commitment from community leaders and participating agency CEOs.

Maintaining Success: Ongoing Training and Technical Assistance

The success of a CART program depends on members of its steering committee and the team at-large achieving and maintaining a solid understanding of its concept, mission, and operational foundation. As personnel changes occur—from the executive to frontline levels—focus on continued training and technical assistance to preserve this critical understanding of concept, mission, and operations. For CART training and resources, stay connected to the [CART Program area of our AMBER Advocate website](#), and reach out to our CART program development team by emailing askamber@fvtc.edu and including “CART Assistance” in the subject line.

Best Practices

Agencies successfully developing teams have found the following practices to be helpful.

- Develop a well-defined policy before approaching agency CEOs. Use a successful program’s policy and protocols as a starting point if helpful, amending and adjusting as necessary to meet the needs of your CART’s proposed jurisdiction.
- Invite CEOs to a presentation highlighting the concept of CART and facilitate discussion to develop a shared understanding that CART does not supplant their authority in a case, and is not only feasible to implement from a resource perspective, but is indeed critical to effective utilization and preservation of resources when a child is missing or abducted.
- Ask a survivor or victim parent to participate in the CEO presentation to highlight the perspective of families on the critical need for CART.

The Tacoma, Washington CART has developed a video that explains CART for police administrators, legislators, and the general public. The team graciously shares this resource video with other CART programs. [Click here to view.](#)

Section 2

Implementing the 12 CART Components

The following 12 components comprise the basis for forming and implementing a CART, and are derived from research and best practices relating to operational CARTs across the U.S. Each element should be carefully considered when forming a CART, along with individual agency protocols and policies which have a bearing on the development and implementation of the CART program.

Component 1: Response Criteria

The development of and adherence to response criteria is the most important issue a team faces, and the foundation on which the CART operates. Once a CART program's participating agencies determine the criteria for activation and the area of service for the team, a written agreement—or memorandum of understanding (MOU)—should be formalized, circulated, and incorporated into each agency's policy and procedures related to CART and child abduction incidents.

Every decision to activate a CART must be made based on the program's established response criteria. A CART activation should trigger an immediate, unquestioned response. The CART coordinator(s) should be the catalyst in determining the team's response. In some situations, the activation could warrant only a partial callout of the team. Often, when a team is requested, it is advantageous to have an "all-call" initiated by the CART coordinator, with key members of the team involved in determining the level of CART involvement. See example levels of CART response, *right*.

Component 2: Team Composition

The objective of CART is to deploy a ready-made team of experts who know what to do as soon as they hit the ground. The success of the team will depend upon its ability to add personnel whose knowledge, skills, and abilities will be beneficial in an endangered missing or abducted child case. Experienced CART members suggest utilizing the following groups, who collectively represent a broad range of subject-matter expertise: search and rescue, interview and interrogation, expert witness testimony, command post operations, and major case investigations (including cold cases).

In building teams and selecting personnel for areas or expert skill in executing CART operations, the bottom line is this: *Who would you want to look for your child if he/she were missing? Find, form, and continue to train the "best of the best."*

Example levels of CART response are as follows.

Level I: Limited resources deployed (e.g., flyer distribution, search dogs, search and rescue volunteers, "A Child Is Missing" neighborhood notification).

Level II: Designated sub-region member notification and request for resource deployment. Members closest to the incident site are requested to respond during the initial operation period.

Level III/CART 911: Rapid, full mobilization of all personnel and operational resources available for deployment.

Selecting a CART Coordinator

The selection of a CART coordinator is critical to the team's success. This is likely the person who will work with the requesting agency to activate CART and will assume responsibility for team coordination and training. The CART coordinator will maintain a current list of active CART members and ensure any vacancies are filled. Following are other duties that may be included.

- Coordinating regular meetings with the team
- Reporting team progress or updates to administrators
- Reviewing CART protocols to ensure they are up to date
- Conducting an after-action debriefing following a CART activation
- Preparing an after-action report detailing a CART deployment

CART Composition: Agency, Jurisdiction, and Geographic Factors

Other key factors to consider for team composition include the jurisdictional location and/or affiliation of needed resources and the area within which the CART will be authorized to respond. For example, a CART may be small and have a limited scope, representing a single agency or jurisdiction. Other CART programs may have multiagency teams but operate within a single county. Some teams may be comprised of agencies/members from multiple counties within one region of a state, while others may represent multiple jurisdictions with agencies geographically connected to a community but working across state lines.

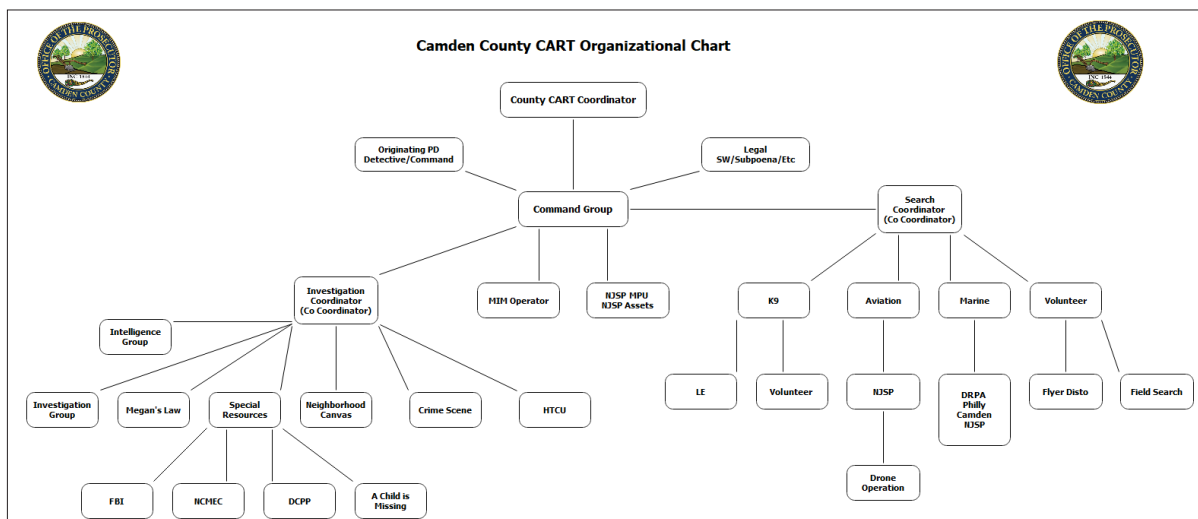
Evidenced by the wide range of CART composition and jurisdictional makeups, what is clear is that the most effective approach to team composition will employ flexibility based on the operational and geographic needs of the area. This flexibility is particularly important when determining how assignments are made across defined roles as teams are constructed.

It is important to note that team composition is ever changing. Often, other resources will be identified after a team is deployed. An after-action debriefing will assist in identifying additional stakeholders and resources which may be needed for future deployments.

The graphic, *below*, provides an example of a CART's organizational structure and includes stakeholders that may comprise the team's membership.



Sample CART Organizational Chart



Used with permission from the Camden County, New Jersey, CART Program

Component 3: Notification and Deployment Protocols

For a CART to be successful in its mission, the agency of jurisdiction must have a method to activate the callout and know precisely whom to contact. For the team to respond in a timely manner, it must have a well-constructed and agreed-upon activation plan. Once the call to activate has been made, the team should be able to respond on-site with resources and equipment within the time frame established.

Public Safety Communicators

The first line of response to a missing or abducted child incident begins with the dispatched call for service and the officer on scene. To that end, successful teams should have a written policy detailing the criteria for requesting and utilizing resources such as a CART.

The policy should establish the persons/roles with the agency who have the authority to authorize callouts and deploy team members. These authorities will vary among agencies, depending upon size and the 24/7 availability of resources for responding officers. Regardless of who makes the determination, the agency should have a checklist of investigative efforts that have occurred on scene prior to the CART activation. This checklist should be included in the agency's policy and procedures for responding to an endangered missing or abducted child investigation.

Activations

Agencies have learned every CART program needs redundancy in who can request an activation. There should be more than one person with authority to activate the team and coordinate response in the event the CART coordinator is unavailable or on leave. Also critically important is an institutionalized process to ensure each member is aware of the activation and knows when and where to respond. CART programs have developed a variety of methods to accomplish this notification process. A common method used for team notification is a mass texting application, which allows members to be notified of a deployment and reply with their availability and response time.

Response Time and Deployment Logistics

CART interagency agreements and MOUs should discuss both the responsibility of personnel to respond to the callout and the expected response time. Every CART will experience some lag time—from the moment the child was last seen, to the time the endangered missing or abducted child report is made to the police, to the time when the agency requests CART. Because the first few hours are critical to the successful recovery of the child, team members should make every effort to minimize the amount of time it takes for the CART to respond on scene.

The goal is for all responding team members to arrive quickly, understand their roles, and bring with them all agency or personal equipment for use in the search and investigation (including any “to go” packs of useful items), so that no time is lost once on scene. All these elements must be clearly defined and articulated in the CART protocols.

Identifying Team Members

A process must be in place to identify all CART members at the scene. Some programs use vests with identifiable name placards, while others recommend team members wear either a CART or agency identification badge.



Component 4: Communications

During a CART activation, multiple agencies will be on scene, and all agency personnel must have a method for communicating with both the command post and other personnel. Depending upon jurisdiction, communications among law enforcement agencies may be a challenge, and additional obstacles can occur when non-law enforcement agencies are included. Jurisdictions are sometimes able to capitalize on communication-bridging and other interoperability technology that can be used in cases of mutual aid callouts or similar domestic security needs. Regardless of the method chosen, each team should have a plan in place for how it will effectively communicate during an activation. In some cases, this may simply mean having spare portable radios for outside agencies to use, while in others, a more comprehensive interoperability plan will be needed due to varying frequencies and equipment in use.

Call Center

The number of tips that pour into the command center during an endangered missing or abducted child event often overwhelms agencies. ***The result can be operational paralysis if ample, well-trained personnel are not available and readied to handle a heavy volume of calls through a designated number for the public to use in providing information.*** Experienced CART members have the following recommendations for setup and operation of call center operations.

- Establish a predetermined tip hotline that can be activated immediately, with an assigned phone number that is easy for the public to remember.
- A multi-line triaging setup and associated phone/headset bank should be equipped and regularly tested for use in call intake.
- All lines/extensions which are part of the public tip-line phone number should be recorded to ensure investigators can review calls as needed.
- All calls should be quickly answered, 24/7, by personnel trained and fully prepared for the demands of this critically important function in the case investigation.

When creating a hotline phone number, remember not all cellular and smartphones have letters on their numeric keypads to which callers can refer; be sure to always publish and broadcast both the actual numeric call-in information as well as the easy-to-remember phonetic (for example, 1-800-CALL-TIPS). Also remember not all CART activations result in immediate resolution of the case; the agency should have a plan in place for extended use of the designated phone number and call center operations in the event the investigation becomes prolonged.

The swift and effective processing of tips and leads is dependent upon good call intake. That means all calls need to be answered and information logged fully and accurately.



Most teams report they rely heavily on their emergency management operations personnel to establish phone banks and assist with staffing.

Communications Equipment

The CART protocols should include an inventory of equipment designated for communications in a callout. The equipment inventory should include, at minimum, radios and cell phones, with careful consideration and planning given to all ancillary equipment related to radio and phone operations that will be needed. All equipment should be tested regularly and properly maintained, and personnel should know where to access and how to use it. Equipment should be stored in a central location, and 24/7 access should be provided during an activation.

Incident Debrief

Just as important as efficient and effective communication during an endangered missing or abducted child incident is the communication which occurs following an incident. It is essential to gather key team members to discuss, document, and assess what went right in the CART's incident response, as well as what can be improved upon through restructuring, retooling, and/or retraining for future callouts. Team debrief activities should be documented using an after-action report which details all key elements of CART operations and actions over the full course of the incident.

Component 5: Command and Control

The CART serves as an investigative enhancement tool and an operational force multiplier, comprised of experts, equipment, and a planned strategy to respond to incidents of endangered missing or abducted children. During a CART activation, the requesting agency usually maintains the lead role. The nature of a CART activation implies multiple agencies, jurisdictions, and disciplines will be responding. Therefore, it is essential for a command-and-control structure to be in place and understood across all roles and functions of the team.

Experienced team members suggested the following procedures for structuring the command-and-control function.

- Establish a command post close enough to the scene where it can be effectively managed, but far enough away so as to not interfere with operations occurring at the scene.
- Utilize a command structure (Incident Command System).
- Assign an incident commander and co-commander.
- Establish operational team leaders (e.g., search, leads, investigations, volunteer management)



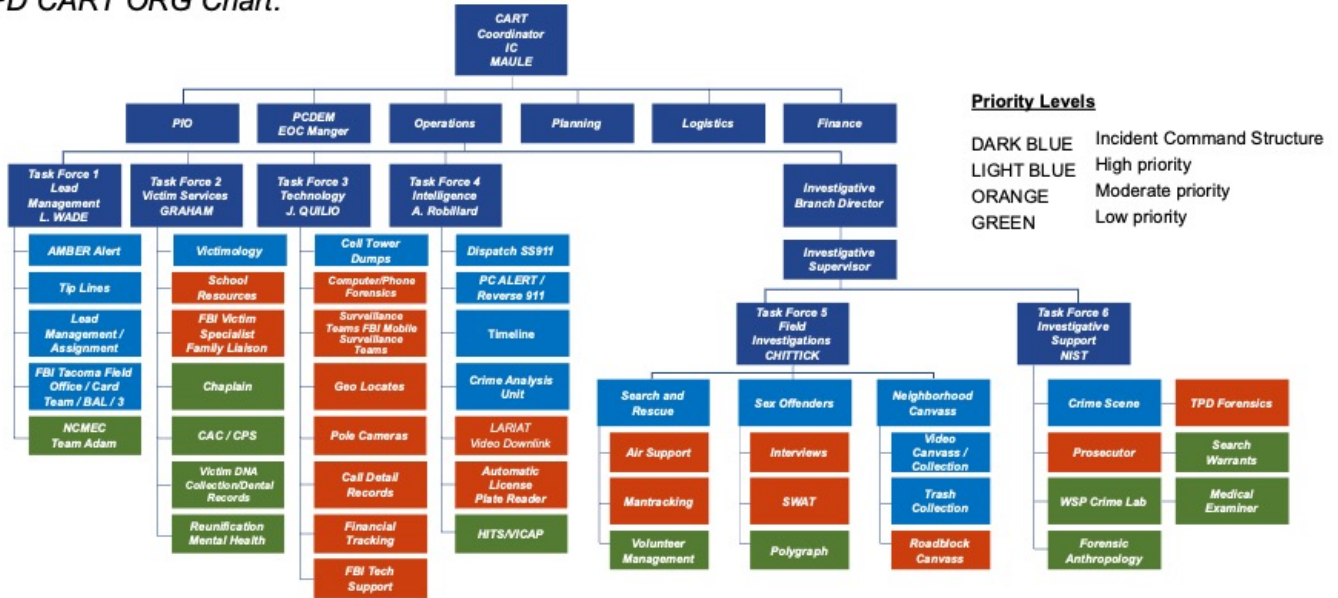
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CART Organizational Structure

Each CART should develop an organizational structure to facilitate pre-planning of assignments and to assist in rapid and efficient deployment of personnel and resources upon activation. The organizational chart should be part of the CART protocols and made available to all existing and new CART members.

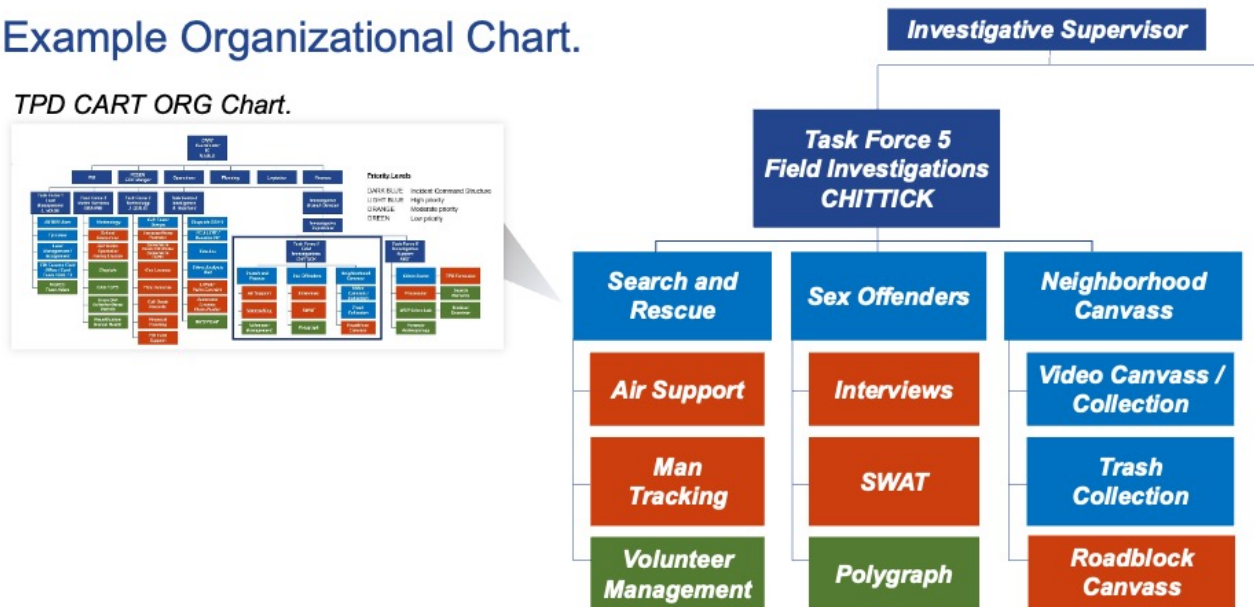
Example Organizational Chart

PD CART ORG Chart.



Example Organizational Chart

TPD CART ORG Chart.



Component 6: Search, Canvass, and Rescue Operations

The importance of search, canvass, and rescue operations in a CART activation cannot be over-emphasized. Searching is the effort to find the child or detect items such as physical evidence or clues, and direction of travel. Canvassing is the search for information that can drive the investigation. Items found in a search can often dictate areas that need to be canvassed, and information learned in a canvass can drive areas that need to be searched. In an endangered missing or abducted child event, time is of the essence, and agencies should use all available means to search the immediate area and obtain direction of travel. Experience indicates searches and canvasses must be coordinated, conducted, and controlled by trained personnel. This component highlights the intricacies involved in conducting both and explains the various elements which must be in place to ensure searches and canvasses are conducted quickly and effectively, without risking compromise to the larger investigation.

Accountability of personnel during search and canvass operations is required at all levels. All personnel, regardless of agency affiliation, must report to and receive assignments in accordance with procedures established by the incident commander. Each member should be assigned to only one supervisor, who must be able to guide, control, and communicate with subordinates, as well as manage all resources under his/her supervision. Supervisors must also record and report resource status changes as they occur.

Most law enforcement agencies do not have an established plan or procedures in place for conducting a canvass or search as part of an endangered missing or abducted child investigation. Search and canvass operations can experience serious problems during major investigations, such as missed witnesses; missed, damaged, or destroyed physical evidence; poor documentation; suspect contact without officer knowledge; and difficulty in obtaining feedback from canvassers. Additional pitfalls include delays in initiating formal search activities, ambiguity of authority, inadequate utilization of specialized resources, poor interagency communications, unplanned media relations, and inability to deal with unplanned volunteer response.

Response Time and Deployment Logistics

There are several important points to understand regarding response times and deployment logistics. Be mindful of these in developing CART protocols, and include assessment of these in team training and debriefing efforts.

- Organization from the beginning is key.
- Designate a lead search coordinator who is a law enforcement representative.
- Designate a lead canvassing coordinator.
- Document all search and canvass operations.
- Utilize the latest technologies such as global positioning systems (GPS).
- Be able to locate search and canvass teams at all times.
- Keep people on task with assignments.
- Brief search and canvass personnel throughout the incident.
- Ensure communication between the command post and search and canvass operations is seamless.
- Train with search organizations and K-9 units prior to a callout.
- Conduct neighborhood searches and canvasses using law enforcement, with guidance and scripts given to those conducting the canvass (see the [AMBER Advocate website's CART Resources area](#) for example forms).



- Distribute an established checklist and standardized forms for use by all search and canvass personnel.
- Employ vetted, private search and rescue teams in order to allow the CART to leverage specialized resources and equipment.

Video Canvass Options

In addition to neighborhood, business, roadside, and sex offender canvasses, the search for relevant video footage has proven to be an effective and important tool in the investigation. Advances in technology and reduction in prices have led to exponential growth of potential video sources including most businesses, many private residences, and traffic cameras. And perhaps of even greater impact is the near-ubiquitous recording of smartphone video by public bystanders, often capturing (and often unbeknownst to the person recording the video) important activity in or around key locations in the case. While this upsurge increases the likelihood an event or information relevant to the investigation may be captured on video, it also requires an appropriate dedication of resources, to locate, legally obtain, retrieve, catalog, and analyze the numerous digital files.



Use of Volunteers

Established CARTs include volunteers as part of their team during an activation. Volunteers should be screened, trained, and provided specific equipment prior to participation. When using volunteers, experienced CART members strongly recommend criminal background checks be performed, that volunteers be required to wear something that makes them easily identifiable, and that there is a curfew established for their work/involvement on scene. For example, volunteers should be issued a color-coded name tag, arm or wristband, or other form of identification that is changed daily to identify everyone as screened and part of the CART's official and current operations.

Most CARTs have a volunteer coordinator who assigns volunteers to less-significant jobs where duties and responsibilities are limited. Such tasks may include handing out flyers at predetermined areas, coordinating food and water breaks for rescue personnel, and posting flyers within the larger community area. Having predetermined tasks that volunteers can readily perform and keeping a current file of volunteer registration forms will ease the process for everyone.

One thing is certain in a high-profile case—volunteers will show up. If turned away, they will likely form their own operation, which may lead to a communication breakdown and potential degradation or complete loss of evidence. Agencies need to be prepared to channel this valuable resource appropriately and effectively.

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Component 7: Training

Every CART needs continual training in order to be effective. Training should cover individual assignments, as well as all areas of team operations, to ensure an effective multiagency, multidisciplinary response.

CART training provides an opportunity for the team to test activation, callout procedures, revise rosters and contact information, update team members' training and specialized skill records, inspect equipment inventory, adjust assignments due to turnover, and review protocols with new and existing members. The CART coordinator may be responsible for conducting the training, or can designate another individual responsible for team training.

Team members should familiarize themselves with AATTAP training resources. The CART coordinator should assist members in identifying and accessing the training course(s) and related resources most appropriate for their respective positions on the CART. AATTAP courses related to and/or helpful with CART understanding and operational preparedness include those listed below—but for the most current array of training and resources, be sure to bookmark the [CART area of the AMBERAdvocate.org website](#), where you can find complete information on classroom, self-paced, live online instructor-led, webinar, and resource offerings.

- Child Abduction Response Team Training (classroom)
- Child Abduction Response Team New Member Training (online, self-paced)
- Child Abduction Response Team Commander Training (online, self-paced)
- Child Abduction Tabletop Exercises (classroom)
- Child Sex Trafficking Training for First Responders, Investigators, and Prosecutors (classroom)
- Crime Scene Response in Child Abduction Cases (classroom)
- Investigative Strategies for Missing or Abducted Children (classroom)
- Initial Response Strategies to Incidents of Missing or Abducted Children (classroom)
- Search and Canvass Operations in Child Abductions (classroom)
- Telecommunications Best Practices for Missing and Abducted Children (classroom and online, self-paced)

Component 8: Legal Issues

The goal in an endangered missing or abducted child case is to rescue the child, develop a solid prosecutorial case against the offender, and do both without violating the constitutional rights of members of the community. Issues such as search and seizure and the role of the prosecutor in the CART command post should be incorporated into the CART protocols. The CART should identify in advance an agency that is prepared to fulfill this role.

Additionally, when establishing a CART, agencies should be aware of important legal issues. If legal action needs to be taken immediately when an activation occurs, it is essential that MOUs and other agency agreements be in place before they are needed, and that all jurisdictional issues and liability concerns be addressed before they become problematic. All agency agreements should be securely maintained in an established location and should be reviewed and updated routinely by CART leaders and legal partners.

AATTAP training courses and related resources, including live webinars, are available to help with CART understanding and operational preparedness. The CART coordinator should assist members in identifying and accessing the most appropriate training and resources for their respective positions on the CART.

It is always easier to establish parameters (and potential situation-driven constraints) for the team proactively, as part of MOU and protocol development and review, rather than during an activation. Legal advisors may be helpful in identifying liability and jurisdictional issues that could impact the CART during an activation. Not only should legal advisors identify these issues, but also possible solutions to challenges and obstacles known or anticipated.

Every CART should include a prosecutor and/or legal advisor. The prosecutor's role can be extremely valuable to the investigation as well as to the outcome of the case if an arrest is made. The prosecutor or legal advisor should be included in all CART training, and a proxy also trained and readied for callout in the event the primary member is unavailable.

CARTs should devote one training session each quarter to addressing legal issues related to CART operations, and should include topics such as search and seizure, roadblocks, the advantages of using probation and parole members in conducting searches, the use of search dogs, operational liability, and mutual aid jurisdictional concerns.



Component 9: Equipment Inventory

The equipment and resource inventory for a CART is more than a simple list. The inventory should include additional information, such as detailed instructions on how each resource can be accessed regardless of time or day. Every resource should have related backup contact information (telephone and email), as well as procedures for making an after-hours callout. Anticipated response times for every resource should be noted—not only for normal operating hours, but for after-hours, weekends, and holidays as well. If costs are involved, that information should also be included in the documentation. See an example of a CART equipment inventory, *below*.

Experienced CART members suggest the team begin compiling its resource inventory by asking each participating agency to list all equipment and other resources they can make available to the CART. Additionally, the team should compile a list of agencies and organizations that may not be a part of the core

Example of a CART Equipment Inventory

DESCRIPTION	QTY	S/N	CONDITION	INSPECT DATE	BY	COMMENTS
H&H Trailer	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	CALEA form submitted 8/2/23
Trailer padlocks & keybox	1		good	02/20/24	I-46	batteries changed in keybox
Volunteer vest (yellow)	349		good	07/24/23	I-46	
8ft table	2		good	07/24/23	I-46	
Folding chairs	6		good	07/24/23	I-46	
Sandwich board	4		good	07/24/23	I-46	
Samsung 65 inch TV	2		Excellent	07/24/23	I-46	
HP Laser printer	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	needs to be connected to new surfaces to confirm compability
Unified command "go box"	10		excellent	07/24/23	I-46	contains laminated UC org chart/responsibilities, necessary paperwork, red vest with identification, mics items specific to task
Microsoft Surface	5		good	03/11/24	I-46	off network
drop cord/outlet container	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	4 drop cords, 3 power outlets, misc electronic
File cabinet - office supply	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	pens, pencils, markers, tape, misc office supplies
File cabinet - forms	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	at least one of all CART forms included in cabinet
Mobile hotspot	1		good	03/11/24	I-46	in possession of SAC DeCamp
Search box	1		good	07/24/23	I-46	flags, paperbags, mini lanterns, crime scene tape, misc search items

team, but that can be called upon whenever their expertise is needed. For example, some private search and rescue teams may not be part of the initial CART callout, but once the situation has been assessed, they may be called upon to bring specialized equipment to the incident investigation.

Another suggestion is to review previous child abduction cases, either from the local jurisdiction or from high-profile AMBER Alert and CART cases in other jurisdictions. Teams should assess what was needed and used in those cases to determine whether those types of resources would be beneficial for use in CART activations within their community/area.

Component 10: CART Protocols

Established protocols, along with operating procedures and manuals, will help to ensure consistency in a CART's functionality. These documents must be shared among and accepted by all participating agencies. Any changes to policies and procedures must be documented in a consistent and singular location.

The best advice from established CARTs is to start with another team's protocols and borrow from what has already been written. Do not make the process overly complicated, and remember the document does not have to be perfect—because it is never final. The protocols should be fluid and updated based on the lessons learned following each activation. The information provided in this guide on the 12 components developed for CART may also be utilized as the framework for your CART protocols. AATTAP can assist with other sample items such as MOUs, organizational charts, membership forms, and more. Reach out to askamber@fvtc.edu, and include "CART Inquiry" in the subject line of your email.



Component 11: Victim Assistance and Reunification

When a child has been recovered, it is critical for a variety of services to be made available as soon as possible—not only to address any physical or medical needs, but also the psychological distress that often results from the incident. Following those immediate needs, a forensic interview must be conducted to obtain any information that may assist in apprehending suspect(s) and to determine if other crimes were committed against the child. Additionally, the forensic interview may provide information that will facilitate the prosecution of defendants and potentially identify other victims and/or suspects. This may result in spin-off investigations that should be carefully documented and swiftly assigned. Finally, before reunification with the family occurs, the child's home must be evaluated to ensure it is a safe and appropriate environment where the child can recover in the wake of the ordeal.

Most CARTs have victim advocates on the team who assist the family both during and after the incident/case, with referrals to community and social services. Experienced CART members recommend the reunification process between child and parent not be rushed. The comfort and welfare of the child is paramount. Psychologists emphasize that the way reunification is handled can have a significant long-term impact on the mental health of both child and family.

Several national nonprofit organizations provide various forms of assistance, including post-recovery support to families that have endured a missing child

incident. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is one of the largest and most respected organizations in this area of **service to surviving victims and families**. One of NCMEC's most valuable programs assists law enforcement in the reunification process by arranging both transportation and lodging for families who cannot afford these costs when reuniting with their child.

While law enforcement and victim advocates are trained to assist those who have been impacted by an abduction, as well as to provide families with a variety of resources, impacted families have expressed that some of the best support received has come from talking with other parents, siblings, or children who have shared the same experience. **NCMEC's Team HOPE** is an excellent resource for this mode of support.

Component 12: Community

A vital component of any CART program is utilizing members of the team to provide training and awareness to the public. This outreach will assist in keeping the community safe as well as informing the public about your agency's CART and what its role is when responding to incidents of endangered missing or abducted children. Additionally, this may generate public interest in assisting and volunteering when an incident occurs. Community organizations often look for avenues to assist public safety officials with logistical items such as food, water, command post space, and bathroom facilities during a major incident. Community events your team can get involved with include National Night Out activities, civic group speaker nights, school assemblies, and National and/or State Missing Children's Day events held annually on or around May 25.



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Section 3

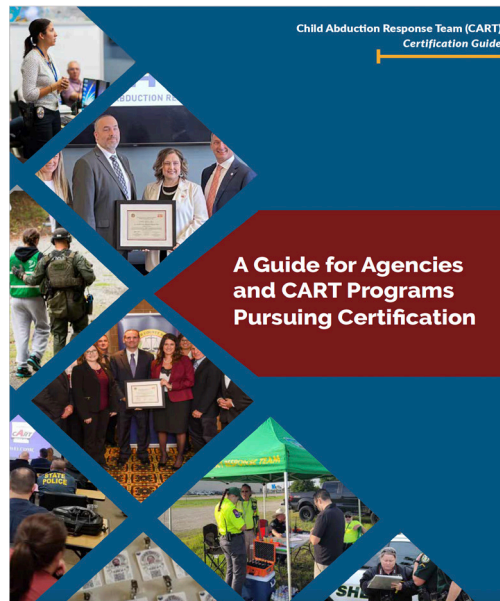
CART Certification

With a commitment to enhancing your team's skills, the CART certification process is an excellent opportunity for all participants of the program to assess their individual and collective policies, procedures, protocols, implementation components, training plans, and overall team capacity. Although not mandatory, this process is highly recommended, and will assist teams with sustainability and continuous improvement.

Certified CARTs must demonstrate their compliance with the minimum standards, guidelines, and practices as set forth in the USDOJ CART Certification Program and taught through AATTAP's CART training courses and related resources. The CART certification standards represent an enhanced model for law enforcement best practices for effectively responding to an endangered missing or abducted child incident. By following the standards, CART programs will increase both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the team activation and operations over the life cycle of the case. The standards address teamwork, interagency cooperation, and a unified response, all of which are crucial for agencies from implementation through ongoing maintenance of their CART program.

To be considered for CART certification, the team and all of its members must have attended a CART training recognized by the USDOJ and submit **AATTAP's application for initial certification**. CART coordinators seeking certification should refer to the **CART Certification Guide** for more details of the process.

An AATTAP certification team will assess the policies and procedures of the requesting CART based on compliance with the CART minimum standards. The CART documents, which must be submitted by the agency in advance of the on-site certification visit, should include, but are not limited to, organizational charts, procedures, protocols, checklists, equipment and resource inventory, forms and MOUs, and any related agreements.



CART coordinators seeking certification should refer to the CART Certification Guide for more details of the process. Visit the CART Certification area of the AMBER Advocate website to learn more.

The certification process consists of a two-day, on-site assessment including interviews, a review of the CART's supporting documentation, and a final mock child-abduction exercise. An executive summary of the assessment, which provides the outcome of the certification, is later sent to the requesting agency and includes any deficiencies that need to be addressed by the CART coordinator. The coordinator, in cooperation with the team, will have an opportunity to correct any deficiencies noted. Once the coordinator successfully submits documentation which confirms/validates these issues have been addressed, the team will receive notice of its CART certification approval.

Upon approval, AATTAP representatives will officially present the CART with its certification. This is usually done on-site, in conjunction with a CART program/agency event, to provide formal recognition of the team's efforts and achievement.



Members of the Iowa Department of Public Safety (DPS) CART program receive their certification from AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen in February 2023. [Read more about the team's efforts and achievement here.](#)

For questions on CART certification, email askamber@fvtc.org or call (877) 712-6237.