The Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (CART)© is a community intervention designed to enhance community resilience through assessment, group processes, planning, and action. CART can also be used as a vehicle to introduce other interventions into a community.

Resilience is the ability to cope with adversity (e.g., anything from an individual misfortune to a major disaster), to learn from the experience, and to grow stronger as a result. Community resilience is the ability of a community as a whole to cope effectively with, and learn from, adversity. Building a resilient community involves more than assembling a collection of resilient individuals; it requires communication and the ability to transform the environment through collective action. Increased resilience offers many benefits. One important goal is to reduce the potential traumatic stress and other negative mental health and social impacts of major adverse events.

Developed by the Terrorism and Disaster Center (TDC) of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, CART brings community stakeholders together to address community issues in a process that includes surveys, group meetings, and strategy development and implementation. CART builds on three key aspects of group behavior: (1) communication among group members permits the group to pool skills and knowledge to achieve better outcomes, (2) members can learn and grow as a result of group interactions, and (3) group participation can facilitate acceptance and implementation of group goals. CART stimulates communication, analysis, and action, and it contributes to community participation and collaboration, community self-awareness, critical reflection, and skill development. CART encourages public engagement in problem solving and the development and use of local assets to address community needs. CART is designed to strengthen and empower communities, not to compare or rank them.

Based on community capacity and related theories, and shaped by field testing and the input of key informants, CART addresses four overlapping, interrelated domains that both describe and affect community resilience. Three of the domains are common to all CART efforts:

1. Connection and Caring – which includes relatedness, shared values, participation, support systems, equity, justice, hope, and diversity;
2. Resources – which includes natural, physical, financial, human, and social resources; and
3. Transformative Potential – which includes data collection, analysis of community assets and capabilities, and skill building that create the potential for profound community change.

The fourth domain relates to the specific adversity that concerns the community. In TDC work, the fourth domain typically is terrorism and disaster management, but communities can focus on other adversities such as community violence, a suicide epidemic, or the recession.

The CART process engages community organizations in collecting and using assessment data to develop and implement strategies for building community resilience. A mix of community leaders, neighborhood members, selected professionals, and/or representatives of community organizations are typically involved. The process begins with a survey that addresses the four resilience domains, participants’ personal relationship to their community, demographics of respondents, and additional concerns developed and refined in conjunction with community partners. The CART assessment survey provides a snapshot of strengths and challenges that are meaningful for the particular community and the organizations participating in the process. The survey can be administered in person, over the telephone, by mail, or online. Results are used to develop a community profile that describes findings by and across domains (Connection and Caring, Resources, Transformative Potential, and Disaster Management or other community concern) from the perspective of respondents. The initial survey is followed by a series of meetings in which participants interpret survey
findings within the context of their community and identify potential information gaps. Other assessment instruments – such as stakeholder analysis, community ecological mapping, and neighborhood tours – are available to refine the profile as necessary.

As part of generating the community profile, participants work together through group processes to explore the meaning of community, perceptions of the community resilience domains in application to specific community concerns, and potential resilience-enhancing actions. Based on assessment results and knowledge of their community, group members identify community strengths and weaknesses, opportunities for improvement, factors outside the community that might advance or impede progress, and other relevant concerns. Groups then establish goals related to issues they choose to address, and they engage in planning to develop strategies and an action plan to enhance community resilience in support of the goals they have established. Prior to implementation, groups may disseminate plans among community members and organizations for consideration and possible revision. The Terrorism and Disaster Center (TDC) CART team will assist throughout the CART process.

The diagram that follows shows a graphical representation of the CART process.

To initiate a CART project for your community or for further information, please contact:

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