

CASE CARTOGRAPHY

A Professional Framework

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Definition

Case Cartography is the attorney-directed discipline of turning a matter's fragmented discovery, records, evidence and research into a structured, source-grounded picture of the case for counsel.

A Case Cartographer works under the direction of counsel. The work shows what the record contains and how its parts connect. It sets events in order, marks where accounts diverge, notes what has not been located, and ties each point to its source.

The Case Cartographer maps the record. Counsel is responsible for legal analysis, strategy, advice and every decision in the case. In short: the cartographer draws the map, and counsel chooses the route.

Why cartography

Complex cases don't arrive with a map. They arrive as terrain: thousands of pages, hours of video, and reports that refer to items nobody produced. Instead of handing an attorney 20,000 pages, hundreds of videos, and a sincere wish for good luck, the office can hand them an organized record with the problems already flagged.

The name makes three promises, each taken from how maps work:

- **A map is drawn at a scale the reader can use.** Counsel receives a short document to carry into court, while the full survey stays on file and is available on request.
- **A map marks what is unknown.** Areas not yet surveyed are labeled as such, never filled in with guesses.
- **A map does not choose the route.** It shows the terrain; counsel decides where to go.

The name does not promise geographic or forensic mapping. Case Cartography does not produce cell-site maps, scene diagrams or opinions on location evidence; those belong to qualified experts.

Core functions

Case Cartography rests on seven functions. Discovery Cartography comes first, because every later step depends on knowing exactly what was produced.

Function	What it covers	Typical output
Discovery Cartography	What was produced, reconciled against what the reports say exists: Bates ranges, file numbering, media and photograph counts	Production inventory and completeness issues
Source provenance	Every material fact tied to the document, page, Bates number or timestamp it comes from	Source registry with pinpoints
Chronology and relationships	Events in order, with the people, places and items that connect them	Chronology and relationship index
Issue mapping	Each count, issue or element set against the record: what supports it, what cuts against it, what remains open	Count-by-count or issue-by-issue table
Divergence and gaps	Where accounts conflict, and what the record refers to but the production does not contain	Evidence problem log
Requests and research	Attorney-directed research, plus drafts of records requests, preservation letters and subpoena plans for counsel's review and signature	Request schedule and research notes
Matter information management	The picture kept current as new discovery, rulings and dates arrive, with facts never mixed between matters	Matter constants sheet and open-items list

The functions apply across matter types. In criminal defense the record is set against the counts; in family and dependency matters, against the issues and findings sought; in civil matters, against the elements of each claim and defense. In habeas and resentencing work, where the record is often old, scattered and enormous, the same functions rebuild it before anything else can happen.

Standards of practice

Every Case Cartography product meets the same standards, whatever the matter or the attorney.

- **Attorney direction and confidentiality.** Counsel sets the scope, sources and priorities. The work is handled confidentially for counsel's use and shared only as counsel directs.
- **Primary sources first.** The report, the recording and the metadata themselves are reviewed, not a summary of them.
- **Every material assertion traced.** Each point ties to the original discovery or controlling authority, with a pinpoint. Repetition across documents is not corroboration.
- **Honest labels.** The language distinguishes what is established, reported, inferred, disputed and unknown. Anything unverified is labeled unverified in the text itself.
- **Not located, never missing.** An item the record refers to but the production lacks is *not located in the production reviewed* until the producing party confirms it does not exist.

- **Both sides printed.** The line that cuts the other way always appears, and an ambiguous passage is shown as ambiguous.
- **Confined to the matter.** Facts from other matters never enter the map.
- **Nothing claimed that was not done.** A recording is described as heard, or a video as viewed, only if it was.
- **Machine output verified.** Machine transcripts are search aids, never quotations. Technology-assisted work is checked against the originating source, and confidential material enters only tools counsel has approved.
- **Adversarial review before delivery.** Each package is checked against its sources the way a hostile reader would check it, and it does not go out until it passes.

Boundaries

Case Cartography stops where counsel's role, a license, or another discipline begins.

- **Not legal advice or representation.** A Case Cartographer does not advise clients, appear in court or state legal conclusions. A suggested course of action is labeled a recommendation for counsel to accept, modify or reject.
- **Not a service to the public.** The work is performed for attorneys, under their direction. It is never offered directly to a party or a member of the public.
- **Not evidentiary judgment.** The work is searching, organizing, comparing, cross-referencing and drafting. Decisions about what matters legally belong to counsel.
- **Not investigation.** A Case Cartographer analyzes and integrates what counsel supplies, conducts attorney-directed legal research, and flags gaps that may need investigation. In California, investigating for pay to learn about a person's conduct, whereabouts or character, or to secure evidence for court, generally requires a private investigator license. That can include background research on people through public records. A Case Cartographer does no surveillance, witness interviews, field investigation or background research unless separately licensed or exempt; a licensed investigator gathers that material, and it comes back to be mapped. The same law penalizes knowingly engaging an unlicensed person for that work, so the line protects counsel too.
- **Not outside contact.** Requests, preservation letters and subpoenas go out under counsel's name and signature. A Case Cartographer does not interview witnesses, and contact with the client happens only at counsel's direction.
- **Not testimony.** The work is prepared for counsel's use, not as testimony, and a Case Cartographer is not offered as a witness.
- **Not mitigation.** Case Cartography may organize and integrate mitigation-related records, histories, reports and source materials under counsel's direction, and may identify gaps or unresolved areas in the existing record. It does not include the specialized interviewing, social-history development, field investigation, clinical assessment or other work of qualified mitigation professionals, whose role the 2008 Supplementary Guidelines for the Mitigation Function of Defense Teams describe.

Competencies

The discipline is defined by what its practitioners can do, not by who does it. A person performing Case Cartography can:

- Reconcile a production against what the reports describe, and state every difference as a completeness question.
- Work from primary sources in every format a case contains: reports, audio, video, phone extractions, metadata and legacy media.
- Build a chronology and a source registry in which every fact carries its source and pinpoint.
- Show where accounts diverge, presenting each version with its source without resolving the conflict.
- Set each count, issue or element against the record: what supports it, what cuts against it, what remains open.
- Write in language that separates established, reported, inferred, disputed and unknown.
- Research a question counsel poses, and draft records requests and preservation letters for counsel's review.
- Distill a full review into a two-page reference counsel can carry into a hearing, keeping the line that cuts the other way.
- Protect confidential material across every tool used, including technology-assisted review.
- Recognize the boundaries above, and tell counsel when a licensed investigator, a mitigation specialist or an expert is needed.

Engagement and work product

An engagement runs in the same order every time, so the short documents are always cut from a full review and never the reverse.

1. **Engagement and screening.** The retaining attorney engages the Case Cartographer and sets the scope in writing. Before substantive review begins, the Case Cartographer identifies the instructing attorney, the matter, the represented party and any other information reasonably needed to screen for known conflicts, confidentiality concerns or incompatible engagements.
2. **Matter constants.** Names, case numbers, dates and counsel are recorded once, at the start, and checked against every document that follows.
3. **Inventory before analysis.** Discovery Cartography establishes what was produced and what the reports say should exist.
4. **Primary-source review.** The underlying reports, recordings and metadata are read directly.
5. **The full survey.** The evidence problem log, source registry, issue map, open questions and request schedule are built in full.
6. **Distillation.** The documents counsel carries are cut down from the full survey.
7. **Review and delivery.** After adversarial review, the short documents go to counsel and the full survey is held, available on request.
8. **Upkeep.** The map is updated as new discovery, rulings and dates arrive.

Typical outputs

Two documents are delivered and a third is held. Eighty pages on an ordinary matter reads as padding; eight pages backed by a full survey reads as judgment.

Output	Length	Role
Quick reference	2 pages	Delivered. The one document counsel carries; self-contained.
Summary	6 to 10 pages	Delivered. What the record establishes and what it does not, what is not located, recommended requests, decisions for counsel.
Detailed source review and evidence audit	As long as it needs	Held, available on request. The full survey behind every statement in the short documents.
Matter-specific exhibits	Varies	Chronologies, transcript summaries with clip indexes, production inventories and request schedules, as the matter requires.

Use of the term

Case Cartography and Case Cartographer are used in this framework as professional terminology. Publication of this framework is not certification, licensure or endorsement, and it does not authorize anyone to imply an affiliation with VdVLaw. Comments from practicing attorneys and legal professionals will shape later editions.

Status of this framework

Case Cartography defines a specialized way of performing attorney-directed case-information work. It does not claim exemption from laws that regulate particular underlying activities, and it is not a license, certification or legal specialization. VdVLaw is not a law firm and does not provide legal advice, and Robert van der Vijver is not an attorney.

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Sources

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- Bus. & Prof. Code, § 7522 (exemptions, including attorneys performing attorney duties and persons engaged solely in the business of securing information from public records). California Legislative Information: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=BPC§ionNum=7522.

- Bus. & Prof. Code, § 7523 (license requirement and penalties). California Legislative Information: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=BPC§ionNum=7523.
- Supplementary Guidelines for the Mitigation Function of Defense Teams in Death Penalty Cases (2008) 36 Hofstra L.Rev. 677. Hofstra Law Review: https://law.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/journals/lawreview/lrv_issues_v36n03_cc1_guidelines_final.pdf