

Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative

ALBANY (NEW YORK) POLICE DEPARTMENT



This project was supported, in whole or in part, by cooperative agreement number 2014-CR-WX-K004 awarded to CNA by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The opinions contained herein are those of the author(s) or contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific individuals, agencies, companies, products, or services should not be considered an endorsement by the author(s), the contributor(s), or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.

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Recommended citation:

CNA Analysis & Solutions. 2019. *Albany (New York) Police Department*. Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative. Arlington, VA: CNA.

Published 2019

Introduction

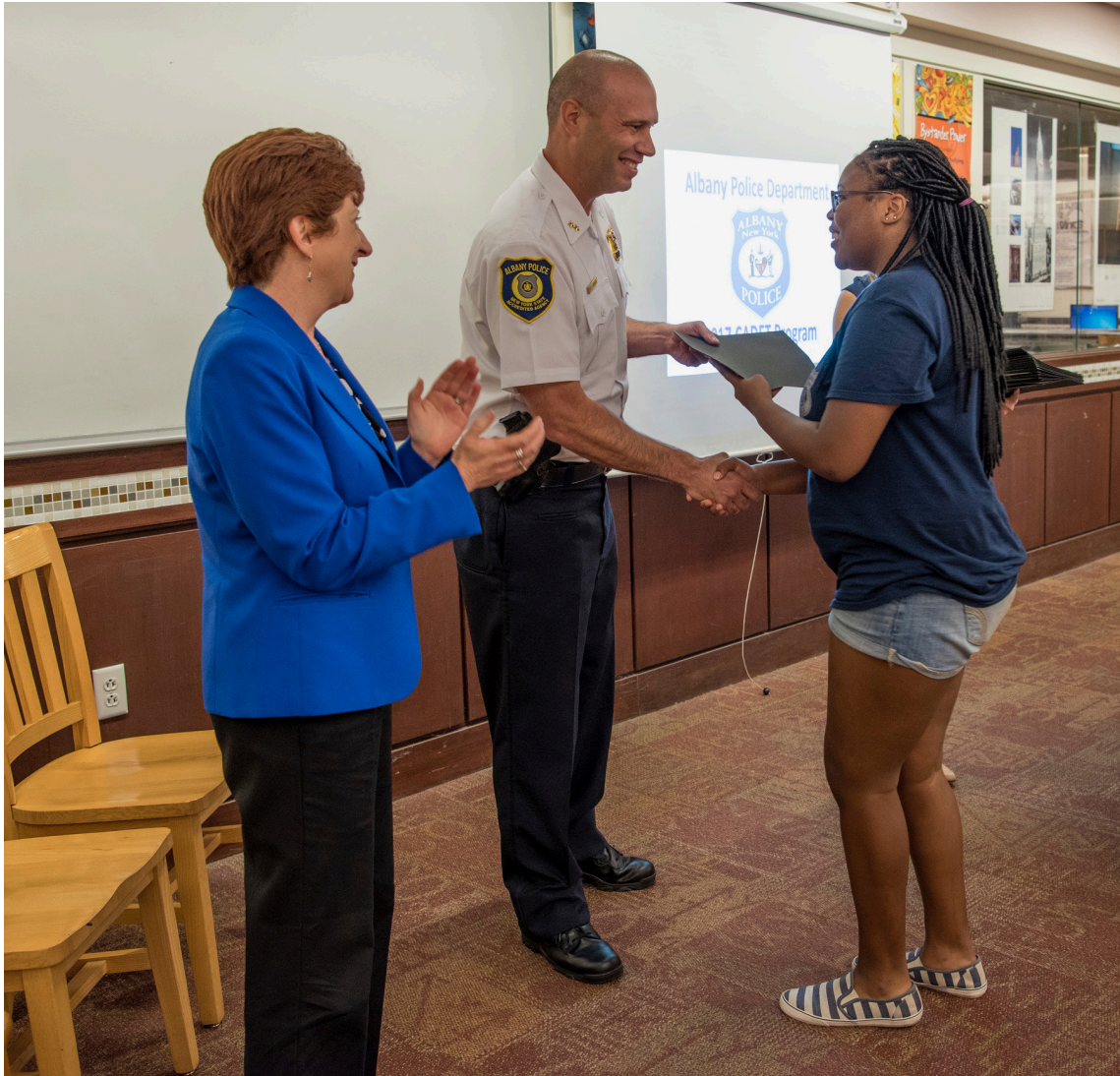
The Albany (New York) Police Department (APD) is one of 15 law enforcement agencies selected to participate in the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative (SNPPI). SNPPI provides policy review, assessments, training, and technical assistance to a cohort of law enforcement agencies across the nation. The four goals of the initiative are to identify promising strategies that **reduce crime, protect officers' safety and wellness, establish productive interagency partnerships** with law enforcement and community stakeholders, and **implement innovative and effective technologies** to assist police departments to safeguard neighborhoods.

Methodology

Each of the 15 selected departments is assigned a CNA Strategic Site Coordinator (SSC) and an operations analyst to assist with planning, implementing, coordinating, and delivering technical assistance. CNA worked with the APD to develop a customized strategy to capitalize on the great work already in progress across the four policing principles. To do this, CNA looked at the APD's policies and practices related to crime reduction efforts, policy effectiveness, technological capabilities, training structures and offerings, and officer safety and wellness philosophies. The CNA team then helped identify training and technical assistance (TTA) opportunities and additional tools and resources to enhance areas related to the principles of precision policing. The CNA team documented these best practices and will share these initiatives with police departments nationwide to promote public safety.

Background

The APD has gone through a series of reforms over the decades. Through much of the twentieth century, it was heavily influenced by the state's political machine. In the early 1990s, under the mayor's direction, the APD introduced various strategies to promote strategic and productive relationships between the police department and the city's neighborhoods. The department assigned specific officers to various neighborhoods in



an effort to rebuild relationships. However, this approach was short-lived; there were significant budget cuts across the city, and a new administration reversed many of the initiatives.

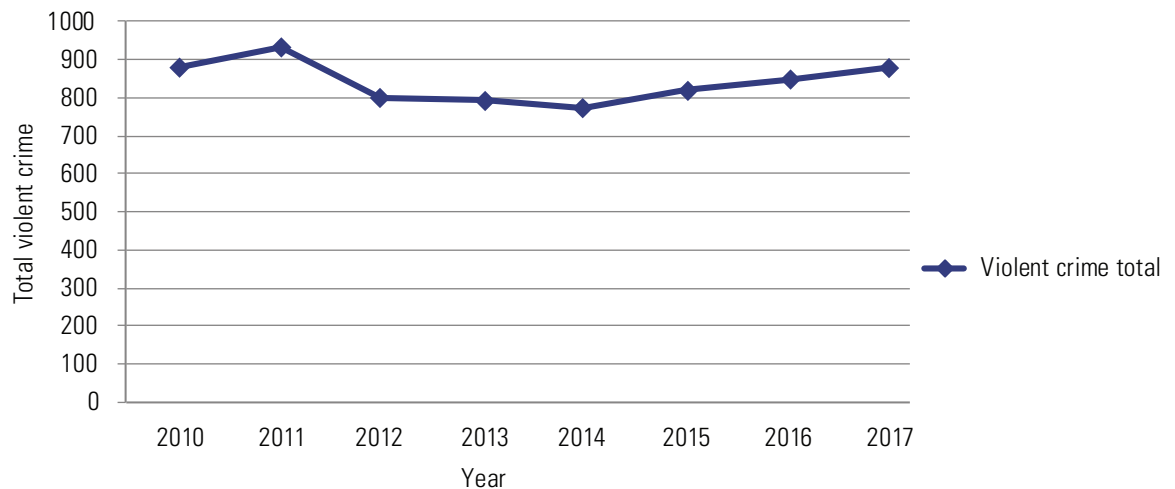
Starting in the early 2000s, the APD redesigned the way it partners with the community. Chief Brendan Cox and his successor, Acting Chief Robert Sears, initiated and continued a whole-department approach to relationship building. The department assisted in standing up multiple

community-based organizations to create productive, positive working relationships with community stakeholders. Two of these partnerships, the Citizens' Police Review Board and the Albany Community Police Advisory Committee, assisted the department in addressing crime and quality-of-life issues throughout the city. The APD's overall strategy is to address crime, fear of crime, and quality-of-life issues while creating a sense of greater community involvement through collaboration, partnerships, and transparency, to ultimately enhance trust in the police.

Crime Data

Historically, the city of Albany has experienced relatively low levels of crime. Since 2010, Albany has had fewer than 1,000 violent crime incidents each year. Despite a recent upward trend, violent crime has stayed consistently below 2011's total of 935 violent crime incidents. While Albany has experienced a slight increase in homicides since 2010, there are still fewer than 10 incidents per year. The APD has developed programs to strategically target offenders who contribute to these crime rates. The APD's crime reduction programs target both youth and adult crimes.

Figure 1. Trends in violent crime in Albany 2010–2017



Source: Albany Police Department

Identifying Promising Practices to Reduce Crime

The APD has incorporated two crime-reduction strategies in its strategic plan: Winning over a Generation, which focuses on youth, and Healing Wounded Communities, which focuses on increasing public trust in an effort to reduce violent crimes.

Youth-focused programs

Winning over a Generation is a strategy that focuses on building relationships with the next generation to prevent career criminality. The APD initiated numerous engagement activities targeted at all youth in the city, including those marginalized in their schools and communities.

Prevention Services Unit

The Prevention Services Unit consists of the To Reach and Connect (TRaC) program and the Enhanced Supervision Unit (ESU). The TRaC program concentrates on children aged 12 to 16 and acts as an early intervention program to keep kids out of the juvenile system. APD officers take a case management approach to conducting outreach to at-risk youth, providing them with mentoring and access to support services as needed. The APD, the school district, service providers, family members, and probation officers can refer youth to this program. Upon referral, an officer conducts a basic needs assessment to determine the needs of the youth and their families. Next, the officer presents the case to the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)—a group that provides services to at-risk individuals—for review. Finally, the MDT identifies and provides appropriate support services.

In 2015, the John Finn Institute for Public Safety in Albany conducted study looking at the success rate of the TRaC program. It examined 11 months of arrest data to determine post-TRaC intake offending patterns.

According to the Finn Institute's initial report, the TRaC program has a 77 percent success rate in deterring individuals from repeat criminality, meaning 77 percent of those who participated in the TRaC program were not subsequently arrested for violent or property crimes.

The ESU uses a case management approach for young adults between the ages of 17 and 22 who are most at risk of being involved in gun violence. The police department identifies individuals who are habitual violent crime offenders and often in a state of crisis. The goal of the ESU is to build relationships and trust with these individuals and to provide them with support services, such as mental health services, employment assistance, and education opportunities, to steer individuals away from a life of violence. In 2017, 65 individuals were identified for ESU intervention as perpetrators, victims, or both.



Youth Court

In addition, the APD has created a Youth Court, with the help of community stakeholders, to deter and appropriately punish youth crime. Community members, juvenile justice workers, and the law enforcement community saw the need for a youth diversion program.



CADET Program

An innovative approach to connecting youth to the police department is the APD's City of Albany Departmental Experiential Training (CADET) Program. The CADET Program is a five-week summer program in a youth-targeted Citizens' Police Academy. Youth aged 13 to 18 receive an assigned job within the police department. This paid program allows youth to learn about the intricacies of law enforcement and gives them unique insight into the department.

Other youth-focused programs include the Police Athletic League (PAL), bike rodeos, and National Night Out. Because of its strategic focus on youth, the APD requested technical assistance through CNA focused on its School Resource Officer (SRO) program. The APD recognized the need for a more robust program. To that end, it sought to formalize its standard operating procedures, memoranda of operations, and other agreements with the school board. CNA identified a subject matter expert (SME) to assist in developing these products and to provide expertise as the APD redesigned the SRO program.

Adult-focused programs

The APD recognized that while youth programs would ultimately affect long-term crime trends, it was equally important to address today's crime issues. The Healing Wounded Communities strategy seeks to build a stronger working relationship with communities that have historically experienced systemic criminal activity. The APD designed multiple programs to reduce violent crime and target adult offenders.

Neighborhood Engagement Unit

In 2010, the APD developed the Neighborhood Engagement Unit (NEU) to build problem-solving partnerships with the community, engage with community members and organizations, organize community and law enforcement events, and address neighborhood-level issues. The NEU consists of 33 patrol officers, four community service officers, three SROs, one PAL officer, four prevention service officers, one antiviolence coordinator, one youth aide, one social worker, and two interns. Twenty-five percent of patrol-functioning personnel in the APD are sworn officers in the NEU. Members of the NEU attend Neighborhood Association and Neighborhood Watch meetings in their areas as well as neighborhood events, such as community clean-ups, barbecues, and block parties, that allow the police and community members to interact in non-confrontational and untraditional ways.

Sworn officers from the NEU have also given presentations and facilitated activities at Teen Night, a collaborative event to proactively prevent teens from participating in gang-related activities. On average, the NEU participates in more than 500 meetings and events that directly involve neighborhood groups and community partners every year. The NEU is at the forefront of collaborating with community residents to identify problems in the community and develop solutions. NEU officers do not have traditional patrol operations; rather, they identify problems in neighborhoods that inhibit the well-being and safety of their residents.

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion

The APD developed the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. LEAD allows police officers to use their discretion to direct low-level offenders into social services or programs rather than into the criminal justice system. The program includes a full-time case manager



who works directly with the initiative and manages the referral process. The case manager works with the clients to obtain such services as drug treatment, mental health services, and housing services and assists with a variety of other needs. Through LEAD, an officer can divert someone whose underlying issue may be drug dependence, mental illness, or homelessness to services that the person needs to recover. One of LEAD's main goals is to ensure that clients have access to the services needed to prevent them from returning to a life of crime. The LEAD program has seen a decrease in recidivism among participants.

Violent Offender Identification Directive

To target the worst of the worst offenders in Albany, the APD partnered with the Albany Crime Analysis Center (ACAC) to create the Violent Offender Identification Directive (VOID). VOID is a data-driven risk assessment tool that the APD uses to identify the people most likely to be involved in gun violence, whether as victim or perpetrator. VOID takes over 100 data points, including previous weapon charges, history of gang activity, previous assaults, and truancy, and applies a weighted scale to determine the subsequent quantified risk. After the list is created, a two-pronged approach is implemented: enforcement and prevention. Members of the district attorney's office, police department, and supervisory agency meet for a

weekly strategy session to examine methods of prevention and enforcement. The Community Response Unit carries out all enforcement actions, while the Enhanced Supervision Unit carries out all prevention strategies.

Establishing Productive Interagency Partnerships

The APD continues to develop productive interagency partnerships with law enforcement and community stakeholders to share responsibility for crime and quality-of-life issues. By uniting organizations throughout the city, the APD believes it can continue to reduce crime and increase quality of life among all residents. Two multiagency partnerships that have had significant impact on the community and police department are the ACAC and the Albany Community Police Advisory Committee (ACPAC).

Albany Crime Analysis Center

The ACAC is an interagency fusion center that collects, maintains, and analyzes crime data throughout the Albany region. The ACAC is staffed by crime analysts, APD officers, Albany County Sheriff's deputies, Albany County Probation Department officers, and New York State Police officers. The ACAC can produce real-time crime products for officers and investigators in the field to best inform them of the crime issues taking place at a given time—for example, providing summaries of daily known offender arrests and video surveillance maps. They also produce command-level reports on information such as stops, summonses, arrests in a given area, heat maps, and university crime data. Because the ACAC is a multiagency operation, the APD can share and benefit from data across multiple counties and at the state level. Access to the fusion center has helped the APD integrate crime data into daily operations to help address the most pressing crime issues throughout the city.

Albany Community Police Advisory Committee

The City of Albany established the ACPAC to solidify the partnership between the police department and the community. The committee consists of 15 Common Council–appointed residents, four police officers, four at-large members, one chair, and one vice chair. Each member assesses the needs of his or her neighborhood and works with service providers and the police department to bridge the gap.

In partnership with the ACPAC, the APD hosts Pop-Up Events, which are strategically held in neighborhoods that have high crime rates. At one such event on August 18, 2016, the APD, ACPAC, local radio station, Albany Housing Authority, and Common Council members held a barbecue in the heart of the high-crime Lark Street neighborhood, where children, community members, and officers could enjoy games, sports, and an outdoor movie. Historically, this area has experienced high levels of gun violence and is known for its gang activity. This neighborhood was strategically selected as a target area for Pop-Up Events in an effort to drive down crime and build relationships with the community. The effort has been successful: in 2017, there were no reports of gang-related shootings in the Lark Street neighborhood. Increasingly, officers have identified known gang members attending these events, which allows officers to engage these individuals in a nonenforcement manner and assist them in transitioning from gang activity.

The ACPAC also partners with the APD to host public seminars and forums to discuss pressing issues, such as the adoption of body-worn cameras (BWC). In June 2016, the APD hosted a public forum on BWCs at the local public library. The ACPAC facilitated a discussion after a presentation about the new initiative during the open-floor question and answer session. Both the Pop-Up Events and the public forums are examples of initiatives to increase public access to the police department, inform the community about police activity, and solicit input from community members on policies or initiatives.

Implementing Innovative and Effective Technologies

The APD uses its website and the social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, and Nixle to engage the community and increase community trust and access.¹ In addition, the APD through the ACAC provides information to local universities and colleges regarding information that may involve their students. Externally, the ACAC also puts out a 28-day Nixle report to the various neighborhoods on the service. The APD is also in the process of hiring a vendor to create a public map showing crime and community engagement data to enhance the public's access to crime data. Internally, the ACAC produces daily reports for officers attending community

1. "Police Department," City of Albany official website, accessed September 6, 2016, <http://www.albanyny.org/Government/Departments/PoliceDepartment.aspx>.



meetings. Reports can include daily known offender arrests and video surveillance maps. The APD is in the process of implementing a BWC policy for officers and has consistently involved the community during the development process. For example, the APD posted its draft policy on Facebook to solicit public input. Finally, when implementing a new red light camera at an intersection, the APD held a community forum to receive feedback regarding the specific location of the new camera.

Protecting Officers' Safety and Wellness

The APD has focused on developing policies and procedures to protect and promote officer safety. The APD takes the following steps to protect officers while on the job:

- Requires personnel to wear seatbelts
- Issues antiballistic vests
- Provides every officer with a tactical first aid kit

In addition, the APD has expanded its officer wellness program to include a Fitness Advisory Board (FAB). The FAB consists of three officers and one supervisor who are responsible for developing and implementing a holistic wellness approach, supporting both physical and mental health, for the department. To improve physical health, the FAB promotes an annual fitness test. The APD created incentives to promote high scores. Officers who receive high scores in all categories are eligible to earn 4, 8, 12, or 16 hours in compensatory time within that calendar year. The FAB also organizes an APD team to participate in local and nationally recognized races, such as the Run to Remember held in Boston. In addition, the FAB has worked with the APD to update the gym facility and increase access during officers' work hours. The FAB promotes mental wellness by bringing in outside experts to discuss stress relief techniques, meditation, and yoga. The FAB promotes its programs throughout the department through the wellness page on the department's intranet.

Lessons Learned from SNPPI TTA

The APD participated in three TTA opportunities through SNPPI:

(1) strategic communications through CNA's SME, (2) peer exchange with the Cambridge Police Department, and (3) redesign of the School Resource Officer Program through CNA's SME.

Strategic communications

Acting Chief Robert Sears wanted to focus SNPPI efforts on assessing the APD's strategic messaging. His desire was to create a unified strategic message about the APD's programs so that community members would hear the same descriptions from any given officer. The SSC and the operations analyst identified Laura McElroy, an SME in strategic messaging, to assist the APD in designing a unified message about the productive work of the police department. McElroy developed a three-pronged strategy:

1. Develop a strategic communications plan and protocol.
2. Develop hands-on media training for executive staff and social media training for officers.
3. Assess deployment of internal and external communications.



With a new strategic communications plan, the APD will have a unified message to the public about ongoing activities—a message aimed at creating a stronger relationship with Albany’s residents.

After examining policies, procedures, and crime statistics and conducting interviews with APD staff, the SSC and the operations analyst identified small areas for improvement within the department. These proposed improvements were grouped into four main areas of focus: SRO programs; crime reduction programs; data collection, analysis, and dissemination; and community engagement. The SSC connected the APD with two police departments that have implemented programs across these four focus areas: the Cambridge (Massachusetts) Police Department and the Lowell (Massachusetts) Police Department.

Peer exchange with the Cambridge Police Department

Through SNPPI, the APD had three opportunities to exchange promising practices with the Cambridge Police Department (CPD). In November 2016, the APD hosted members of the CPD’s Prevention Services Unit, Department of Communications and Public Relations, Community Services Unit, Police Review and Advisory Board, and Officer Wellness and Resiliency Team. The APD had the following takeaways from the first peer exchange:

- Develop procedures for releasing crime statistics, department policy statements, and other department data based on the CPD’s guidance.

- Use the CPD's online platform as an example for developing an online interface for community members to access APD information.
- Expand the officer wellness program to include access to mindfulness techniques, officer support and resiliency, and stress management.

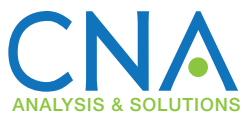
The APD also traveled to the CPD to examine its SRO program. Members of the APD's NEU met with the CPD's SROs to share best practices. The APD learned how the CPD works with the Cambridge School Board to provide public safety within the high schools and middle schools. Seeing a successful SRO program prompted the APD to examine other TTA opportunities in this area.

School Resource Officer program

The APD expressed the desire to create a formal understanding between the Albany school board and the police department to address juvenile crime. After the CPD peer exchange, CNA worked with the APD to develop a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) to outline the roles and responsibilities of the SROs. This MOU provides a baseline for the new SRO program, which seeks to mentor, educate, and partner with youth in Albany. In addition, CNA identified an SME who specializes in addressing juvenile crime, including in a school setting. The SME examined the APD's SRO policies and procedures and interviewed members of the APD staff. The SME provided a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that detailed the APD's redesigned SRO program, in hopes of developing a better relationship with the school board. In early 2018, the Albany school board agreed to provide funding for an additional SRO in a city middle school.

Conclusion

The APD has stood the test of changing leadership within the department and city council while staying true to its strategy, which is rooted in protecting the well-being of the community through leadership and service. The APD restructured its department and developed new strategies based on the needs of the community. While developing the corresponding programs to meet the strategic objectives, the APD incorporated experts from city departments, community members, non-governmental organizations, and law enforcement partners into its planning and implementation of the described programs. The APD is well positioned to serve as a model for smaller, urban police departments across the nation because it has numerous examples of successful and productive partnerships with the community to address some of the most challenging city-wide issues.



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